

Oversands School

Witherslack Hall, Witherslack, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6SD
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school is an independent residential special school with 73 pupils aged between eight and 19 years who have special educational needs related to social, emotional and health difficulties. There are 13 male pupils currently living in the school's residential provision and 39 day pupils. At the time of the inspection, three houses were being used to accommodate residential pupils. The school offers post-16 provision with a specific programme designed to meet the needs of young adults. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2016.

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 June 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 8 November 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Staff at the school work cohesively and flexibly together to provide a team-centred approach, collectively working together to meet the individual needs of residential pupils.
- Residential pupils are treated as individuals in a non-judgemental way. Excellent plans and assessments of risk highlight individual needs, with routines, structures and strategies personalised to meet those needs.
- Residential pupils benefit from having outstanding relationships with staff, who provide clear boundaries, along with a safe and stimulating environment. The support, coupled with the structure and routines established, allow new pupils to settle and make progress.
- Feedback received from residential pupils, parents and others external to the school is consistently positive, with pupils able to say that they feel safe in the school. As a result, they make outstanding progress in all areas of their lives based on their starting points.
- A forward-looking, proactive headteacher, who has a clear vision of how to move the school forward, has created a culture and ethos around the school that is fully supported by other staff members. This creates a warm, happy atmosphere where young people receive consistently outstanding care.
- Excellent levels of communication between pupils and staff promote high levels of consultation, where pupils have a voice and contribute regularly to certain aspects of the residential provision.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Refine the language used in pupils' risk assessments to make them clearer, so that the reader can fully understand the risks involved for young people.
- Where risks are identified and linked to when pupils are at home, the school should seek greater clarity about their own role alongside those of parents and placing authorities in keeping pupils safe. Communication with parents and placing authorities should be accurately recorded to give the reader a full understanding of the current situation.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- With regard to residential pupils' risk assessments, the school should review the language used with a view to using plain English, so that the reader understands the context of the risk and the strategies in place for managing them.
- Where there are risks identified at the child's home, the school should seek greater clarity regarding their own role and responsibilities alongside those of parents and placing authorities.
- Where there are risks identified at the child's home, the school should revise the way that they communicate with parents and the placing authority. This should then be recorded accurately to ensure that all staff are fully aware of the current situation for the child when they are living at home.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The progress and development made by residential pupils based on their starting points is outstanding. Pupils live in an inclusive environment, where disability is not viewed as a barrier to leading a challenging and fulfilling lifestyle. Although living in a structured environment with clearly defined boundaries, the culture and ethos built up over recent years creates a warm, relaxed atmosphere in each of the three areas where pupils reside. This allows them to express themselves as individuals, build up trusting relationships with others, and develop their self-esteem and confidence.

Residential pupils and staff speak with genuine warmth when discussing each other. Strong and long-lasting relationships are formed, which are the foundation to good order and help to account for the few behavioural management incidents that occur in residential areas. Feedback from pupils regarding residential staff is consistently positive. One pupil summed up the views of many when telling an inspector, 'I like being with the staff. I get on well with all of them.'

Staff excel with the support given to families and pupils and is a real area of strength. The parent of one pupil told an inspector, 'I can't thank the staff enough for what they have done for him and with the support they have given to all of us.' Another says, 'They go above and beyond. The school has been amazing in the way they have supported him through a really difficult period of his life, which has helped us all to feel secure. I have 100% trust in the staff, if I didn't he would not be at that school.' When discussing her son, a mother stated, 'He is happy there and likes the staff. He gets very upset following an incident and is frightened he will get kicked out. Staff give him a lot of support and reassurances.'

The progress pupils make is exceptional based on where they were when first admitted to school. This view is recognised and supported by parents, other professionals and many of the pupils themselves. For example, a social worker reported, 'I could not have wanted for a better placement. The placement in terms of success has gone beyond my expectations.' A parent writes on Parent View, 'My child is new to the school, but even after six weeks I have seen a marked improvement in his attitude and behaviour. The school has been very helpful and efficient in starting him at school and has helped him settle well.' One parent told inspectors, 'He has made a massive improvement.' Another said simply, 'I can't fault them. My son is happy again.'

Developing new interests and hobbies, as well as supporting existing ones, underpins the activity programme that is ongoing during non-school hours. The school has excellent facilities on campus, but makes full use and takes advantage of the school's location with a wide range of outdoor activities. It also promotes developing interests in the local community that are transferable to a pupil's home area. For example, one pupil spoke about a local football team he played for, while another described the work that goes into preparing and baking the goods they later sell at a local farmers'

market.

Staff advocate strongly on behalf of pupils and have high aspirations for them. For example, one young person beyond school leaving age is to stay on for a further academic year to allow him to complete his studies at a local college. Another pupil of school leaving age has similar arrangements. The school and relevant placing authorities make brave decisions designed to meet the needs of pupils, which are testimony to the persuasive skills of staff and a reflection of the strong professional relationships the school continues to build with external agencies.

Residential pupils confirm that there are high levels of ongoing consultation. This is underpinned by the excellent levels of communication that exist between pupils and staff, giving young people a strong voice and levels of influence over certain aspects of the school's operation. For example, young people play a role in the recruitment of new staff. Other forums include house meetings and the school's own council. Alongside this, informal consultation also takes place on a daily basis, when pupils are asked for their views on a range of issues affecting their daily life in the residential provision, such as choices around leisure activities and food. As a result, pupils feel empowered because they know that their views will be taken seriously.

The promotion of young people's health is outstanding. Pupils benefit from the school's full-time nurse and their extended links into the local community-based services that address everyday health needs. The nurse has also developed excellent professional relationships with a range of specialist services, which allow for successful referrals to be made. For example, since the last inspection, a number of pupils have been successfully referred by the nurse to local mental health teams and, as a result, they are now receiving individualised packages of care.

In addition to this, the school also employs a number of specialist staff who are qualified and trained to provide a range of therapeutic services to its pupils. Examples of these services include speech and language, an occupational therapist, and a mental health practitioner. This gives pupils direct access to specialist services within the school's campus. Therapeutic staff work closely and flexibly with residential staff and teachers using a team-centred approach, which provides pupils with a multi-disciplinary approach to their care and education.

The three residential units provide high levels of support and semi-independent living. The state of repair, décor, fixtures, fittings and equipment are of a high standard. Bedrooms are personalised to reflect the taste and interests of the occupant and have their own bathrooms, which improves privacy. Pupils were observed as being relaxed and at ease in their environment. Developing skills and moving towards greater independence is a feature of residential life. For example, pupils shop for food locally, and many plan and cook meals for themselves and others, which links effectively into other aspects of their individualised programmes of independence.

Residential pupils live in a non-judgemental environment where individual needs, disabilities and identities are fully accepted. Appreciating and celebrating different cultures is built into the daily life of the school, such as themed nights and regular

trips into the wider community. This results in pupils developing a greater appreciation of what is around them, and gives them insight into areas they may not have experienced before or be familiar with.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

The arrangements to protect and keep pupils safe are good. New residential staff receive initial training in safeguarding early into their probationary period. Longer-serving staff also undertake regular safeguarding training, which is refreshed and updated regularly as part of the core staff training programme. Staff know how to activate safeguarding procedures if required, and understand their own role and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe.

The three designated safeguarding officers, who have each received the appropriate level of training, maintain excellent links with other external agencies charged with keeping young people safe. Working relationships and levels of communication between the school and other agencies remain strong.

During the inspection, discussions took place around areas of responsibility in regard to pupils remaining safe when they are at home. This was linked to the potential vulnerability of one pupil when at home. Overall, when at home, it is accepted that parental and placing authorities assume responsibility. In practice, the school does take it upon itself to make checks when pupils are at home.

However, inspectors invited the school to review its current practice to see if more can be done during these periods, particularly if parental and placing authority cooperation proves to be limited. Senior managers agreed to this in an effort to gain greater clarity regarding their own role and responsibilities alongside those of parents and the placing authority, particularly if an area of risk has been identified. Any communication with parents or representatives from placing authorities when pupils are at home are to be recorded with greater accuracy and clarity, to ensure that all staff are fully aware of the current situation.

Serious incidents, behaviour management and physical intervention in the residential units occur less frequently than those in school. Those that have taken place in residency have been well managed and only involved a minority of residential pupils. Records are detailed and management oversight of each incident is thorough. No pupil or parent raised any issues or concerns about physical intervention or behaviour management in general.

Late last year, as part of an initiative to refresh the culture and ethos of the school, a system known as positive behaviour support was introduced. This is designed to provide staff with increased insight and confidence to review incidents of physical intervention and analyse them in depth. The aim is to reduce the number of incidents taking place. This system has now become embedded into daily practice and is starting to have some positive effect in reducing the number of physical intervention incidents. Allied to this, is the aim to totally eradicate the use of front ground holds in the school by July 2017.

Inspectors received only positive feedback from pupils and parents during the

inspection process, with no complaints received. Incidents of bullying, the use of sanctions, or pupils going missing from the residential provision are either rare or do not occur. Bullying for residential pupils is not an area of concern for them.

Residential pupils are living in a non-punitive, safe and caring environment where their needs are identified and met. Detailed assessments of individual risk are reviewed and updated regularly. However, senior managers have been asked to review the language used in pupils' risk assessments, with a view to using plainer language so that readers understand the full context of the risk and the strategies in place.

Recruitment and clearance procedures meet with statutory requirement and guidance, with all levels of staff being suitably cleared. The involvement of pupils in the recruitment process is seen as an area of strength. The school is also implementing its own policy of re-checking longer-serving staff every three years, which is deemed to be good practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Following his appointment, the headteacher was charged with the task of changing the culture, ethos and working practices of the whole school. Three and a half years on, that task has been completed. A real strength is in the way teaching, residential and therapeutic staff come together to work flexibly and collectively, using a team-centred approach to meet the needs of pupils.

For example, during the inspection, a day pupil was being re-introduced back into the school. The plan for that day was for two lessons only to be completed. However, as everything was going well, a request was made by the pupil to stay on and join other pupils in an activity due to take place later. Both educational and residential staff immediately worked together to facilitate the pupil's request. Residential staff went that extra mile by staying on duty late to ensure that the pupil was returned home safely later that evening. This is only one of a number of examples noted by inspectors of flexible working practices adopted by staff to ensure that pupils' needs are being met.

Communication levels between staff are high, with a number of short-targeted meetings held at various points throughout the day. This ensures that the levels of communication throughout the school remain high. These meetings ensure that both residential and teaching staff are aware of issues and have knowledge of events that may have occurred before they come on duty. This high level of internal communication enhances the ongoing collaborative work that is taking place.

The monitoring of the school and its residential provision, both internally and externally, is excellent. Practice is reviewed and, where necessary, changed by effective methodical and evaluative monitoring. Issues raised feed into plans for further development of the residential areas, which are ongoing.

High standards are expected from the team members, who are supervised and appraised regularly. Shortfalls and areas to work on are quickly identified and

rectified with appropriate action plans put into place. Residential staff feel well supported by their seniors and they, themselves, are fully supportive of the ethos, culture and working practices developed in the school over recent years. The organisation and daily practices taking place in the residential provision are totally focused and designed to meet the needs of pupils. For example, the morning routine, although structured, allows for pupils to wake and prepare themselves for school at their own pace, which helps to create a relaxed start to the day.

The school continues to invest heavily in training for staff. There are clear expectations of staff to complete their core training programme within the timeframe set. Systems are in place to move staff, who complete their probationary periods, on to further level 3 training quickly. Training is varied, with certain areas such as safeguarding, first aid and physical intervention refreshed at regular intervals. Specialist training is brought in as required. The training provided develops and improves the skills of staff, which enables them to meet the ever-changing needs of the pupils they look after.

The school has an excellent record of compliance. Following the previous inspection, one area for improvement was identified. This has led to the school continuing to report all minor injuries to the local safeguarding hub, which enables external agencies to keep up to date and monitor events taking place in the school.

Although only a relative period of time has elapsed since the last inspection, the school and its residential provision has continued to develop and progress. For example, some of the new initiatives and developments that have taken place include the introduction of a new senior and middle management team, which gives team leaders and their deputies specific, identified responsibilities that link directly to the everyday running of the residential provision. Two parents recently came to school and, on the same day as their sons, sat their GCSE exams. This reflects the levels of support provided and the flexibility the school has in managing its operation.

Residential pupils thrive in an environment where they feel safe and have their needs met. This aids their learning. Pupils enjoy the experiences that residency has to offer, and feedback from them and parents about all aspects of the residential provision is consistently positive. One parent summed up their feelings when telling an inspector, 'This school suits him perfectly. He had a lot of issues in mainstream and he could not cope. He has matured so much in the last 12 months. His social interaction, levels of communication and the willingness to enter into conversations with others are all areas of great improvement.'

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people

and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC040063

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Robin Adams

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 01539 552 397

Email address: oversands@witherslackgroup.co.uk

Inspector(s)

Graham Robinson, social care inspector (lead)
Jackie Line, social care inspector



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