

Oversands School

Witherslack Hall, Witherslack, Grange-Over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6SD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Oversands is an independent day and residential special school located at the edge of a small village in Cumbria. The residential accommodation comprises three units on the main school site. The school currently provides places for 71 boys who may have behavioural and/or emotional and/or social difficulties, 12 of whom are currently resident in school. The school was last inspected in June 2017.

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 May 2018

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 20 June 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Residential pupils make good progress across all areas of their social, academic and personal development. They thrive within a nurturing environment, where their unique needs are understood, and that maximises their potential.
- The residential pupils enjoy a range of activities that provide them with the opportunity to try new leisure pursuits.
- Residential pupils feel safe because staff are warm, understanding and respectful. Such practice fosters trusting relationships. Staff search for the message and rationale behind any presenting pupil behaviour. This approach enriches residential pupils' development and supports their experience of being away from home.
- Specialist professionals employed by the organisation provide suitable assessments of residential pupils' needs and strategies to meet these needs.
- The vast majority of parents have the utmost confidence in the staff and the leadership team. They see and can describe the progress that their child makes.
- The staff work tirelessly to facilitate the best experiences for the residential pupils.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- The school does not meet two of the national minimum standards.
- There are some safeguarding concerns regarding resident pupils' use of the internet, which are in need of urgent action.
- Senior leaders with responsibility for care need to continue their professional development so that they have a greater understanding of safeguarding.
- Staff do not consistently use the school's own procedures for reporting serious concerns. The quality and systems of recording require improving. It is not possible to be sure that all known concerns are fully consolidated and used to inform intervention plans for individual young people.
- Where risks are identified and linked to when pupils are at home, the school should seek greater clarity about its own role alongside those of parents and placing authorities in keeping pupils safe. Communication with parents and placing authorities should be accurately recorded to give the reader a full understanding of the current situation.
- Monitoring arrangements are not sufficiently strong, and the independent visitor's review on safeguarding lacks depth and scrutiny.

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:

- 6.3 - Ensure 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 that appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
- 11.1 - Ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Recommendations

- The independent visitor report should provide greater scrutiny in relation to the evaluation of safeguarding in the school.
- Where there are risks identified at home, the school should seek greater clarity regarding its own role and responsibilities alongside those of parents and the placing authority.
- Persons responsible for the direct management of care in the school should enhance their professional development with wider support from within the Witherslack group, particularly with regards to child protection and safeguarding children regarding the internet.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The vast majority of the children and young people at this school thrive and flourish because of the quality of the individualised care and support that they receive from the dedicated staff and leadership team. The staff from the residential houses have strong working relationships with the school's multi-disciplinary team, and they work together to deliver a good service to resident pupils. The quality of support from the care staff at the school has a positive impact on the progress and experiences of each child and young person.

Educational clinical psychology input is provided when needed. While there is no on-site access to clinical psychology, the school can access provision from within the company's resources. A speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist and mental health support staff work with the children and young people and the residential staff, which helps to maximise opportunities for the children and young people to progress in areas such as communication and behaviour. This arrangement helps to ensure that there is consistency and continuity to the assessed and personalised approaches for working with each individual. One parent said, 'My son has made real progress socially and emotionally. He needed the stability and support of a well-organised and caring therapeutic approach, which Oversands provides.' The parents see the tangible progress that their child makes because of boarding at the school. In contrast, in an isolated case, a multi-disciplinary assessment for therapies completed by the on-site team failed to consider a child's known sexualised behaviour, which is a significant omission.

Meals are balanced and varied. Salads are fresh and colourful; there is an abundance of fresh fruit. The children have the opportunity to try foods that they have not previously tried. Parents reported that children's diets become increasingly varied because of the dietary support they receive.

The residential and school staff work in partnership and carefully review each pupil's progress. The staff across all disciplines focus on the social communication and emotional regulation of each child and young person. These approaches enable the school and residential staff to give detailed feedback to parents and other agencies.

The staff have good relationships with other professionals, who said that communication is helpful and clear. The staff work hard to provide regular updates and to share information with parents as quickly as possible. The vast majority of parents spoke highly and with confidence of the endeavours made by the staff to ensure that they remain included and as involved as possible in their child's care. One parent said, 'I have greatly appreciated the close contact between home and school. Contact between school and home is very good and allows a consistent approach when my son comes home.'

Senior staff routinely share concerns about children with their allocated social

workers, parents and other professionals. However, those children whose home addresses are in other local authority areas, and who do not have a social worker, receive a variable response. For some, prompt referrals to home safeguarding services have led to successful safeguarding actions. For example, referring a disclosure made by one young person led to the successful serving of a child abduction notice on the perpetrator and the pupil being assessed and receiving services appropriate to a child at high risk of sexual exploitation. However, for another child, concerns were not shared with his home local authority although his behaviour and his parent's behaviour indicated a safeguarding concern.

The residential team leaders and residential managers are hands-on. They are quickly able to identify any changes in children's and young people's mood or behaviour. The senior leaders, managers and staff encourage the children and young people to make known their views and wishes using a range of methods. The school council meets termly with representatives from the school's leadership team. There is representation on the school council from some of the resident children and young people. This provides an opportunity for children and young people to make suggestions and to influence the residential provision in the home.

The quality and strength of the school curriculum means that the children access and benefit from a range of exciting and fun activities throughout the school week, such as mountain biking, horse riding and going to trampoline parks. The school has staff that are trained in forest school techniques, and children can enjoy den building and making fires.

Careful monitoring ensures that children's health and medical needs are sensitively supported. Clear healthcare plans describe current needs and ways in which staff are to support them. Some children have additional mental and emotional health difficulties, for which external professionals are involved. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities in this regard. For example, they help individuals to understand when they get down and upset, and let them talk about it, or arrange a specialist to discuss things with them. For such pupils, it is this depth of knowledge about the individual, and about how best to intervene, that makes such a positive impact on their developing self-worth and confidence. Staff have not received anti-ligature training, and anti-ligature scissors are not in place across the school. Access to these would improve children's safety.

A strength of the school is the ways in which staff help children to move into and move on from school. Staff work well together to focus on the needs of each child. Introductions and taster days are taken at each child's pace. Staff are keen to gather all information necessary to provide children with the right support to cope with a stressful situation. For example, one young person, beyond statutory school leaving age, has stayed on for a further academic year, which has allowed him to complete his studies at a local college. He has recently been successful in gaining full-time employment at a Michelin star restaurant in the area. This means that, when a move takes place, young people are able to take this in their stride. Good communication means that any problems that emerge are dealt with quickly so that all pupils have

the best possible experience.

Notable improvements are continuing with regard to the quality of the residential accommodation. Planned and ongoing redecoration is refreshing communal areas with warm, inviting decor and furnishings. This is complemented by the meticulous approach of the ancillary staff, who ensure that maintenance and repair requests are promptly dealt with. Children can choose to decorate and personalise their own bedrooms. Many bring in treasured personal items, while others elect not to.

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

The school's child protection policy and procedures clearly set out the need for senior staff to refer potential safeguarding matters to local safeguarding community-based services and/or the local authority designated officer. However, they do not specify which local authority areas and services to inform. This is a significant shortfall because the children often have complex living arrangements and different legal statuses. A safeguarding concern may require sharing with different agencies in different areas, and for different purposes. If senior staff are unsatisfied with the response from community safeguarding services, the policy's escalation guidance refers only to the area the school is based in, which will not always be the right authority.

A referral was suitably made to the home local authority for one child whose presenting behaviour indicated that he was at risk from child sexual exploitation. This resulted in the local authority commencing an assessment of need, which is positive. In contrast, other children do not benefit from assessments of need or the provision of statutory social work services, even when their changing circumstances indicate that this would benefit them.

Safeguarding referrals and records held within the school are clear and secure. There is a swift response to safeguarding concerns from senior staff, and all staff make good use of the 'internal notification of child protection/welfare concerns' to pass concerns to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). However, other records relating to individual children, such as their keyworker files, indicate other 'issues of concern' that have not resulted in a formal written notification to the DSL, and it is unclear why this is so. For example, a keyworker file notes that a pupil had tried to access pornography on 25 February 2018 and 5 March 2018, that he had had a conversation with another young person that his keyworker described as 'disgusting' and had exposed his genitals to staff on 1 February 2018. However, none of these incidents generated an internal notification of child protection/welfare concern to the DSL.

In addition to concerns being recorded in different documents without full cross-referencing, some records are poorly written. For example, one young person's placement plan makes reference to him being involved in sending an adult female in the community inappropriate photographs, but the details of this are not recorded

more fully in any other records held by the school. Senior staff recall this differently, but confirmed that this was not recorded properly in his files. Overall, the quality and systems of recording require improving. It is not possible to be sure that all known concerns by the senior management with responsibility for care are fully consolidated and used to inform intervention plans for children. Senior staff would benefit from additional support from the wider company to assist with their professional development in this area.

Senior staff refer serious incidents of concern to Ofsted promptly. Updates are also notified promptly. However, a recent incident of a child being charged with a serious sexual offence was not notified on the grounds that he was not on site at the time. This is not in the spirit of transparency and openness, which underpins the notification system.

Any hint or suggestion of bullying is identified and addressed immediately. Records show that incidents of bullying are few. The staff take action quickly and proactively to meet with the children and young people when the staff are concerned about the impact of an individual's behaviour on others

All complaints are clearly recorded and followed up promptly. Those that involve allegations against staff are appropriately referred to the local authority designated officer. Mediation is frequently used, and children reported being satisfied with the outcome of investigations into their complaints. Complaints against staff are dealt with at a suitably senior level, and the headteacher assumes responsibilities for these cases. External safeguarding agencies scrutinise and accept the thoroughness of these enquiries.

Some children have histories of concerning sexualised behaviour. This includes accessing pornography online, sharing indecent images, sexualised language to adults and/or other children and sexual assaults on others. Children have individual risk assessments and risk management plans. However, these are not always fully effective. Some children have been able to download adult material such as dating applications and film sites, for example Netflix and Tinder, despite being fully supervised. Some children have shared inappropriate material with other children.

Some parents do not comply with agreements to monitor and ensure the safety of their children's online activity. While software on the school's internet system enables unauthorised activity to be flagged, it does not capture activity on children's internet-capable devices that have independent access, such as separate mobile contracts. Staff advise that they will restrict access to devices and check devices when necessary. However, there are gaps in the strategic oversight of children's safety in this important area.

Good efforts are under way to reduce the number of restrictive physical interventions (RPIs) that staff use to safeguard and support children, particularly those interventions that result in being prone on the floor. Use of RPIs is monitored and analysed carefully, with appropriate actions taken after each incident to ensure that

children's and staff's welfare is promoted. The introduction of a model of behaviour management two years ago has successfully reduced the volume of ground holds. It has not reduced the number of RPIs, but the average length has reduced, which is positive. Overall, the use of force is carefully monitored by sufficiently senior staff to ensure that it is minimal and takes account of preceding behaviour and events.

Other important aspects of life at the school, such as the volume of safeguarding referrals and incidents of concern, are subject to detailed oversight and analysis. Senior staff are aware of trends and patterns, and drill down into individual issues, to determine whether anything further could be done to improve children's outcomes.

Staff receive regular information and updates on child protection issues such as radicalisation, county lines and child sexual exploitation. However, the impact of staff training and information dissemination is unclear. It is positive that all staff in the school, including support staff, benefit from regular team meetings and similar updates on child protection issues. This equips the support staff to recognise concerns and know what to do thereafter.

Children are encouraged not to go missing from the school. Those who do are referred to the police and community-based responsible staff and/or parents. Children are spoken to by a member of staff on their return to attempt to discover the reasons why they went missing, and offered the opportunity to speak to someone external to the home. Missing from care procedures are not individualised; for example, the plans inform practitioners that, after a 90 minute period of not being able to find a child, they should be reported missing. This is regardless of children's ages, vulnerabilities or known risks. This places children who are partially vulnerable at a greater risk due to the delay in reporting.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The service is led effectively by a passionate headteacher, who has the confidence of the staff, senior managers and operations board. An experienced extended management team ably supports him. Leaders and managers have very high expectations and ambitions for the service, the staff and the children. Leaders and managers aspire to deliver a high-quality service. This passion and the culture of aspiration and achievement have a positive effect on the children.

The residential care manager has been in post for a number of years and holds a relevant level 5 qualification. She continues to work effectively alongside the deputy head/care, and together they provide continuity for the children and young people and strong and supportive leadership to the residential staff. Both the care manager and the deputy head/care know exactly what is happening on a day-to-day basis for the children and young people. They participate and help with shifts, including at the weekends. This helps them to monitor the quality of care provided, to model expected practice and to ensure that the standards of care remain high. The deputy head/care meets regularly with the headteacher and regional manager. As a result,

the senior leadership team maintains an up-to-date understanding of each child's and young person's care and support needs.

A clear system of supervision and appraisal is in place. Managers ensure that all staff enrol on induction programmes when they start working at the school. This includes staff who change roles. The staff then enrol for relevant level 3 qualifications. The staff receive a range of suitable additional training opportunities. These include training on anti-radicalisation, first aid and safeguarding. This provides the staff with the skills and knowledge that they need to carry out their roles.

Safe recruitment procedures are followed, for example, following up gaps in employment history, securing enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service clearance, and having appropriate references. The single central register is not up to date; staff who have been internally promoted have data on the register which pertains to their previous job roles. There are many staff who have been employed at the school for a long time. Because of different historical recruitment practices, their records do not comply with current expectations. For example, some lack documentary proof of pre-employment qualifications. Some references are not on the school's electronic files, and are reportedly held centrally instead. Updating these records would improve assurance of the suitability of the current workforce in the school.

An independent person undertakes monitoring visits to the school. However, these visits do not include an in-depth scrutiny of the safeguarding practices of staff and senior management. As a result, the evaluation of the safeguarding is based on minimal information.

Two of the three areas identified for improvement at the last inspection have been addressed. A third remains unmet. This is with regard to the recognition of risks identified at home, in particular with regards to safeguarding, and that the school seeks greater clarity regarding its own role and responsibilities alongside those of parents and the placing authority.

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: SC040063

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Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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