

# Walton Hall

Walton Hall Special School, Walton, Eccleshall, Stafford ST21 6JR

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Walton Hall Academy is a residential special school for secondary-aged and post-16 children and young people who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including aspects of autistic spectrum disorder, emotional and behavioural difficulties and other complex needs. The school is located in a rural part of Staffordshire and serves children and young people placed by a number of local authorities. Residential accommodation is provided in two buildings sited within the school's grounds and provides accommodation for both boys and girls.

The residential provision was last inspected in March 2017

**Inspection dates:** 16 to 18 January 2018

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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:** 14 March 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- The quality of care is exceptional. Every child and young person makes excellent progress from their starting points in their behaviour, social skills, independence, self-confidence and self-esteem.
- A committed staff team, led by passionate and aspirational managers, provides a consistent approach that enables positive relationships to develop and underpins the progress that children and young people make.
- Staff are vigilant in making sure that children and young people stay safe.
- Staff ensure that care plans cover all aspects of the health and care needs of each child and young person. These link into risk assessments and support plans so that staff are well informed and able to deliver appropriate, individualised and safe care.
- Children and young people are relaxed and content during their stay. Positive behaviour is promoted and children and young people are supported in diverting inappropriate behaviour into more positive experiences.
- Staff across the school share a commitment to improving the well-being of children and young people and their family's lives.
- Residential care staff are highly motivated to work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for every child and young person.
- Staff training and supervision are highly effective in strengthening practice.
- Children and young people have access to a wide range of activities that help them to socialise as a group and to develop as individuals.
- Leaders and managers incorporate research into practice to underpin the introduction of new ways of working.
- Leaders and managers are committed to delivering excellence in their residential provision by using self-evaluation, which continuously challenges practice to avoid the risk of complacency. Consequently, children and young people thrive physically, emotionally, socially and educationally.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

The residential service is considered by all stakeholders as an outstanding provision, where staff are innovative and use their creative ideas to sustain the highest quality of care for children and young people. All parents spoken to were exceptionally positive and complimentary about the residential service. One parent told an inspector, 'They make you feel as if your child is the best child in the world and then when you hear them dealing and speaking with the other children you realise that they make everyone feel like that. It is an amazing, positive environment.' Another parent said, 'We cannot speak highly enough about the residence and the team, which works very hard with all the pupils to make this such a success.'

Children and young people have the opportunity to stay in the residential service for one or two nights a week. Children and young people new to the service are able to start with extended days. This experience enables children and young people to build confidence and make friends before staying for their first night. Referral and admission procedures to the residential facility are thorough. Prior to a place being offered, a thorough assessment determines whether the needs of the child or young person can be met. A range of professionals, parents, carers and the child or young person contribute to the assessment. Detailed planning prior to admission helps new children and young people to settle quickly.

Children and young people recognise that staff genuinely care about them and consequently they feel valued and safe. A young person told the inspector, 'Everything is good here, people are nice and kind to you and you get to do loads of exciting things.' This was validated by a parent who said, 'The staff really care about the children and nothing is ever too much trouble for them.'

Children and young people make exceptional progress in areas of personal, social and emotional development from their starting points. Staff use various assessments to carefully track children's and young people's progress. Along with capturing progress against targets, feedback from parents and carers is also taken into account. One parent said, 'Since being at residential, his independence has really come on; he can now make his bed, he changes his own quilt, he now washes up and he safely showers and washes himself. They have done really well with him.' The provision is undertaking a piece of research-based work around the impact of the residential setting on outcomes for children and young people. The outcomes of this piece of work will be used to inform future strategies to enhance children's and young people's progress at the residential provision.

Children and young people benefit from a very inclusive approach to their complex healthcare needs. Staff communicate effectively with parents and a range of health professionals, to ensure that care is provided in a consistent way. Medication is

stored safely, and arrangements for the administration and recording of prescribed and non-prescribed medication are effective. Staff receive specialist training around children's and young people's specific health needs and this helps to maintain the high quality of care provided.

Children and young people actively contribute to the operation of the residential service. A range of regular meetings, chaired and led by children and young people, ensures that they are able to fully participate in the running of the service, even if they only stay for one night. Staff encourage children and young people to form their own opinions and to voice them. They listen to what children and young people have to say and value their contributions, offering reasonable explanations when they cannot accommodate a request. One young person explained one of the processes to the inspector: 'We have a steering group, we have a spokesperson and we will discuss if we want anything to be changed; we will write it down and send it to [name] and she reviews it and sees our feedback and makes the changes.'

Children and young people make excellent progress in developing independent living skills. Older young people receive a considerable level of support from the staff to learn life-skills, such as cooking, laundry and budgeting, in preparation for their future. One parent said, 'He is learning life-skills and strategies to encourage independent living. By a mixture of empathy, kindness, firm boundaries and being given a clearly understood menu of expectations, my son has made real progress.' There is also a focus on advocating on behalf of young people to enable them to experience work placement opportunities. Planning for young people leaving the residential provision begins well in advance to support their successful transition to adulthood and increases the opportunities and choices they have. A young person told the inspector, 'I am more independent and I am more aware of what I can do. With confidence, I have learned I can do things. It can be life-changing being in residence.'

Children and young people participate in a range of evening activities with the aim of providing opportunities for them to relax and enjoy their leisure time, and at the same time promoting their independence and social skills. Full use is made of both school facilities and, where appropriate, local community facilities. Staff use an effective assessment tool that contains all relevant information that allows activities to be planned accordingly, making sure that they consider all possible risks. Staff promote children's and young people's individual interests, making sure that they participate in activities of their own choice in addition to group activities. One parent said, 'The residential provision is very well organised and provides an excellent range of activities. Our daughter has no friends near to our home, so this provides invaluable social opportunities to enhance her interaction skills.'

Accommodation for children and young people is spacious, comfortable and suited to their needs. Staff encourage personalisation across all aspects of the provision and their bedrooms reflect children's and young people's personalities. The catering manager maintains a record of all special dietary needs and has effective procedures in place to make sure these are met. All children and young people reported enjoying

their meals at the provision.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

The staff take their responsibility for keeping children and young people safe very seriously. The safety and well-being of children and young people is central to their practice. All staff have an in-depth knowledge of children's and young people's vulnerabilities and the risks they may be subject to, and follow agreed child-protection procedures where necessary. Children's and young people's individual plans clearly identify any risks they may face and outline effective strategies to make sure that their welfare is safeguarded. This enables staff to make sure that children and young people are safe, both in the residential provision and out in the community. A parent told the inspector, 'What reassures me about his safety the most is the competence of the staff. They treat the kids as individuals, and give positive reinforcement, all of which helps keep them safe.'

Staff have excellent relationships with children and young people and they are proactive in nurturing them and redirecting any challenging behaviour. They also have an in-depth knowledge of the children and young people they work with that enables them to identify signs that indicate how children and young people are feeling. This allows staff to redirect any challenging behaviour before it escalates. Because of these effective relationships, there has been no use of physical intervention since the last inspection.

The head of care has ensured that the good-quality missing person procedures link to locally agreed protocols and complement children's and young people's individual risk assessments. As a consequence of these procedures being used effectively, no children or young people have gone missing.

Residential accommodation provides children and young people with a safe and secure environment. Children and young people have comprehensive personal emergency evacuation plans, detailing actions that staff must take to make sure that they exit safely from the building. Health and safety checks make sure that the provision is well maintained, and any potential hazards are identified and minimised or remedied promptly.

The staff recruitment and selection process is thorough, requiring a full assessment and checks of all applicants for work. The management team has implemented a process that enables children and young people to be involved in the selection process. This gives young people a say in the staff who care for them.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The school leadership team is passionate about the residential provision and has high aspirations to ensure that children and young people achieve the best possible outcomes. The residential provision is seen by the leadership team as an integral part

of the school and is fully encompassed into everything the school does.

The head of care manages the residential provision with a high level of efficiency and effectiveness. She is suitably qualified, having attained the level 5 diploma in leadership, health and social care. She is also experienced and highly motivated to continue to raise the quality of the provision and help children and young people to achieve their full potential. A joined-up approach between teaching staff and care staff means that there is a strong collaborative approach across the school site.

The staff team members are stable and committed in their roles, and demonstrate a genuine care for children and young people. Staff receive good-quality, practice-based supervision, which enables them to reflect on their practice and identify areas for professional development. They are all consistent in their approach and supportive of one another. One parent told the inspector, 'I think this is an amazing place for children with special needs, because the staff are competent, innovative and they really do care about the children.' The staff spoke positively about the head of care, whom they described as very supportive and as someone who listens to new ideas that may improve the quality of care for the children and young people.

Monitoring systems are strong. The school works collaboratively with other residential schools in the local authority, undertaking peer reviews and sharing ideas and best practice. The head of care is able to clearly demonstrate how the provision benefits children and young people. Reports to senior managers provide a detailed overview of how well the residential provision is meeting the needs of the children and young people and keeping them safe. The school has a strategic development plan for the coming year, which includes the residential provision. The governing body, local authority and the independent visitor provide effective external oversight. This external scrutiny makes sure that managers are aware of issues or areas of development to improve the provision.

## **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:** SC038723

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Amanda Cameron

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Dave Carrigan, social care inspector (lead)  
Lisa O'Donovan, social care inspector





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