

North Hill House

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

Assurance visit

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 education and care for children who have autism spectrum disorders and associated learning difficulties.

Visit dates: 24 to 25 September 2020

Previous inspection date: 3 March 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

Children are well cared for by staff who know them well and with whom they have built strong, trusting relationships. The good-quality care provided is supported by detailed care plans that provide staff with clear guidance to enable them to meet children's needs consistently. One child created their own care plan presentation for staff while they were self-isolating. This is a very good piece of work and demonstrates the child's awareness and understanding of their needs and how these should be met.

Children are making good progress and benefit from their residential experience. Children grow in confidence and their self-esteem is increased. Feedback from parents, carers and other professionals supports this view.

Staff have reviewed and developed children's individual targets. These are now more challenging and aim to help children to reach their full potential.

Each child has an independence plan and an independence skill plan. These would benefit from being amalgamated to provide children with one comprehensive plan and record of their independence achievements.

The safety of children

Children are kept safe at the school.

The safeguarding culture across the campus has improved and staff demonstrate a good understanding of their safeguarding role. This in turn has led to safeguarding incidents being managed effectively. Records of safeguarding events are clear and provide a comprehensive record of all actions taken. This helps the manager to ensure that appropriate actions are taken swiftly to safeguard children.

Staff manage risk well and are not risk-averse. Risk assessments are comprehensive and provide clear strategies for staff about how to mitigate risk. Staff help children to develop their understanding of risk and how to keep themselves safe, including during the current pandemic. One child used their understanding of COVID-19 issues, as discussed with staff, to create a piece of artwork which is informative and striking.

Leaders and managers have implemented good-quality practices across the school campus for the management of internet-enabled devices. This is supported by a clear policy. Some of these practices already existed in the residential provision. However, now the senior leaders' expectations of staff, parents and children have

been clarified. This approach helps to protect children in their use of the internet and social media.

Behaviour is well managed. Staff take a positive approach to children's needs and each child has a detailed individualised behaviour support plan. Staff share effective behaviour strategies with parents and vice versa to ensure consistency of approach. Parents commented on the improvements in their child's behaviours, which has improved the quality of their family time.

Restraint has not been used in residential provision but has been used during the school day. Further improvement is required in this area to ensure that conversations with children consistently take place after a restraint. In addition, restraint records do not consistently include any lessons learned which can then be used to inform and improve future practice.

Complaints are managed appropriately, and clear records are maintained.

Leaders and managers

Apart from the manager of the residential provision, the senior leadership team has changed significantly. This team's strong leadership has ensured that the actions from the previous inspection have been met. The manager of the residential provision has a good understanding of the strengths and areas for development. Together, senior leaders have a clear vision for the future of the residential provision and have comprehensive plans in place to achieve this.

The manager and staff team have the children at the centre of their practice. They support and advocate well for children to enable them to reach their full potential. Staff advocate well for children and work collaboratively with parents, education staff and other professionals to enable children to reach their full potential. Communication from education staff to care staff and parents has improved, which aids this collaborative approach.

Staff maintained good contact with children and parents during the lockdown period to support them and to maintain positive relationships. This contact included a fun video to show children that staff were missing them.

Staff feel well supported in their roles by their colleagues and managers. Staff supervisions and appraisals are reflective, supportive and when required, challenging. Records of these sessions are comprehensive, with clear action plans that aim to help staff improve and develop their practice.

The on-call system has been reviewed and now provides staff with effective out-of-hours support when needed.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the quality of the incident/restraint records in education is improved to consistently record conversations with children after the event. In addition, consistently record any lessons learned.
- Ensure that the current two independence plans are amalgamated to provide children with one comprehensive plan and record of their independence achievements.

Residential special school details

Unique reference number: SC033014

Headteacher: Justin Davey

Inspector

Wendy Anderson, Social Care Inspector

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