

# Skilts School

Skilts School, Gorcott Hill, Beoley, Redditch, Worcestershire B98 9ET

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Skilts is a local authority residential special school for 64 children between five and 11 years old who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school is situated in Warwickshire and operated by Birmingham City Council for Birmingham children. There are two joined residential houses.

**Inspection dates:** 17 to 19 September 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 **inadequate**

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:** 5 December 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement to be good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school requires improvement to be good because:

- Leaders have failed to drive improvement and have failed to meet some of the recommendations from the last inspection.
- Leadership and monitoring of the quality of care provided to children is extremely poor.
- Senior leaders have taken too long to replace the board of governors, which further undermines the leadership and scrutiny required to drive improvement in the residential provision.
- Independent review of the residential setting has failed to improve.
- Care plans, healthcare plans and risk assessments fail to provide sufficient guidance for staff.
- Children's individuality, including their racial identity, is not fully supported by staff.
- Children's progress is poorly monitored, and records do not provide a journey of children's experiences and achievements.
- Safeguarding is not robust due to inconsistent information sharing between care and education staff.
- Health and safety is poorly monitored.
- Poor communication between care and education staff results in a lack of meaningful target setting for children.
- Oversight of behaviour management, including the use of physical intervention and sanctions, is poor and lacks child focus.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- Children enjoy attending the residential setting, and they enjoy positive relationships with staff.
- The range and quality of activities provided has improved and children experience new and beneficial experiences.

## **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:

- Arrangements are in place to review how the child is settling following admission to the school. In an emergency admission a review meeting is initiated as soon as possible (and never longer than four school weeks after admission) to consider whether the child should remain at the school, or whether it is in that child's interests to move to a different placement. Such a review meeting may involve (where appropriate) the school, the placing authority, the parents/carers or those with parental responsibility, those with significant involvement with the child (such as social services or health services) and, where possible, the child. (National minimum standard 2.5)
- Where necessary, a child has a clear individual health and welfare plan or similar record, containing relevant health and welfare information provided by parents/carers and recording significant health and welfare needs and issues. This record should be agreed by parents/carers and include: records of developmental checks; health monitoring required by staff; intimate care or bodily functions requiring staff help; and the involvement of a child's parents/carers or significant others in health and welfare issues. (National minimum standard 3.12)
- 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. (National minimum standard 6.3)
- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. (National minimum standard 7.1)
- In addition, fire drills are regularly (at least once per term) carried out in 'residential time'. (National minimum standard 7.2)
- 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. (National minimum standard 12.1)
- The policy complies with relevant legislation and has regard to guidance and is understood by staff and children. (National minimum standard 12.2)
- All children and staff are given an opportunity to discuss with a relevant adult (who was not directly involved) within 24 hours incidents of restraint, including reasonable force, they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by.

(National minimum standard 12.5)

- A written record is kept of major sanctions and the use of any reasonable force. Records include the information in Appendix 2 (use of reasonable force). 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 to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice. (National minimum standard 12.6)
- The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school and takes appropriate action where necessary. (National minimum standard 13.1)
- There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff. (National minimum standard 13.2)
- The school's leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role. (National minimum standard 13.3)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (National minimum standard 13.4)
- Children are not discriminated against, paying particular regard to the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act 2010, or because of their cultural background, linguistic background, special educational need, or academic or sporting ability. These factors are taken into account in the care of children, so that care is sensitive to different needs. (National minimum standard 16.1)
- Most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include: checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of reasonable force, risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children; evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded; assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitor (in private if they wish). (National minimum standard 20.2)
- 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. (National minimum standard 20.4)
- The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan. The placement plan

identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible, children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans. (National minimum standard 21.1)

- Each child has at least one key worker (or similar person) within the school who provides individual guidance and support to the child. They regularly make time available to the child to enable the child to seek guidance, advice and support on any matter. They monitor the school's compliance on a day to day basis with the child's placement plan. (National minimum standard 21.2)
- 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. (National minimum standard 22.1)

## Inspection judgements

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

The opportunity for children to reach their potential is not fully supported within the residential provision. Guidance for staff and strategies that support children's individuality and identity are not detailed in care plans or risk assessments.

Children enjoy their time in the residential provision. However, their social and educational targets are not effective. Some children have had the same targets for an extensive period. Others have received minimal input to help them achieve targets for behaviour, cultural identity and education achievement.

New children settle well into the residential provision, but a formal review of the admissions process as recommended from the last inspection has not been undertaken. Recording that details children's experiences is minimal and does not demonstrate any connection to their care plans and/or target measures.

Residential staff have failed to implement or engage with significant improvements in behaviour management that have been made in the children's school. New risk reduction plans, which are designed to be used across the school and the residential service, have not been implemented by care staff. This lack of connectivity is a significant and missed opportunity to help children manage their challenging behaviours and to extend their educational and social development.

Children currently using the residential service have no concerns about bullying. However, previous concerns raised by children, who have since left the service, have not been fully tracked and addressed by the head of care.

Children enjoy going to school and are keen to talk about the new red, amber, green and gold awards system in school. They eagerly count up their 'golds' and were keen to show off their new VIP lounge where they can relax, play and celebrate their gold awards with education staff. This enthusiasm and positive reinforcement for improved behaviour has not been embraced by residential staff. The 'Star of the Week' and 'Achievements' display boards in the residential setting have not been updated. Essential resources to give young people a visual reinforcement of positive achievements are not made available and this is a further missed opportunity to improve children's daily experience.

Some staff take time and reflection to identify and acknowledge the progress made by young people. Other staff lack insight into children's individuality and the progress that they make from their starting points. Some comments made by staff during the inspection reflect a lack of respect for children.

Children value a new range of enjoyable activities provided by the staff. They have benefited from outings, including a special birthday celebration for one child, and opportunities to nature watch and grow their own vegetables. They make new friends and look out for each other as a result of staff encouraging positive

relationships.

Children experience good levels of nurture through the essential routines that staff provide for children. One young person says he has grown because he has good sleep and eats all his food. All children enjoy the food provided, and take care of their personal hygiene, including showering before bed and dressing smartly for the school day ahead after a good breakfast.

Parents are positive about the quality of care provided by residential staff to both children and their families.

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

Health and safety, especially fire safety, has been poorly monitored and records are not routinely maintained. On this inspection, records for fire drills, the updated fire risk assessment and checks on fire safety systems could not be located. Remedial action was taken by senior leaders during the inspection.

This lack of effective monitoring is evidenced in other safeguarding and care planning records. Poorly written guidance for staff and a lack of management oversight compromise the quality and robustness of the setting's care and safeguarding framework.

Care plans have not been improved as recommended at the last inspection. There is no staff guidance about how to meet children's basic primary care needs. For example, essential information provided by parents about children's bedtime routines are not included in care plans. Healthcare plans are descriptive, listing children's medical, health and medication needs. There is little staff guidance about how to meet and monitor these needs. Concerns about a child's dental health have not been picked up and appropriately referred.

Risk assessments are generic. The lack of attention to detail compromises an individualised approach to keeping children safe. For example, some children's risk management plans have not been updated following incidents where children have climbed onto roofs. Staff are not aware of the new risk reduction plans that have been implemented for children who present high levels of risky behaviours across the school and residential day. This significant shortfall compromises consistency of care and dilutes the impact of the new behaviour management strategies that have been introduced to improve the school.

Physical intervention records vary in detail, quality and managerial oversight. Some recording is misleading. For example, one record did not fully depict the type of physical intervention used by staff and gave no detail of the 'accusations' made by the child. The child's voice is not always given sufficient priority or focus. This is most evident when debriefs with children are held in the presence of the member of staff who has carried out the physical intervention. Additional discussions between the head of care and the children are not fully recorded.

Sanctions records are difficult to monitor and evaluate as staff do not record any sanctions that are set for less than 10 minutes.

Poor communication between the residential and education staff potentially compromises the smooth and timely referral of safeguarding concerns. There are clear procedures in place to help children be kept safe. However, there is a lack of joint working between the residential and school leaders. For example, the head of care, who is one of the designated safeguarding leads, was not aware of a child's head injury for several days. Fortunately, this had been noticed by the designated officer in the school and appropriate action was taken.

Complaints from parents are appropriately addressed and the relevant safeguarding procedures followed when necessary. However, recording of complaints investigations remains poor and there is a lack of evidence and detail about how leaders and staff have spoken with the children concerned and what they have said.

Improvements have been made to procedures for the administration and management of medications. Staff have received training in this regard and children are being better protected by the implementation of improved procedures.

All activities are now risk assessed to promote the safety of children.

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

Senior leaders in the local authority and leaders in the school have failed to address the improvements required to provide a good quality of care and management in this residential provision.

While the school has improved with strong internal leadership and external consultancy, the same management strategies and robust monitoring have not been replicated across the residential provision.

Since the last inspection in December 2017, the arrangements for governance and oversight of the residential setting that were judged to be unacceptably poor have not improved. The board of governors and local authority leaders have failed to implement required improvements to ensure that the residential provision is compliant with the National Minimum Standards for residential special schools. A new board of governors has recently been convened, but this has been delayed due to lack of timely action by local authority senior leaders.

The previous, and recently replaced, chair of governors has continued to carry out monitoring visits to the residential houses. The quality of these visits and reports has not improved and shows little regard for the voice of the child or the improvements required as a result of findings at the last inspection. Significant incidents and the use of sanctions have not been evaluated to identify learning or areas for improvement. The head of care gives little scrutiny to these reports prior to submitting them to the board of governors, where he has also been a governor. These arrangements, where the senior leader for the residential provision and the chair of governors report to themselves, are not appropriately independent or



objective.

The recent appointment of the same chair of governors as the independent visitor for children is of great concern. Evidence demonstrates that this individual has shown little regard for the voice of children. For example, children's concerns about bullying, identified in her last monitoring visit in July 2018, have not been addressed. This appointment is now being reviewed by the headteacher as a result of the inspection.

The head of care has not completed any evaluation of the residential setting since his last report to the board of governors in September 2017.

The head of care and staff openly acknowledge that they have completed very little work to improve the residential setting after the last inspection. They feel they have had little time to make improvements due to the challenging needs of the young people up to the end of the academic year. Staff morale has also been affected by news of the possible closure of the residential setting. Staff appear to have not been provided with information or leadership about this news of their future employment.

Staffing arrangements provide high levels of staffing as there are now only six children attending the residential provision. Staff are well trained and offer extensive experience to their roles.

Residential staff say that they work as a team to support each other and discuss difficult children. Some staff want the best for children, others appear to lack the motivation and understanding of how to move the service forward. For example, one member of staff has visited another special school in his own free time. This visit has contributed to the improvements made in the activities programme for children and supported some children's transition to their next school. Other staff lack understanding of the changing landscape within residential care. Their attitude of 'we have always done it this way' is holding back their ability and desire to move forward to ensure that children reach their full potential.

The substantive headteacher has recently returned to his post and is currently on a phased return to work, with full support from the interim assistant head. Early links with the new board of governors and the improvement officer are already in place. Local authority leaders have also taken action in regard to health and safety concerns and monitoring.

Eight recommendations from the last inspection are repeated. A further 11 recommendations are made as a result of this inspection.

## **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:** SC033753

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:**

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

**Telephone number:** 01527 853851

**Email address:** heath.mason@skilts.bham.sch.uk

## **Inspectors**

Elaine Cray, social care inspector (lead)  
Louise Battersby, social care inspector



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Manchester  
M1 2WD

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