

Notton House School

Notton School House, 28 Notton, Lacock, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 2NF

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Notton House Academy is a residential special school. It is located in a rural area of Wiltshire.

The academy provides a 38-week per year educational provision for boys aged eight to 19 years who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties and/or speech, language and communication difficulties.

At the time of the inspection, there were 43 residential pupils. The residential accommodation is provided for pupils in eight distinct areas on the academy site.

Inspection dates: 2 to 4 March 2020

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 **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of previous inspection: 25 to 27 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children's opportunities and experiences are good. The shared values of kindness, safety and respect are strongly embedded throughout this school.

Children enjoy coming to this school. They make friends and have good relationships with trusted adults. They have positive opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities, some that they have not had before.

Children benefit from consistency, structure and positive routines. Boundaries are clearly understood by staff and children. Staff know children's needs very well, and provide individualised and nurturing care. The information that staff have about children does not translate comprehensively into children's support plans. This is an area for further development.

The health and well-being of children are prioritised. Children benefit from a good range of pastoral support services. The success of this support means that children are learning to develop emotional resilience and are increasingly developing positive views of themselves.

Children are influential in the development of the school. Their views are regularly and meaningfully obtained, and they are able to determine how the school and residential provision operate. Listening to and involving children are integral to the quality of children's experiences here.

Staff are strong and effective advocates for children and their families. The family support work is highly valued by parents and has a significantly positive impact on children's home life.

The experiences of children can be improved further by reviewing the use of the communication radios, clarifying the identity of each residential home and reviewing the purpose and ongoing need for observations of some children every 15 minutes during the night.

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

Children feel safe, and are they are kept safe by staff. Staff identify and manage risk well. For example, the actions that staff take reduce harmful behaviours effectively and enable children to develop more positive ways to express and manage their anxieties.

The management of child protection concerns is highly effective. Leaders and managers respond swiftly to concerns and work in partnership with other agencies to ensure that children are protected. In the main, child protection records are well

maintained and the actions are documented. In two cases, this usual good practice was not undertaken.

Episodes of children going missing are managed well. The 'missing' protocol is followed effectively by staff, who proactively search for children when they are missing. There are good links to the local police team. The incidents of children going missing have reduced.

Staff understand that children's previous experiences and how they are now feeling may present in the ways that they communicate and behave. Staff implement the school's ethos and values effectively, following a trauma-informed approach. Staff are well trained in these important approaches.

Children have positive relationships with the adults who support them. They can identify a person whom they trust, and they feel confident that this person will listen to them and respond well to any concerns or worries that they raise.

Complaints are robustly investigated, and appropriate action is taken in response. Leaders and managers do not always confirm that the complainant is informed and satisfied with the outcome.

Children's behaviour is managed well, and punitive approaches are not used. Children are encouraged to talk about their behaviours, and the consequences imposed focus on conflict resolution and restorative justice. Since the last inspection, physical intervention has reduced in frequency and duration. It is used only as a last resort to keep children safe. Staff and children are helped to talk about incidents. However, the discussions with children do not always focus on how they felt about being held and those with staff are not always reflective enough.

Staff do not start work unless all required checks are in place. Gaps in employment history and disclosures on enhanced checks are explored, but the reasons why the headteacher goes ahead and recruits the applicant are not always recorded. In addition, the application form does not insist that applicants record the month as well as the year of their previous employment. Leaders and managers have been asked to review the reference request letters that they send to referees ensure that their responses always include information on the applicant's suitability.

Health and safety and the quality of the physical environment are managed well. Swift action is taken to rectify any damaged areas. The vision to maintain and develop the school and residential provision is set out clearly in the school development plan. During the inspection, leaders took action to address cleanliness issues in one house and to remove doors and/or locks from the sensory rooms.

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

The headteacher brings structure, empathy and clarity. The children and staff respond well to this transparent and nurturing approach. Children, staff, parents and the trust councillors who contributed to this inspection said that they have confidence and trust in the leadership team.

The weaknesses identified at this inspection relate specifically to the quality of record keeping and the effective monitoring of a range of children's records. For example, the quality, content and accuracy of behaviour records and risk assessments require improvement. Omissions from these documents are not always identified and rectified through management monitoring.

Monitoring by the board and an independent visitor takes place regularly. The monitoring of the residential provision is not as challenging as that undertaken in the education provision. To date, the independent visitor does not spend time with the children, but there are plans to address this.

Medication is stored and administered safely. Staff undertake online training in administering medication. Their development in this area can be monitored by undertaking competency assessments of their practice.

Opportunities for staff to receive good-quality training have improved since the last inspection. This is because more face-to-face training has been provided. Staff have particularly enjoyed and benefited from training in understanding the impact of children's trauma and developing strategies to help them.

Leaders and managers prioritise staff's well-being. Staff say that they are well supported and that the training opportunities are good. Staff can regularly attend weekly drop-in sessions with the school counsellor. Supervision and appraisal take place regularly. However, records of these important sessions do not demonstrate opportunities for staff to reflect on their practice or confirm when leaders have addressed their poor performance.

The previous areas for improvement have been addressed. For example, locks have been removed, individualised overnight phone usage has been reviewed and children have increased opportunities to cook in their houses.

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:

- 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. (NMS 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. (NMS 13.1)
- Each child's file includes the information in Appendix 2 (individual records). (NMS 22.2)

Recommendations

- Ensure that staff supervision sessions include opportunities for reflective discussions and that the records clearly address any performance issues.
- Review the use of the communication radios.
- Clarify the identity of each residence.
- Review the purpose and ongoing need for observations of some children every 15 minutes during the night.

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: SC039112

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Michelle Reysenn

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 0124 973 0407

Email address: admin@notton.learnmat.uk

Inspector(s)

Sharron Escott, social care inspector

Paula Lahey, social care regulatory inspection manager

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