

Notton House Academy

Notton House Academy, 28 Notton, Lacock, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 2NF
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Notton House Academy is a residential special school. It is located in a rural area of Wiltshire. The academy provides a 38-week per year educational provision for boys aged nine to 19 years, who have behavioural, social and/or emotional difficulties. An increasing number of pupils have additional complex needs. All young people referred to the academy have a statement of special educational needs. At the time of the inspection, there were 22 residential pupils. The residential accommodation is provided for pupils in seven distinct areas located on the academy site. The residential provision was last inspected in December 2016.

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 January 2018

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

requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected

requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers

requires improvement to be good

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of previous inspection: 12 December 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school requires improvement to be good because:

- Newly implemented systems to safely record and audit serious incidents require further time to embed.
- Some areas of the residential part of the school continue to require refurbishment.
- Excessive use of keys and key fobs to access all areas results in the school having an institutionalised feel.
- High security fencing throughout the school is not fit for purpose and creates an unwelcoming and institutional appearance.
- There has been a significant reduction in children being restrained. However, senior leaders must demonstrate a sustained reduction in the use of physical intervention.
- While recognising a significant reduction since the previous inspection, padded rooms that are referred to as 'safe zones', continued to be used as a means of managing the challenging behaviours of children until recently.
- Insufficient evidence was provided to demonstrate senior leaders wholly applying the principles of safer recruitment.
- Children's risk assessments, while in place, lack specific strategies to prevent and respond to risk.
- Without consent or policy, senior leaders continue to operate a blanket approach to searching all children on their return to the school. In addition, there was little evidence of the rationale to support searches of children's bedrooms.
- Children's views and opinions are not routinely sought about the development and running of the home and the recruitment of staff.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- The head teacher demonstrates ability, drive and commitment to the continuous improvement in the care provided to children.
- A stable staff team provides the children with consistency of care.
- Staff receive regular supervision which provides them with opportunities and support to improve their practice.
- A refurbishment plan for the residential part of the school is in progress. Children have bedrooms that are much improved and personalised.
- Parents are valued by the team. A dedicated member of staff works with parents, providing support and good lines of communication.
- Staff have access to new and frequent training opportunities to support their learning and their approach to caring for children.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 6.2 The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of children are ensured.
- 6.3 The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
- 9.4 Any search of boarders' personal belongings should be carried out in accordance with section 550ZA of the Education Act 1996 and with regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 12.1 The school has and consistently implements a written policy on managing behaviour, including promoting good behaviour. This policy includes: measures to combat bullying, including cyberbullying, and to promote positive behaviour; school rules; disciplinary sanctions; when restraint, including reasonable force, is to be used and how this will be recorded and managed; and arrangements for searching children and their possessions.
- 14.1 Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 13.4 The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met.
- 17.1 Children are actively encouraged to contribute their views to the operation of residential provision, are able to raise concerns and make complaints, and their views are given appropriate weight in decisions about the running of the school. Children are not penalised by raising a concern or making a complaint in good faith.

Recommendations

- Ensure that young people live in a nurturing environment by reducing the use of institutionalised practice and features.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Staff know the young people well and have a good understanding of their individual needs. The young people build positive relationships with the staff. Inspectors observed positive and warm relationships between the young people and staff. Care plans are in place and regularly reviewed. However, risk assessments, while regularly reviewed, lack specific strategies to prevent risk from occurring and are not sufficiently broad enough.

Since the last inspection in December 2016, some of the residential areas have undergone significant refurbishment and a strategic development plan sets out further improvement work. During this period, young people have been consulted, and staff have helped them to personalise their bedrooms and the communal living areas. As a result, some parts of the school have an improved and homely feel.

Unfortunately, there remains still an excessive number of doors throughout the residential area that are locked and require keys or fobs. It is recognised that young people are not restricted, but this does not promote a domestic feel.

Parts of the residential provision remain institutionalised in appearance. High security fencing throughout the school is not fit for purpose. Inspectors witnessed a number of young people climbing fencing, placing themselves at risk of injury by falling and/or leaving the school premises. Further to this, although the use of 'safe zones' which are padded rooms has dramatically reduced and ceased by the time of this inspection, they have been used since the last inspection. The head teacher was swift to address this and, during the course of the inspection, ensured that the rooms were dismantled.

Support provided to parents is good, and a dedicated member of the team works closely with families to offer support. Some parents attend events such as coffee mornings. These provide opportunities for parents to develop friendships and offer mutual support and learning. Consultation with young people, parents and carers takes place. Nevertheless, further work is necessary to ensure that young people's views and opinions are taken into consideration in respect of the development of the school and recruitment of staff.

The staff team provides frequent individual support to children, and each child has a key worker. In addition, the head of care runs a weekly drop-in session, when children can talk openly about anything that is worrying them. When problems occur, children are provided with mentoring sessions to help them to understand their own behaviour and how this may impact on others. Young people enjoy a wide range of activities when they stay. With the support of dedicated staff, young people develop the necessary independence skills.

Young people are achieving well in school and attendance is good.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Since the last inspection, leaders and managers have been instrumental in improving systems that support the safeguarding of young people. This includes referring concerns to the designated officer and children's services, ensuring that complaints are dealt with swiftly, and that multi-agency working takes place.

Leaders and managers strive to ensure that there is effective management oversight and reviewing of safeguarding concerns. Nevertheless, a number of records are disjointed and do not demonstrate a clear audit trail; in some cases, they lack sufficient depth and detail. There is no overarching record of safeguarding concerns; this creates difficulties when monitoring safeguarding incidents and assessing the nature of incidents that have occurred overall. It is to be noted that this shortfall does not have a negative impact on the safety and well-being of the young people.

Positive behaviour is promoted, and staff receive regular training in de-escalation to avoid restraints. However, management of risk requires further improvement. This is because not all individual behaviour management plans provide staff with information about how to manage and reduce risks using the agreed interventions. Records scrutinised confirm a high level of physical interventions having taken place since the last inspection. Records indicate that these interventions have significantly reduced and staff are feeling much more confident in supporting young people when they are upset.

Children rarely go missing from the home. However, when they do go missing, staff work hard to ensure their swift return.

Overall, staff support the young people in line with policy, and inspectors observed positive relationships between the young people and staff. However, inspectors noted a blanket approach to searching children on their return and, on occasions, searching their rooms. Leaders and managers were not able to provide a good enough rationale for this practice, and neither is there a policy that underpins this practice.

The recruitment of staff requires improvement. The principles of safe recruitment are not followed as leaders and managers could not provide evidence that references are checked.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

There has been improvement in the leadership and management of the school since the last inspection. This is largely due to the appointment of a new head teacher. The head teacher, along with the head of care, have an ambitious vision. Improvements noted include the reduction in the use of physical intervention and use of safe zones, the refurbishment of residential areas, and the introduction of weekly staff training sessions. During the course of the inspection, the head teacher was

instrumental in the removal of the safe zones.

However, there is still a way to go, as leaders and managers have failed to address some of the shortfalls identified at the last inspection. Some areas of the school do not provide the young people with a welcoming and homely environment, the practice of searching young people continues, and further work is necessary to ensure that the systems that support the reviewing and monitoring of the school are efficient and fit for purpose. In addition, this inspection has identified shortfalls in relation to recruitment and risk assessment.

These areas aside, leaders and managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. A strategic development plan identifies the necessary further improvement work.

Leaders and managers ensure that regular visits and detailed reports are provided following visits by the school improvement officer and governors. Recommendations made as a result of these visits are responded to. The school's statement of principles and practice, along with its website, are kept under review.

Staff are dedicated and are well supported by the head of care. Staff spoke highly of the leadership team and value the relationships that they have with their colleagues. The new head has introduced very good, regular training opportunities for staff. These help to drive a positive and caring ethos and improve the skills of the staff team. Staff receive regular supervision that focuses on safeguarding, reflective practice and their personal development.

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: SC039112

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Inspector(s)

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