

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 School 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 65 boys who may have behavioural and/or emotional and/or social difficulties, 11 of whom are currently resident in school. The school was last inspected in May 2018.

There is currently no headteacher at the school. The school has a deputy head – care, and a care manager who supports the residential provision in the school.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 June 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **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: 1 May 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Residential pupils benefit from individualised, nurturing care and support from the staff. Their positive experiences are directly related to the trusting relationships that they form with staff, who are dedicated to improving residential pupils' well-being and helping them to build a happy and successful life in the future. Residential pupils commented on how they have fun, they like it being so calm and peaceful and they enjoy doing activities with their friends.

Parents and carers have noticed the progress that residential pupils have made in a short period. A parent commented that her son had made 'formidable' progress in the time he had been at the school and that staff had addressed the difficulties in attending education. Another parent stated that her child was now more settled and much calmer at home, with a greater ability to verbalise their feelings; family life is much improved. Parents and carers appreciate their child's progress in social development and independence. They value the importance that staff place on working with them to support their child.

Working collaboratively with staff across the school, residential staff use their knowledge of each residential pupil to ensure that effective support advances their development. Well-considered and individualised plans help pupils to settle quickly into residential life. With a focus on residential pupils' emotional needs, staff are alert to signs of distress, anxiety and stress. They are trained to provide appropriate support and to refer to the organisation's own specialists when necessary. Through this close attention to their well-being, residential pupils develop resilience and coping strategies to manage their difficulties.

The staff value the views of residential pupils. Group meetings provide opportunities to choose activities and to discuss issues. Regular key-work sessions enable residential pupils to put forward their views. Residential pupils stated that they can talk to staff if they are worried about anything and that staff are 'up for a laugh'. Managers and staff are responsive and act on residential pupils' requests, demonstrating that residential pupils are listened to and that their views are important.

Staff ensure that residential pupils are aware of how to make a complaint. Managers were unaware of the outcome to one concern raised by a pupil, as there were no records about its conclusion.

The school has admitted pupils who display very complex and challenging behaviours. On occasion, despite leaders' and managers' best efforts, the pupil has had their placement terminated. Currently, the school does not have a formal recorded process regarding potential placement breakdowns. As a consequence, there is no capture of what the best steps are to support the pupil and what lessons can be learned from placement breakdowns.

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

Good and effective safeguarding measures protect residential pupils. All staff take their responsibility seriously for ensuring the safety of residential pupils. They recognise and understand the residential pupils' specific vulnerabilities and address these on an individual basis. Their responsibility is not confined to keeping residential pupils safe while in school, but they continuously strive to extend all pupils' awareness and understanding of keeping themselves safe in the social media community and online.

The designated safeguarding lead has a good relationship with external safeguarding agencies. There is detailed information on the school website and within school, informed by Cumbria County Council policies and Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures, that sets out how staff should reduce risks and respond to concerns. Staff have received training and understand procedures regarding allegations against staff who work with children.

Relationships between staff and residential pupils are positive and are at the heart of successful behaviour management strategies. Structure, routines and clear boundaries help residential pupils to develop a sense of safety, protection and trust. Staff model appropriate social interactions, supporting residential pupils to make friends, to maintain friendships and to learn to live with others.

Individualised placement plans comprehensively identify residential pupils' needs and the support that they require from staff to develop. Staff know and understand each residential pupil very well and they implement personalised strategies to help residential pupils self-regulate their emotions and manage their difficulties.

Staff have good procedures to follow if pupils leave the school grounds without permission. Children and young people do not report bullying as an issue at this school. Concerns about bullying behaviour are quickly reported and resolved.

There have been 704 incidents of physical intervention in the school since the last inspection in May 2018, and 30 of those incidents affected residential pupils. Twenty-one incidents of physical intervention occurred in residential time. All staff are trained in an accredited method of safely intervening to prevent harm. The deputy head – care produces an analysis of the interventions to understand the crisis points in the day and provide more care support at those periods. Behaviour plans advise staff on what works best for each child, including how to de-escalate behaviours and intervene safely to prevent harm. Detailed records are kept. Staff and children, as far as possible, are involved in a review of any intervention. Information is shared with parents and partner agencies fully.

Risk management plans do not provide clear guidance for staff to follow if pupils access the private lake which is situated within the school grounds. Following three incidents where pupils accessed the water earlier in the year, the risk management plan around the lake remained as part of the overall grounds risk management plan.

It had not been reviewed following the incidents. These basic errors undermine the risk-management systems. The health and safety lead for the company group did address this during the inspection and produced a substantial plan.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The school is currently operating without a headteacher. A regional manager is covering the position until a new head, who has been appointed, commences in post. The deputy head – care, and the care manager of the residential provision are competent, experienced and confident in maintaining a positive culture in which staff support residential pupils to do as well as they can and to develop the skills that they will need in the future. All staff share this commitment to meeting residential pupils' diverse needs and believe that residential pupils can flourish through individualised support, advice and guidance.

The skilled residential staff team members work cohesively, supporting each other to meet the residential pupils' individual needs. Managers encourage the staff to be creative and innovative and, through this, to continuously improve the residential pupils' experience of living at the school. Through training, individual performance plans and regular supervision, the staff receive effective support from managers to improve their practice and their support for residential pupils, with a sharp focus on safeguarding themselves and promoting their well-being. Training around autism would improve practice further, as a number of residential pupils have an autism diagnosis and this would lead to a better understanding of their needs.

On one occasion, probation meeting notes did not reflect the supervision notes of a member of staff. A supervision took place over a staff member's conduct, but this was not cross-referenced or detailed in his subsequent probation meeting a few days later. This is poor recording and fails to ensure that adequate scrutiny around new staff members is in place.

A strong governing body provides effective scrutiny, challenge and oversight of the residential provision. A particularly knowledgeable and experienced independent person, from a local advocacy service, closely monitors safeguarding matters. Her depth of knowledge and up-to-date training provide valuable support to the safeguarding team, ensuring that the systems to protect pupils are fully embedded. This independent person also regularly visits the residential provision, providing leaders and managers with detailed and comprehensive reports with action points, which help to ensure that high standards of care are maintained and there is continuous improvement.

Staff across all aspects of the school have a strong determination to work together to identify each pupil's individual needs and the support that they require to make progress. Residential pupils benefit from all staff applying consistent strategies and sharing resources.

Staff stated, in the returned questionnaires to Ofsted, that demands made of them during the educational period of the school day have resulted in long days when pupils have been challenging. Within the education setting there is less stability in the teaching team, with several teaching assistant posts being vacant. This has resulted in care staff covering in their absence and it is affecting their well-being. The school recognises this and is working hard to recruit and retain the educational staff to reflect the stability within the residential provision.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure risk assessments are known to the staff team and regularly reviewed and updated with particular regard to the lake within the vicinity of the school.
- Ensure robust action is taken to address all issues of concern, including monitoring the outcome of complaints made by children to their conclusion.
- Ensure when children are not settling in, leaders and managers take steps to ensure that the plan is reviewed internally and with the placing authority and/or parents, as appropriate, to consider the best steps to take next.
- Ensure training and development activities are effective and are focused on ensuring that staff can meet the specific needs of the children, with particular regards to autism training.
- Ensure there are effective supervision and probation meetings, which correlate and cross-reference with each other.
- Ensure the emotional impact on staff of the work is recognised and managed well by leaders and managers, with particular regard to the education day being properly staffed and resourced.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Post vacant

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspector(s)

Elaine Clare, social care inspector (lead)

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