

# 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 who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including aspects of autism spectrum disorder, emotional and behavioural difficulties and other complex needs. The school is located in a rural part of Staffordshire and serves children placed by a number of local authorities. Residential accommodation is provided in two buildings sited within the school's grounds and provides accommodation for boys and girls.

The residential provision was last inspected in January 2018.

**Inspection dates:** 5 to 7 February 2019

<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	good
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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:** 16 January 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## **Key findings from this inspection**

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives and thrive in this inclusive environment.
- Safeguarding is outstanding. There is a thorough and comprehensive approach to promoting children's safety and welfare.
- Managers and staff have high aspirations for children. They are extremely motivated and skilled, and deliver quality, personalised care to children.
- Children receive nurturing care and support from a dedicated staff team. This enables them to flourish educationally, socially, physically and emotionally.
- Partnership work with families is excellent. They unanimously praised the exceptionally positive impact the residential provision has had on their children's development and progress.
- Children's views, wishes and feelings are central to daily routines in the residential service. Their feedback influences the continual development of the service.
- Leadership and management are extremely effective. The residential aspect of the school is integral to children's achievements.
- Effective communication between residential managers and school leaders is embedded in the culture of the service. This enhances children's residential experience.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that children's case files provide a comprehensive and inclusive description of their individual needs, their developmental aims and goals and their progress, and that information relating to children's time in the residential provision is included in statutory plans.
- Ensure that policies and procedures for the care of children who are unwell when accessing this residential service are easily accessible and sufficiently detailed to provide families with necessary information.
- Ensure that effective links with health agencies, including specialist services, cover children's time in the residential service.

## Inspection judgements

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

All children who access the school's residential provision make significant progress, taking account of their starting points, in all areas of their development. This is because staff fully appreciate and embrace children's uniqueness and their individual needs. They work with teaching staff and health professionals to pinpoint children's complex needs. Consequently, staff deliver bespoke care and support.

Children enjoy exceptionally positive relationships with staff, and with each other. This is because staff take time to understand how individual children build relationships. They use this knowledge to support children to develop their social interaction skills and their communication skills, and to appropriately express their emotions. Consequently, children can develop friendships with their peers.

Staff ensure that mealtimes are social occasions. With the support of a dedicated and knowledgeable cook, children are involved in planning menus and considering food options. This further enhances their social skills.

Partnerships between staff and children's families are excellent. Parents and carers spoke with passion and positivity about the impact that the residential provision has on children's growth and development. One parent said, 'I couldn't ask for more. The residential experience is essential to enable my child to lead as normal a life as possible. The impact and benefits of the residential opportunity should never be underestimated.'

The residential provision provides a stimulating and exciting environment for children where staff consistently encourage them to work on their educational targets. Additionally, staff work with children and their families to identify social, emotional and cognitive goals that will support their transition to adulthood. For some children this may mean learning basic independence skills such as making drinks and snacks. For other children this means improving their hand-eye coordination, allowing them to help with their personal care. Children are immensely proud of their achievements. They grow in confidence and self-esteem because of these opportunities.

Children participate in a wide range of exhilarating, fun and educational activities. They are fully involved in decisions about how they spend their time during their stays and who they spend their time with. Staff support children to take part in community projects, recreational activities, trips and social occasions. Managers and staff make sure that children's complex needs do not curtail their leisure options. This means that children are not defined by their disabilities. Staff structure children's residential experience around celebrating their abilities. This further supports their progress and enhances confidence.

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

Children are safe and protected from harm. Staff are extremely competent in assessing children's risks and identifying strategies to reduce these. They devise supportive behaviour management plans and use incentives and rewards to help children to learn to manage their own behaviour. Taking account of children's abilities and understanding, staff help them to consider how their actions may impact on others. Developing personal awareness enables children to prosper in a group-living environment.

Staff are very mindful of children's individual anxieties. They use clear and consistent communication, including non-verbal and signed prompts, to de-escalate volatile situations and reassure children. As a result, there have been no incidents of restraint in the residential provision since the last inspection. Parents and carers also praised this area of practice. One parent said, 'The residential element of the school is outstanding. The staff are unflappable, the kids adore it.'

Staff recognise that children's challenging behaviours may be reflective and symptomatic of their often-complex health needs. In these circumstances, residential managers ensure that they have enough staff on each shift to provide children with one-to-one support when necessary. Staff work with specialist health professionals to ensure that children's health needs are met, and that any risks associated with these are managed. For example, staff complete specialist training in administering specific medication.

Residential managers work closely with senior school leaders to ensure that they appropriately record, manage and address any concerns, regardless of severity. This enables managers to build a full picture of children's circumstances. Consequently, this integrated approach promotes children's safety and welfare.

Staff benefit from regular safeguarding training. This includes modules relating to child sexual exploitation, bullying, radicalisation and female genital mutilation. Staff are fully aware of their responsibilities and are confident in their use of referral systems to highlight any safeguarding or child protection concerns. Furthermore, strong and consistent governance by the designated officer and senior management team means that safeguarding practice is monitored effectively. This helps to keep children safe.

The members of the dedicated maintenance team ensure that they regularly complete all relevant health and safety, fire safety and environmental checks. They quickly address any known hazards or risks to children's safety. This means that children reside in a safe and secure environment.

All residential and school staff are subject to robust recruitment processes. Recruitment records include verified employment references and a range of suitability checks. This ensures that staff are safe to work with children.

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

Senior leaders and residential managers are inspirational and lead by example. The new head of care and deputy head of care are innovative. With the support of the headteacher they continually review the positive impact the residential service has on outcomes for children. Leaders and managers prioritise children's progress. They create a 'can-do' culture across the residential service. The committed and motivated residential staff embrace this ethos and have high aspirations for all children accessing the service. Parents and carers appreciate this. One parent said, 'For our son the residential facility has been the most successful part of his school life and this is due to the professionalism and dedication of the residential staff.'

Leaders, managers, staff, governors and independent visitors continually assess and evaluate the residential provision. This ensures that they have a clear understanding of the service's strengths and any areas for development. Residential managers are currently updating the care planning process so that children's care plans better capture their progress. Once this work is completed, it is the hope of managers that this will provide a more comprehensive and inclusive description of children's needs and achievements.

Staff are extremely passionate about their role. Managers ensure that staff have the skills and experience that they need to support the children. Although most members of residential staff are long serving, managers continually seek to offer new training and use research to enable them to reflect on and to review practice. This ensures that staff practice and performance continue to evolve to meet the children's changing needs.

Senior managers continually review internal policies and procedures to ensure that these reflect children's needs and promote their safety and welfare. However, there is scope for the residential managers to better highlight for parents the specific procedures relating to their child's time in the residential service. For example, the action required when a child is unwell during their stay.

Partnerships between leaders and managers, and the externally commissioned support service are strong and effective. These relationships are further supported by an active governing body. The members of the governing body fully understand the positive impact that the residential provision has on children's progress and development. However, it is essential that as the service moves forward leaders and managers ensure that the service level agreements incorporate the residential aspect of children's education.

## **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**

Jo Stephenson, social care inspector (lead)  
Alison Cooper, social care inspector



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