

# Wargrave House School

Wargrave Road, Newton-Le-Willows, Merseyside WA12 8RS

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

This is a non-maintained special school, established in 1971, for students who have autistic spectrum disorder. The school operates as a registered charity (charity number 1104715). It offers a day school, weekly and part-weekly residential boarding for up to 10 residential pupils at any one time who are aged from five to 19 years. Residential facilities are on site both in the main school building and in the post-16 department, Lakeside House.

**Inspection dates:** 1 to 3 May 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:** 17 October 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** inadequate

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school requires improvement to be good because:

- Although leaders have successfully addressed all previous failures to meet the national minimum standards, and children and young people now stay in safe and pleasant accommodation, additional shortfalls have been identified. These do not affect children's safety or welfare but limit the capacity for improvement in the residential service.
- Senior leaders are unclear about the roles and responsibilities of different departments in the monitoring and oversight of the residential provision. This limits the progress being made in the content of staff supervision and development plans and record-keeping. This relates to the quality of care plans and records of restraint, where children's views are not consistently captured.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of the quality of care being provided is weak. There is limited quality assurance activity. Targets are not monitored effectively. Consequently, there is drift in any action identified to improve systems and processes to support holistic and continuous development of the service.
- Leaders have failed to identify clear action plans to resolve issues related to poor residential staff morale and confidence within the multi-disciplinary team. This is work in progress, but it is limiting the progress being made in a whole-school approach to children's and young people's development.
- There has been one referral made to external safeguarding professionals about staff conduct. The designated safeguarding lead for school acted quickly to report the matter but failed to escalate her concerns about their slow response. This delayed the subsequent internal investigation. Some identified actions from this investigation have not been completed in a timely manner. This has not affected children's safety but has limited opportunities for reflection and development of residential staff.
- Leaders do not ensure that they consistently take the necessary steps to employ only suitable people to work with vulnerable children. Leaders were unable to demonstrate that decisions had always been made after a full review of employment history, and on one occasion, with two suitable references.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- Children and young people enjoy exceptionally warm relationships with staff. They make good progress because of the effort staff make to identify activities that interest and motivate children and young people to try new experiences. This helps them to have a greater understanding of the world around them.
- Children and young people benefit from individualised behaviour and interaction support plans that residential staff use consistently. This helps children and young people make progress in finding ways to manage their feelings of anxiety or uncertainty about the world. This minimises the times when they need adult physical intervention to stay safe.
- A busy maintenance team ensures that there are effective systems for maintaining a safe environment. They also ensure that the residences maintain a homely feel that reflects children's and young people's needs and wishes, such as appropriate

lighting and decor. This enhances children's and young people's experience of staying away from their homes and families.

- Children and young people learn how to keep themselves safe by using the knowledge they gain at school in their evening activities. This includes road safety awareness, personal hygiene, independent life skills, and protection from extremist influences.
- Children and young people and their families said that they enjoy staying at school. Children's and young people's behaviour and communication demonstrate that they are happy about the way they are cared for. They make progress because they have chances to enjoy new experiences and they improve their communication, which enhances their quality of life.

## **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:

- Ensure that children's physical, emotional and social development needs are promoted. In particular, create a domestic dining facility in main school building. (NMS 3.1)
- Ensure that records include the information in Appendix 2 (use of reasonable force). In particular ensure that the record is made within 24 hours and is legible; children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records; the school regularly reviews any instances of the use of reasonable force and examines trends or issues in order to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice. (NMS 12.6)
- Ensure that the school operates safe recruitment and adopts recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. In particular, obtain references from at least two sources and clarify all employment dates. (NMS 14.1)
- Ensure that staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children as they relate to the purpose of the setting. This includes effective professional supervision and reflection. Ensure that the training keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the school. (NMS19.1)
- Ensure that every child has an accurate, permanent record of their history and progress which can be read by the child at any time (except where the data controller is not obliged to supply the information to the child), and add personal statements or statements correcting errors. (NMS 22.1)

### **Recommendations**

- Provide clear leadership and management of the practice and development of the residential and care provision. Make effective links between academic and residential staff to continue to improve the quality of care provided. (NMS13.2)

## Inspection judgements

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

Children are happy at school and make progress in their health, communication skills, social skills, and understanding of the world. They are supported well by residential staff who care about them. The staff build positive relationships with them and keep them safe.

The staff have improved their knowledge and understanding of how children and young people communicate. Therapy staff have supported the residential staff team by mentoring, observing and working with the residential team to help them support children's and young people's communication more effectively, and this was evident from observation of the evening activities. The residential staff contribute to children's and young people's individual meetings, which means that this work is more meaningful for young people. They encourage children and young people to use symbols and electronic devices that increase their ability to make choices and express an opinion. Staff understand children's and young people's behaviours and expressions. This knowledge enhances their understanding of how children and young people communicate and helps ensure that their wishes are attended to well. Parents said that their children have improved their communication and sociability as a result of their residential experience. One young person used his electronic device to tell the inspector that he was happy at school.

Parents said that staff work very well with them to ensure that their children enjoy their overnight stay. The staff talk regularly to parents and social workers and discuss any concerns that they may have about the progress that children and young people are making. A social worker said, '[Name of child] is making progress in communication and independent living skills. Staff supported [the child's parent] when there was an incident at home.' One parent said, '[My child] came from a different school where nothing was shared. [Here,] I am spared nothing: this was what's happened, this was what we have done and are you happy with it? I am informed of everything.' This view is repeated by other parents, who said that this open approach gives them confidence and trust in the staff to keep their children safe and happy.

There have been significant improvements to the quality of accommodation provided for residential children and young people. Children and young people have been able to contribute to the refurbishment and redecoration of their house, and now enjoy space which is for their exclusive use. They stay in homely accommodation that meets their needs. Children and young people who stay in the main school now have a welcoming lounge for relaxation. It is somewhere they can enjoy their supper and prepare for bedtime. However, due to restrictions arising from catering arrangements, those who stay in the main school still eat in the school's dining room. This does not provide a suitable, homely arrangement for them to have their breakfast.

Children and young people follow individual routines that suit their needs and wishes and improve their independence. They enjoy a range of individual and group experiences. The staff support children and young people to join group activities to improve their socialisation as well as enabling them to follow specific interests and activities on their own. This has led to one young person making friendships at a community youth group, and others enjoying new experiences, such as trips to the hairdresser or bowling. Children and young people enjoy friendships in the residence because staff help them to appreciate the wishes and feelings of others. By staff improving the range of community-based activities offered to children and young people this helps them to improve their understanding and experience of the world. Children and young people have fun and develop new skills that enhance their quality of life.

Staff support children and young people when they express their anxiety or when their behaviour is unsafe. They make adjustments to the environment to reduce any sensory stimulus that causes discomfort. The staff identify any potential decline in emotional well-being so that appropriate assessments can be sought promptly. They monitor the effect of medication and observe children's and young people's health effectively so that any concerns are discussed with families and with medical professionals. This ensures that children and young people receive the help that they need quickly. Children and young people make progress because staff help them to overcome barriers to success.

Children and young people have help to move on from school to their new education provisions or living arrangements. Some move to the college associated with the school. Residential staff work with college staff to ensure that young people are equipped with a range of independent living skills. For example, they shop and cook, follow domestic routines, and increase their confidence in the local community, including participating in work experience. Staff are sensitive to any ups and downs children and young people experience. By seeking and offering the right help, staff promote children's and young people's choices, well-being and confidence as they develop into young adults.

Residential care plans do not capture this progress because record-keeping is poor. It is difficult to identify the impact that the residential placement is having on the progress that children and young people are making. The multi-disciplinary team works well to address elements of the care that children and young people receive, but this is not integrated into the residential plan. For example, the school's coordinator for special educational needs works with placing authorities and families to improve the quality and content of children's local area education, health and care (EHC) plans. However, residential care targets do not reflect the content of the EHC plans.

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

Children and young people can now move around the site safely and stay in safe and pleasant accommodation. Senior leaders have introduced effective systems and checks to ensure that risks are identified and met, and repairs are carried out promptly. A parent said, 'They keep [my child] safer here than I can.' When children and young people experience deterioration in their physical or mental well-being, staff are quick to respond. They share information in multi-disciplinary meetings to review current strategies and emergency plans. They seek external support when necessary, such as a neurological or psychological assessment, or review of medication.

A behaviour support coordinator oversees children's and young people's individual strategies that help them to manage their feelings and behaviour. She also reviews all physical intervention records. The designated lead for safeguarding reviews all cause for concern forms raised by staff. The safeguarding lead identifies trends and patterns emerging so that staff use the most effective approach to keep children and young people safe. The care manager does not review or evaluate those incident reports that relate to residential staff interventions or discuss the impact of significant incidents on staff's emotional well-being. While children and young people remain safely cared for, this limits opportunities for staff reflection and learning about how to improve their practice and to stay safe. Limited recording of children's and young people's views impairs the organisation's ability to evaluate the way children and young people feel about being restrained.

There has been one referral to external safeguarding professionals about staff conduct. The designated safeguarding lead for school acted quickly to report the matter but failed to escalate her concerns about their slow response. This delayed the subsequent internal investigation. Some identified actions from this investigation have not been completed in a timely manner. This has not affected children's and young people's safety but has limited opportunities for reflection and the development of residential staff. The care manager has recently undergone training to take up the role of deputy designated lead for safeguarding. This strengthens arrangements for the protection of children.

Suitable staffing levels and a responsibly secure environment means that children do not go missing from the school. The school provides good opportunities for children and young people to learn about how to keep themselves safe. For example, modules to help children and young people learn about the risk of extremist views are set out in ways they can easily understand. Residential staff reinforce messages about protecting personal space, road safety and making choices, through the range of activities children and young people take part in. This enhances their understanding of how to keep themselves safe from harm. Children and young people trust staff and they accept the advice and guidance offered.

Recent recruitment has not followed best practice. Criminal record checks were

carried out and references were gathered, but the school failed to follow guidance from the Secretary of State to screen applicants fully for their suitability to work with vulnerable children. They failed to obtain references from at least two sources for one applicant and clarify all employment dates for another. These shortfalls were rectified during the inspection, and satisfactory information was provided. New staff follow clear induction programmes that include learning about child protection, to familiarise them with how to raise and report concerns. This improves children's safety.

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

Leaders have made a significant effort to improve the residential service since the last inspection. They have successfully addressed all previous failures to meet the national minimum standards. Children and young people now stay in a comfortable and safe environment.

The quality of self-evaluation is weak. As a result, inspectors identified several other areas where practice does not meet the national minimum standards. The residential development plan does not systematically identify and measure actions to improve known development areas, such as staff morale or staff training needs. It is not always clear which manager is responsible for driving forward improvement, and the care manager does not oversee all actions. This limits the rate of progress being made.

Changes in the membership and function of the governing body have resulted in improved oversight. Support and challenge meetings are a new approach. Trustees and governors are working together with senior staff to improve the rate of progress being made. These are recent initiatives, and it is too soon to judge their effectiveness.

The leadership team offers an aspirational account of the vision for service improvement to the benefit of children and young people. The systems that would ensure continuous and progressive development are not fully formed. For example, residential staff supervision is weak; there are inconsistencies and occasional tensions in inter-departmental communication; there is drift in addressing specific actions for staff training; and systems for monitoring and recording children's and young people's progress are poor.

Inspectors observed staff use highly individualised, person-centred care for children and young people. However, the impact of this approach on their experiences and progress is not captured well. Leaders have taken steps to rectify this. A whole-school approach to identifying children's starting points, and integrating targets from all disciplines, is in the early stages of development. Residential staff are being supported to learn about this approach.

Leaders focus on children's and young people's needs and work cooperatively with



external professionals to ensure that these needs are identified and met. This improves children's and young people's experiences and lives. Children's and young people's views and those of their families are routinely sought and considered when staff make arrangements to provide residential accommodation. This helps children and young people to settle well into after-school activity, and to enjoy their time while gaining new skills and experiences.

## **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:** SC022446

**Director of Services:** Simon Davies

**Senior Care Manager:** Christine Powell

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01925 224 899

**Email address:** [enquiries@wargravehouse.com](mailto:enquiries@wargravehouse.com)

## **Inspectors**

Denise Jolly, social care inspector (lead)  
Sarah Billett, social care inspector



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