

North Hill House

North Hill House, Fromefield, Frome, Somerset BA11 2HB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

North Hill House is an independent residential special school providing weekly boarding for boys and girls aged six to 19 years. The school provides for pupils who have autism spectrum disorders or Asperger syndrome, and associated learning difficulties.

This inspection was aligned with an inspection of the school.

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 March 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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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: 23 January 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

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

This setting requires improvement, because of weaknesses that were identified in safeguarding and leadership and management. These weaknesses were evident across the school.

Safeguarding concerns are not always managed well. For example, in response to one incident when an allegation was made, insufficient action was taken to keep the children safe, including a delay to the start of the internal investigation.

Residential children receive individualised care from care staff. Care staff know children well and have built strong, trusting relationships with them. Care staff are skilled communicators, understanding the nuances of each child's communication. Care staff are ambitious and have high expectations for the residential children, but this ambition is not clearly evidenced in children's individual targets.

Children benefit from their residential experience. They have lots of fun and take part in an excellent range of activities and new experiences. These events help improve the children's social skills, self-confidence and communication skills. Some children were able to stay at the residential provision for one week during the summer holidays. This provided support for both the children and their families.

The parents who contributed to the inspection were very positive about the care that their child is receiving and the progress that they are making.

Residential children's healthcare needs are met. Care staff ensure that they access the medical and support services that they need. The storage of medication is secure, and good records of delivery and administration of medication are maintained. Each child has an up-to-date healthcare plan which provides clear guidance for care staff.

The residential accommodation is of a high standard. Each child has their own room with en suite facilities. Their rooms have recently been redecorated and furnished to reflect their taste. Care staff and residential children have worked together on the communal areas to make them comfortable.

The cooking facilities in the residential provision require improvement. Currently, there is no kitchen in the residential provision. Care staff cook children's meals in the food technology room and then carry the food a considerable distance to serve it to children. Despite being assessed for risk, this practice continues to present a risk to staff and children. In addition, the lack of a kitchen does not support care staff to develop children's independence skills.

Care records are well organised. However, some plans are not consistently signed or dated.

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

The culture of safeguarding across the school is weak, because the management of safeguarding concerns is not always effective. Leaders and managers do not deal with all safeguarding concerns rigorously; the management of concerns is too variable. On occasions, leaders have delayed contacting the designated officer, referrals to the designated officer are incomplete and safeguarding records lack clarity and do not evidence all of the actions taken. The quality of some investigations is poor, and the outcome of investigations or lessons learned are not evident in safeguarding records. In contrast to this poor practice, inspectors saw two examples of good-quality investigations and records, demonstrating that when the right person is managing these concerns the correct actions are taken. Care staff spoken with during the inspection demonstrated a clear understanding of how and when to report child protection concerns.

More action is needed to ensure that children's use of mobile phones across the school is always appropriate. Residential children are not allowed to take their mobile phones into school, and they sign a contract to say that they will use their phones responsibly. Care staff have a verbal agreement with parents that parents will regularly check the phones for inappropriate content. Currently, there is no written agreement clearly stating the expectations of either party. The policy regarding the use of social media and mobile phones is very limited and does not clearly state the responsibilities of staff.

Care staff are not risk averse, and they work with the residential children so that they access the community and take part in a range of exciting trips and activities safely. Care staff are aware of the children's additional vulnerabilities and work with them to develop their understanding of risk.

Behaviour is well managed in the residential provision. A positive approach to understanding children's behaviour in the context of children's needs has resulted in a reduction in incidents and only one restraint since the previous inspection. Conversations are now held with children by staff who are not involved in the restraint. Care leaders and managers monitor and review all behavioural records and challenge staff practices effectively, where needed.

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

Leadership and management require improvement, due to the shortfalls identified across the school and in relation to the safeguarding of all children. Leaders and managers do not ensure that safeguarding matters are always dealt with in accordance with child protection policies. In addition, their oversight of safeguarding records is weak. Currently, safeguarding information is recorded in several different places, and this impedes the effective monitoring of concerns to ensure that good practices are maintained. The quality of safeguarding records is variable.

Care leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of the strengths and areas for development of the residential provision. They have identified some of the areas for improvement noted within this inspection and are in the process of developing and implementing actions to address them. Monitoring systems, including the visits by the independent person, are assisting care leaders effectively in developing the provision.

Care leaders and managers provide a supportive environment for the care staff team. Care staff receive regular, good-quality and effective supervision which helps them to develop their practice. Care staff feel well supported by care leaders and spoke very highly of the care coordinator. Care staff did tell inspectors that they would like more contact with the organisation's senior managers, who visit the school.

The current on-call system requires improvement. Care staff said that when care leaders and managers are on call they are always available, but this is not the case when education leaders and managers are on call.

Care staff receive good-quality training which is closely linked to the needs of the residential children. This is monitored by care leaders and managers to ensure that staff training is current and reflects the developments in childcare practices. Leaders and managers support care staff to obtain qualifications; 10 of the 12 care staff members now have at least a level 3 qualification.

The communication between care and waking night staff has improved, and they now provide residential children with more cohesive care. Waking night staff now feel valued and supported.

The communication from education staff to care staff and some parents requires improvement. Care staff and parents are not consistently receiving the same information about a child; this does not aid joint working.

The school's website has improved, providing access to current policies.

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:

- 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. (NMS 6.3)
- The school ensures 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. (NMS 11.1)
- There are clear arrangements for suitably experienced staff to deputise in the absence of the head of care (or school equivalent). (NMS15.3)

Recommendations

- Improve the safeguarding arrangements and culture. Ensure that records provide a clear, comprehensive record of all the actions taken to safeguard children. Improve the quality of safeguarding investigations and ensure that they commence in a timely manner, including the outcome, actions taken and lessons learned. Ensure that safeguarding information is recorded in a way which aids monitoring.
- Ensure that a clear policy regarding the use of social media and mobile phones is developed.
- Ensure that a written agreement regarding the children's use of mobile phones is developed. This must include clarity on the school's expectations of staff and parental responsibilities.
- Ensure that all documents and records are signed and dated by the author.
- Improve the current arrangements to cook meals for children in the residential provision.
- Ensure that care staff and parents receive the same information on updates about a child from education staff.
- Improve the on-call responses from education leaders and managers.

- Review and improve the children's individual targets to support them in achieving their full potential.

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: SC033014

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Sarah Acland

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Wendy Anderson, social care inspector

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