

Cedar House School

Cedar House School, Bentham, Lancaster LA2 7DD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Cedar House School is a co-educational, independent, specialist day and residential school. The school meets the needs of a diverse group of pupils exhibiting social, emotional and/or mental health difficulties, alongside a range of other associated conditions. It is part of the Witherslack Group, a national provider of specialist education and care for children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disability.

The school is registered to admit up to 88 pupils, aged between 7 and 18 years.

There are currently 66 pupils on the school roll, of whom 66 have a statement of special educational needs and/or an education, health and care plan. Twenty-seven pupils are looked after by a variety of local authorities. Twenty-one pupils live in four self-contained residential houses adjacent to the school site.

Cedar House School aims 'to respect the value of all individual pupils and staff, to provide the highest standards of care and education and to ensure safety, security and opportunities for success'. The school aspires to being 'an exemplar of best practice for children locally, regionally and nationally'.

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 November 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: 26 April 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: Good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Significant changes and developments to the residential provision have taken place since the last inspection. A revision of working practices, alongside developing the ethos and culture of the provision, means that residential pupils live in a more inclusive, less confrontational environment.
- Staff of all denominations work collectively and cohesively together with a team-centred approach. This provides residential pupils with high-quality continuity of care.
- 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 pupils to settle and progress.
- Feedback received from residential pupils, parents and others external to the school is consistently positive. Pupils confirm that they feel safe in the school. As a result, outstanding progress is achieved in all areas of their lives based on their starting points.
- A strong, united and forward-looking senior team has the commitment and ability to critically analyse practice and take positive steps that allow for continued improvement.
- Residential staff are committed and supportive of the changes that have taken place recently. Morale is high, which creates a warm, relaxed and happy atmosphere that impacts positively on pupils.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Allow older residential pupils to have more responsibility and ownership by acting as mentors as part of an anti-bullying task force.
- Involve pupils in the annual assessment of residential staff's performance.

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

Recommendations

- Pupils need to be a part of the solution with regards to bullying. Consider having older pupils serve as mentors and be part of an anti-bullying task force.
- Consider involving residential pupils when the annual assessment of residential staff's performance takes place.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The residential provision has gone through a number of changes since the last inspection took place. A revision of practice has created a clear plan for development. With the support of external management, the headteacher, and other senior colleagues, the deputy head (care) is succeeding in refining the ethos, culture and working practices of the residential provision. This has required some decisive and courageous decision-making.

For example, changes to the staff team and the duty rota have improved the continuity of care to young people, as well as creating extra time for staff to meet and communicate. As a result, more regular meetings take place to discuss the needs of young people, and there are improved opportunities for training. This revised ethos and culture means that residential pupils live in a more inclusive, less confrontational environment.

Residential staff are skilled at forming trusting relationships with pupils. These relationships are strong enough to withstand the most challenging of times. As a result, pupils new to residency settle quickly. A pupil told an inspector, 'I haven't been here long, but it's miles better than my last school. The staff here care about me, they are very kind.' Another relatively new pupil said of staff, 'They look after me better at this school than my last one. My last one could not cope with my needs.'

Residential pupils adapt and respond well to the structure, routine and boundaries. Each of the four houses where pupils reside have their own character, reflecting the needs and personalities of the pupils living there. This creates a warm, happy and relaxed atmosphere for a group of pupils who have a wide range of diverse and complex needs. They live in an environment that allows them to express themselves as individuals, build up trusting relationships with others, and develop their self-esteem and confidence.

Genuine warmth, respect and trust is created between pupils and staff. Strong, long-lasting and often life-changing relationships are formed, which create a foundation for stability and good order. As a result, few serious behavioural management incidents occur in the residential areas. Feedback from pupils regarding residential staff is consistently positive. One ex-pupil summed up the views of many when telling an inspector, 'They turned me around. They were always there to support me, they are outstanding.' This is backed up by the parents. One parent said, 'We can't thank the staff enough for what they have done for our daughter.'

An example of the strength of relationships and respect that pupils and staff have for each other occurred during the inspection. Some time ago, pupils had become aware that a staff member was having a special birthday. They organised and implemented a surprise birthday party in one of the houses. The staff member concerned was sent out of school with a pupil as the preparations were being made. On their return, the lounge had been transformed with decorations and photographs of the staff

member. A buffet tea and a birthday cake had also been arranged. This is an outstanding example that reflects the strength and warmth of the relationships that exist.

The progress that pupils make is often exceptional based on where they were when first admitted to school. This view is recognised and supported by parents and other professionals. For example, a social worker commented, 'She has progressed so much in the time she has been at the school. She has greater confidence in herself, greater self-esteem and is a much happier and friendlier person. She has come on so much progressing socially, emotionally and educationally.' A parent supported this view by saying, 'We are very pleased. She took time to settle and had issues with her peers initially. Staff took time to get to know her and are always supportive.'

Promotion of health is outstanding. Pupils benefit from the school having its own nurse, who has developed strong links with the community-based services that address everyday health needs. The nurse also has excellent professional relationships with a range of community-based specialist services. This allows for successful referrals to be made. For example, a pupil has just been successfully referred to a local mental health team and is receiving weekly input, which is having a positive effect.

The school also employs a number of specialist staff who are qualified and trained to provide a whole range of therapeutic input to its pupils. For example, the school employs an educational psychologist, two mental health practitioners, occupational and speech and language therapists. This gives pupils direct access to specialist services within the school's campus. Therapeutic staff work closely and flexibly with residential staff and teachers, adopting a team-centred approach. This provides pupils with a multi-disciplinary approach to their care and education.

Pupils benefit from the structured activity programme that takes place during non-school hours. This allows for new interests and hobbies to be explored, as well as supporting existing ones. Full use is made of community facilities, as well as the excellent facilities available on campus. One pupil described how she helps out at the local riding stables. Another pupil attends the local fire brigade cadets, which satisfies his interest in fire engines. Pupils are also encouraged to become involved in charitable events, with one telling an inspector over breakfast how he had raised funds for cancer charities.

Staff are prepared to advocate strongly on behalf of pupils and have high aspirations for them. For example, a senior staff member is currently in dispute with a local hospital due to their poor response when a pupil was taken there recently. An ex-residential pupil told an inspector, 'Staff continually pushed me. This helped me to have ambition for the future and I am now doing something rewarding, which I never thought was possible.'

Residential pupils confirm that they are happy with the levels of consultation that take place. This is facilitated by the excellent levels of communication that exist between pupils and staff. As a result, pupils have a strong voice and a level of influence over certain aspects of the school's operation. For example, since the

previous inspection, all bedrooms have been decorated to the taste and choice of the occupant. Ways of pushing consultation further have been discussed with the school, which has been asked to give consideration to residential pupils having input into the annual appraisal of staff.

Pupils live in a total of four houses that provide high levels of support and create opportunities for them to develop their independence skills. For example, pupils undertake a range of tasks that provide them with new skills, as well as giving them a recognised award through the AQA Unit Award Scheme. The overall state of repair, décor, fixtures, fittings and equipment is 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 are relaxed and at ease in their environment, moving around freely and mixing well together during non-school time.

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. This promotes pupils' well-being and safety.

Residential pupils are kept safe in this school. A parent said, 'I used to be quite anxious about him in previous settings. I am relaxed knowing he is in good hands.' The designated safeguarding leads are suitably trained and are familiar with the most recently published statutory guidance. Excellent links are maintained with other external agencies charged with keeping young people safe. Working relationships and levels of communication between the school and other agencies remain strong.

When young people are in the residential houses their behaviour is good. Pupils are observed to be polite and considerate to each other, as well as to members of staff and visitors. There is an embedded culture of mutual respect operating in the school. The imposition of consequences is rare and, where these consequences are applied, they are almost exclusively related to behaviour in the school area. One pupil said, 'Staff are good to us and I think any punishments are fair.'

Serious behaviour management and physical intervention incidents in the residential units occur less frequently than those in school. Staff focus on the de-escalation of incidents in order to avoid the use of physical intervention. The documentation of such behaviour management strategies has improved, although it remains a work in progress as it continues to be embedded into everyday practice across the staff team. Leaders and managers provide guidance to staff on how they should document the strategies that they use to keep young people safe.

On rare occasions, staff have used front ground hold restraints and with some, minor injury has occurred. However, none have occurred since September 2017. Managers are quick to follow this up and they engage staff much more in reflecting on the intervention. Furthermore, pupils have opportunities to share their views on the

incident. Managers offer debriefs with staff, but this is rarely taken up. This means that staff are not always taking the opportunity to learn from these incidents. Earlier this 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 when reviewing incidents of physical intervention and to analyse the records in depth. The aim of this system is to reduce the number of incidents taking place. This system is now becoming embedded into daily practice and is having a positive effect in reducing the number of physical intervention incidents.

Bullying can be an issue on occasions. Staff address any hint of teasing quickly and efficiently. Staff try to build pupils' emotional reliance in order to improve their ability to ignore any silliness. The school recently held an anti-bullying week, with sessions delivered to pupils to make them aware that bullying is not acceptable. Currently, the school does not have any pupils who are identified as anti-bullying mentors. These are pupils identified by the school who younger pupils could approach with any concerns that they have. This is an area of development for the school.

Residential pupils are living in a non-punitive, safe and caring environment where their needs are identified and met. The constructive use of AQA awards when dealing with negative behaviour underpins this. Detailed assessments of individual risk are reviewed and updated regularly. Pupils understand the complaints system, with complaints being dealt with appropriately.

Recruitment and selection procedures meet with statutory requirement and guidance, with all levels of staff being suitably checked to ensure that they are safe people to work with young people. All necessary health and safety certificates are in place. Pupils regularly practice fire evacuations. The management team ensures that there is a suitably qualified person on site to test portable appliances. Electronic devices brought into school, such as phone chargers, are tested for electrical safety. As a result, pupils and staff live in a safe environment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The headteacher and her senior staff were charged with the task of changing the culture, ethos and working practices of the whole school. Although there are areas where this task remains ongoing, much has been achieved since the last inspection took place. For example, 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.

Residential staff are supportive of the changes being made and demonstrate commitment to the ethos, culture and working practices that are developing. They say that they feel well supported by their managers. A programme of supervision takes place consistently and staff have their skills appraised annually. Expectations of staff are high. Changes to working practices have been fully embraced by the staff, who operate the residential provision for the benefit of pupils, not themselves. This is reflected in staff's willingness to adapt to the revised duty rota.

The school invests heavily in training for staff. There are clear expectations for them to complete the core training programme within the required timescale. Staff who complete their probationary periods move quickly into further professional training. Specialist training is brought in as required. For example, with the diverse needs of the current group in mind, specialist training in autistic spectrum disorder has been implemented. Training is designed to refresh old skills as well as develop new ones. This allows staff to meet the ever-changing needs of the pupils that they look after.

Excellent systems to monitor the residential provision both internally and externally are taking place. Systematic, critical analysis of working practices is driving change and improvement. This is reflected in ambitious development plans. Changes to the arrangements for external monitoring have resulted in improvements in this area. For examples, reports are evaluative and provide direction for the school in its quest to improve.

The school has an excellent record of compliance. Following the previous inspection, four areas for improvement linked to the residential provision were identified. These have been successfully addressed, leading to improvements in the introduction of alternative behaviour management strategies and the revision and introduction of new formats for care plans and risk assessments. In addition, records of fire practices have been revised to ensure that the names of those involved are recorded.

A lot of work has been completed to progress the residential provision, but the school recognises that there is more to do. The changes and developments implemented since the last inspection are too numerous to list in full. However, some examples include a greater emphasis on the appearance of pupils and school uniform, a revision of the pocket money system to make it fairer for all young people, all meals are now planned, prepared and eaten in individual houses over the weekend, and there has also been an improved system to match the needs of pupils residing in each house.

The whole school is on a journey of change, with much being achieved in the residential provision since the last inspection. Standards have been raised and there is an energy, focus and commitment for this to continue. As a result, outcomes for residential pupils have improved significantly. This is recognised by those external to the school who have had contact with inspectors. For example, a parent said of staff, 'They deserve a big pat on the back for helping her to manage herself. They have done a first-class job on this.'

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 differences 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 whom 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: SC040058

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Ms Kathryn Taylor

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 015242 61149

Email address: cedar-house@witherslackgroup.co.uk

Inspector(s)

Graham Robinson, social care inspector (lead)

Elaine Clare, social care inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2017