

Fred Nicholson School

Fred Nicholson School, Westfield Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1JB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Fred Nicholson School is a day and residential special school maintained by Norfolk County Council. It caters for children aged from seven to 16 years who have complex needs. The residential provision is situated in the main school building and provides separate accommodation for boys and girls. This accommodation is split into dormitories of up to five children, and individual bedrooms for children who may benefit from this. Each residential area has a communal space in which the children may watch television, listen to music or chat with peers and staff. The children have access to a range of school facilities during residential time.

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 January 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 16 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- The children really enjoy staying in the residential provision. The support that they receive from the staff helps them to make good progress socially and academically.
- The safeguarding systems throughout the school have been reviewed and strengthened.
- The children's behaviour improves as they stay in residential provision. There are very few behavioural incidents.
- The promotion and teaching of independence skills benefit the children and prepare them for adult life.
- The long-serving established staff team knows the children well and provides stability and consistent support.
- There have been a number of internal reviews that have guided improvements to the filing and recording systems in the residential provision.
- Social workers, parents and carers report that communication is strong and effective.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- The children's health needs are not fully supported in regard to their dignity and understanding of balanced meals.
- The staff do not all receive regular supervision for their roles.
- The external and internal monitoring are not strong enough and do not ensure that the school is fully compliant with the national minimum standards.
- There are three unmet national minimum standards. These have not had a negative impact on the children's welfare or safety.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- 3.1 Children's physical, emotional and social development needs are promoted.
- 19.6 All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance.
- 20.4 The head teacher (or school equivalent), governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school carries out, and records in writing, once each year: a review of the operation and resourcing of the school's welfare provision for boarding pupils, in relation to: its Statement of Purpose; its staffing policy; the placement plans for individual children; and an internal assessment of its compliance with these standards. Where appropriate such a report may be incorporated within a review of the whole school.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children all enjoy staying at the school. Parents say that the children are keen to stay, and that the children thoroughly enjoy the camaraderie and the activities in residential time. Generally, the children are stimulated and engaged. They benefit from a structured routine and a consistent staff team.

The process of transition in and out of the residential provision has been defined clearly to ensure that a build-up of visits is planned, which prepares the children for being away from home. The children in Year 10 are given a reduction plan to return home, which prepares them for moving on from the residential provision.

The promotion and teaching of independence skills are a strength of the school. The staff work well with the children on this aspect of their development to build the children's self-belief and confidence. Parents and carers note their children's increased ability and willingness to complete chores and self-care skills, and improved personal organisation. The analysis of data shows that behavioural incidents reduce significantly during the residential evenings. The children increase their social skills and ability to communicate. Core subject data shows that the children make similar progress to the day pupils. Reading and literacy are supported well by the residential staff in the evenings. The children read to staff before bedtime, and, when required, the children do their homework with support from the staff. There are books, board games and group activities. These encourage turn-taking and counting, which help the children to gain confidence in their own abilities. The activities vary and include trips to outside leisure venues, although these trips are limited to a set night. However, this is being extended to ensure equality of opportunity for the children attending on other days.

The children's files have been restructured and updated, making targets and progress clearer. The files show correct dates and ordered guides for the staff delivering their care. These files demonstrate how targets in the residential provision support the children's school targets. The records of progress show how the children benefit from staying in the residential provision. The staff know the children very well. They provide ongoing support, encouragement and continuity. The school provides consistency for children experiencing change and difficulty in their lives. Boarding reports help to monitor the children's progress and share achievements with the parents and carers.

The school works with support services and social workers to assess the children and provide additional support when required. Specialist help is available at the school for behaviour, speech, language and emotional literacy support (ELSA). Several of the children benefit from targeted help, and the residential staff team includes an ELSA practitioner. Emotional literacy support encourages the children to learn how to express their emotions and feelings.

The school is working to improve the catering provision and the dining experience. The care team met with the new catering provider, and sought the children's views through child-friendly feedback forms. However, some meals and snacks are unhealthy, and there is little choice. After school, the children are given orange squash and biscuits at a hatch, and fruit is served in a bowl. Evening meals are high in carbohydrates and accompanied by caffeinated hot drinks, although water is available on request. Hot desserts are served in large bowls, with some children having second helpings. There are some healthy options. However, these are not presented with enough appeal or profile. The children miss opportunities to learn about healthy choices and portion control.

Complaints have not arisen about the residential provision, although the staff are sensitive to the children's views and feelings. A complaints procedure is explained to the children in a way that they can understand. This is reinforced through regular dormitory meetings during which the staff provide the children with an opportunity to share their ideas.

Accommodation is warm and clean. Bed spaces and dormitories are highly personalised. There are areas that require an upgrade; this is incorporated into the development plan. Communal areas offer just enough space. The children use the dormitory areas as a quieter space when required. Laundry facilities are on the ground floor, and the children carry laundry down every day. This routine fails to consider the children's dignity.

The school has been without an independent visitor for a year. Although a visitor was appointed, they did not take up the post and therefore the children have no external or independent adult to go to. This was outside of the school's control. A new visitor is now in post. The visitor has experience of working at the school and therefore understands the children's communication needs.

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

The children show acceptance and respect for one other. Good deployment of staff ensures a calm atmosphere. The children appear relaxed and at home in the residential provision. The children spoken to indicated that there are few tensions and, when there are differences of opinion, the staff quickly help the children to reconcile these. Incidents of bullying are minimal. The parents and carers spoken to all said unreservedly that the children are safe. The calm and orderly environment contributes to the children feeling secure.

The staff are improving the way that they apply consequences for behaviours to provide better learning outcomes for the children. This area for improvement has been identified by the head of care and addressed with the team to ensure better links between behaviours and consequences. The staff undertake comprehensive training in restrictive physical intervention, using a specific model. The use of physical intervention is rare. The care plans include guided holds for individual children. The planning and oversight of these plans ensure that any safe holds are

tailored to children's individual needs.

The staff understand the whistle-blowing procedure. Concerns about staff practice and conduct are investigated and followed up. The actions taken demonstrate a commitment to safeguard the children. The feedback from the designated officer in regard of incident management is positive. The senior leadership team has introduced a number of preventative actions to ensure that all concerns are rigorously monitored. These actions include annual refresher training in safeguarding for all of the staff, and an audit of personnel files.

Safeguarding has a high profile at the school. A recent audit, requested by the headteacher, undertaken by the local authority has led to improved recording procedures. Child protection files are well ordered, and show how the school works with a number of external agencies to safeguard the children. A social worker said that the head of care is central to child protection, disseminating all of the required information in relation to protection concerns. Effective sharing of information helps to safeguard the children who are subject to child protection concerns. The designated safeguarding staff are made known to the visitors and the staff. Leaflets given out to visitors on arrival at the school outline the procedures to follow in the event of a concern. These measures, along with external overview, ensure that procedures are up to date, known to all staff and correlate with the local authority's procedures.

There are no children who are currently identified as being at risk of child sexual exploitation. There have been no incidents of children going missing from the school. There is a policy to guide the staff to ensure that the children are supported and safe in the event that a child goes missing. The children are taught about internet safety and learn about safe social media, helping them to gain an awareness of the risks posed by the internet.

The accommodation is maintained adequately. Health and safety and appliance service checks generally ensure that the building is safe. There is, however, a lack of oversight from residential staff to ensure that mandatory service checks are timely. The hardwiring periodic report due in July 2017 was not satisfactorily carried out with works not completed until December 2017. This lapse shows a lack of oversight and monitoring.

There are two new staff to the residential team. The personnel files contain records of the required checks and the staff members' qualifications. The files sampled are well ordered and complete, demonstrating that the school adheres to safe recruitment systems.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The residential provision is managed by a head of care. She is experienced in residential special school provision and holds a relevant level 4 qualification. The head of care works as a safeguarding lead in the school and has a busy role in

addition to leading the residential provision. Senior care staff also have roles in behavioural support during the school day. This maintains consistency of practice and good communication between the school staff and the residential staff and reinforces safeguarding practice throughout the school.

A number of improvements have been introduced in terms of safeguarding records, safeguarding practice and the children's care files. However, these actions do not fully encompass all of the points for improvement raised at the last inspection. The records of monitoring visits require further evaluation in order to provide the extra safeguard intended. This has recently been addressed by the head of care and therefore this has not been raised as a shortfall. The internal monitoring review to ensure compliance against the national minimum standards has not been carried out. Some of the national minimum standards are not fully met. For example, the residential staff do not check whether the accommodation is compliant with mandatory service checks. The provision of food continues to include unhealthy options and little choice. There are, however, detailed and extensive development plans that incorporate the whole school and a plan for the residential provision. This demonstrates a drive to make improvements.

The children's individual needs are prioritised and are central to the care provided. The support for the staff includes supervision that has a focus on the children's progress. Development and training opportunities are also discussed. Staff supervision is carried out regularly for the care staff, but not for the senior staff. Two of the senior members of staff have each had one supervision in the last year. Irregular supervision fails to provide staff with enough opportunity to discuss performance practice issues with a line manager.

The parents and carers spoken to all indicated that their children are very happy at the school, and that communication is good. Parents report that the staff keep them informed and updated. They speak highly about the school and the positive impact that it has on the children's progress. Parents feel that they can contact the school easily and that the children are cared for well.

Effective working relationships with external professionals support the decisions that affect the children's lives. Feedback from external professionals is positive. Information is readily provided by the staff, with regular updates and attendance at core groups. The staff raise concerns immediately. Social workers said that good recording and effective communication provide a central point of information, which works very well.

There are some links with the local community. The staff use local leisure clubs on a weekly basis to provide an off-site activity and walks in the local area give the children a flavour of the amenities.

The children's views are sought throughout the school. The children have contributed

to menu options through questionnaires and they participate in dormitory meetings. The children's ideas are sought to inform the whole-school development plan.

There are areas of practice that are dated. It is unclear whether some routines extend the children's opportunities or reduce them. There is an extremely long-standing staff team that provides excellent consistency. However, the team also opposes change in some areas. This has not been raised as a shortfall as it is being addressed by the senior leadership team.

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: SC038284

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Inspector

Deirdra Keating, social care inspector



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