

Wennington Hall School

Lodge Lane, Wennington, Lancaster LA2 8NS

Assurance visit

Information about this residential special school

A local authority maintains the school. The school provides an environment that can support 80 boys of secondary school age, from 11 to 16 years old, on a residential or day basis. Currently there are 30 pupils, seven of whom are residential.

The last inspection, in July 2019, was an integrated inspection alongside education and was judged inadequate, however, the residential provision was judged as good. The school is currently in special measures.

Pupils using the services provided at the school have experienced some difficulties associated with their academic and social development.

The school provides a 38-week programme of education, with residential pupils, in the main, spending weekends at home with their parents or carers. Pupils reside in two houses located in the school grounds.

A headteacher was appointed in January 2019 and is committed to moving the school forward to give pupils a nurturing residential experience.

Visit dates: 6 to 7 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 2 July 2019

Previous inspection judgement: 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

Staff and children enjoy strong and trusting relationships. Children benefit from consistent boundaries and staff who know them well and who clearly understand their needs. There is genuine warmth and attention shared between them and it is clear that the children enjoy being with the staff.

Collaboration between the staff and stakeholders is good. One boy's parents are glowing in their praise about the impact the school has had on their son's educational and emotional progress. This underpins the sense that teaching and care staff are working closely together to promote each child's success and ongoing development.

Staff and parents have worked together, ensuring that all children continue to learn and make progress in their education. Staff have been creative and used online gaming platforms to deliver education direct into the children's homes. Some children have made good progress using online education resources and their confidence in learning has improved.

Staff understand the multiple and sometimes complex needs of children. They have monitored the impact on children's emotional health effectively and through a 'circle of friends' professionals collaborate to find a whole-team approach to support children.

Children say they can talk freely and openly with staff about any health issues. They say staff have helped them to understand the COVID-19 pandemic and how to keep safe and healthy. For example, when a child was concerned that a family member had tested positive, staff were able to reassure him and give him the information he needed to reduce his anxiety.

Teachers and care staff contacted parents twice weekly while the school was closed and were often comforted to hear how relationships between child and parent had developed positively during the lockdown. When needed, staff visited the children's homes and gave food vouchers and emotional support. On one occasion, they delivered a gaming console to a child who had inadvertently left it behind in the residential provision, much to the relief of the child and his parents. As a result, children feel that there is a genuine concern for their well-being and that they matter.

The safety of children

Improving children's emotional and physical well-being is the driving force underpinning practice. Each child's safety is promoted and protected to an excellent standard. Their vulnerabilities are known, and strategies are put in place not only to ensure their safety but to develop their skills and knowledge to manage risks and increase their own awareness.

The impact of this carefully worked-through approach, which is not risk averse, means that children are able to expand their life experiences and skills. Consequently, they develop their sense of safety and responsibility, much to their own and their carers' delight.

The positive relationships between staff and children, and this understanding of risk, have significantly reduced the number of incidents of children going missing. Subsequently, the school has seen attendance significantly improve.

Staff understand the effect on children's behaviour of being confined indoors during lockdown. Staff have dealt effectively with the few incidents of challenging behaviour that have occurred. They have provided a range of activities to keep children engaged and occupied, including using many of the school resources, such as quad bikes and go-karts.

Staff continue to access training in a variety of formats, including training on adverse childhood experiences. This enables staff to understand the potential impact of abuse and neglect, and respond to keep children safe and protected.

Leaders and managers

The headteacher has a wealth of experience and has been leading this school for 18 months. He is ably supported by a head of care and a strong team of pastoral and teaching staff.

The manager and senior staff ensure that all children's plans are constantly reviewed, considering the COVID-19 outbreak and the easing of restrictions. Staff clearly understand these plans and implement them appropriately.

There have been no independent visits to monitor the progress and well-being of the children. The independent visitor post is vacant. Internal monitoring of records and practice is of a very good standard overall.

The headteacher regularly consults children and stakeholders and uses this to improve the care and experiences provided for children. For example, the children asked about having their mobile phones with them during the school day. This was agreed, with the condition that if it became a problem then it would be reviewed. The children were delighted with this approach and to date no concerns have been raised.

Transition planning was carefully thought through when the Year 11 children ended their education at the school during lockdown. The transition worker, alongside the staff team, ensured continued support for the children along the next stage of their educational journey. The ability of children already in placement to cope with the change in dynamics that a new environment will bring is carefully assessed by the staff, head of care and senior managers. This means that children's smooth progress and enjoyment of their successes were not compromised.

A core team of regular staff provides consistent care for children. During the pandemic, staff remained in post and were committed to providing an outreach service to the children.

Staff benefit from strong leadership and support. Training continues in a variety of formats to ensure continued and effective staff development. The head of care provides regular supervision to all staff.

The failure to meet National Minimum Standards (NMS) and recommendations made at the last inspection have been met.

This visit has identified that one new NMS has not been met and needs to be addressed.

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:

- The governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who is independent of the management of the school, to visit the school six times, spread evenly, over the course of a school year and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. Where the school has an individual proprietor, that

person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the head teacher (or school equivalent). (NMS 20.1)

Residential special school details

Unique reference number: SC035805

Headteacher: Marc Peart

Inspector

Elaine Clare, Social Care Inspector

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