

# St Anne's School and Sixth Form College

St Helens Drive, Welton, Brough HU15 1NR

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

This residential special school is maintained by a local authority. The school has 159 boys and girls on roll, who have a range of complex learning and physical disabilities. Forty-nine children, aged between eight and 19 years old, enjoy short breaks in the attached residential provision. Up to 18 children can stay in the residence at a time. Most have one or two overnight stays per week, with some also having weekend and holiday breaks. There is flexibility for extra nights, including longer stays, on a planned and emergency basis.

The head of care has been in post for 14 years. She has qualifications appropriate to her role in the residential special school.

The school is in the village of Welton, near the town of Brough. The school and the residence were open during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

### Inspection dates: 7 to 9 June 2021

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people</b> , taking into account	<b>outstanding</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 18 June 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children enjoy their short breaks in the residence. Most continue to attend for many years. They develop warm and trusting relationships with staff who they know very well. Staff provide consistency and routine for children. This helps them to feel settled and to understand what is going on around them. Children and their families place great value on being part of 'the residence'. Some parents say it is like having another extended family.

Children enjoy seeing their friends in the residence. Some children begin to develop social relationships, which they have previously found difficult. Others contribute to new children settling into the residence, by including them in their play. Staff recognise the benefits of these social interactions and encourage such friendships. Children are less isolated as a result of attending the residence, for which their parents and carers are extremely grateful.

Children make remarkable progress due to attending their short breaks. For example, one child has developed healthy sleep routines at home because of confidence developed in the residence. Targets to promote progress are individualised and include the views of the child. The targets are reviewed regularly so that they remain relevant to each child. For some children, the progress they make has a significant impact on them and their family.

Children take part in a wide range of activities. Staff are creative with what happens on site, given that trips and activities further afield are not yet possible due to the pandemic. Specialist equipment provides children with enjoyable sensory and communication experiences. Children use the large grounds to play safely, taking delight in the small animals that share their space. Children enjoy these opportunities, and their social and cognitive skills improve.

Staff understand the communication needs of children. The positive and long-term relationships that staff build with children help them to understand children's wishes and feelings. Children become used to being asked for their views. This means that children feel involved in the care they receive, and they develop a sense that their voice matters.

Children are provided with well-cooked, nutritious meals. They make choices over what they eat if they have particular likes and dislikes. The residence's cook is an integral part of the staff team. She knows the children and their preferences very well and has systems in place so that other staff do, too. Children and staff take their meals together. As a result, children eat healthily and develop socially aware behaviour. Mealtimes are a positive experience for children attending the residence.

The building is as homely as it can be. Repairs are undertaken quickly and everywhere is kept spotlessly clean and tidy. Good use is made of the available space in the residence. Bedrooms are clustered together in 'flats', so that children spend time with their friends. The way the building is used means that, if a child is experiencing difficulties, other children are not affected.

The response to one child has been commendable. Staff have gone above and beyond their usual responsibilities to meet the child's complex needs. This includes working on public and other holidays. Staff remain empathetic to the child, regardless of the level of challenge. The child is happy in the residence and is enjoying new experiences, including developing friendships. Staff use their knowledge and skills to respond sensitively, including when the child is most distressed. This child is making significant progress. In addition, the knowledge that staff are gaining about the child's needs will be hugely beneficial for long-term care planning.

Parents and carers hugely value the short breaks that their children receive. Several parents provided extremely complimentary feedback, including, 'How can you improve on perfection?' Parents and carers particularly appreciate the 24-hour support provided by the setting. They can contact someone knowledgeable about their child for help and advice whenever they need it. Parents and carers said that this was especially important during the pandemic, when access to other professionals was often limited.

The response of staff to the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised the safety and well-being of children. Although the residence has remained open, social distancing has affected the availability of short breaks for some children. Staff recognise the emotional strain on families of this disruption to their normal routines and offer what support they can. However, the immediate well-being of children remains the primary concern for all staff.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

Children are safe from harm in the residence, due to the high levels of supervision that staff provide. Staff help children to learn about potential issues, such as bullying and exploitation. The school is accredited with an online safety award. This helps staff to develop expertise in teaching children to be safer when online. Parents are assured that their children are safe while in the residence. They also know that their children are learning to make safe decisions as they grow up and become more independent.

Staff are extremely knowledgeable and highly skilled in managing the challenges that some children present. Staff are endlessly patient with children who experience such difficulties. The details of the de-escalation plans for children are well-known to staff, who use them consistently. Staff only physically intervene with children as a last

resort. This means that children receive responsive and sensitive care from those who know them well.

The approach of staff following incidents is exemplary. Records are written in detail, so that the account of what happened and the impact on the child is clear. Senior qualified staff monitor records and, if required, ask for further clarification. The views of children are sought and there is a significant emphasis on staff debrief. Staff consider what has worked well and what should be done differently in future. This means that staff constantly learn about the impact of their actions. Consequently, children receive individualised, effective care from a staff team whose knowledge continues to develop.

The school has a 24-hour on-call system for the designated safeguarding lead. This means that staff have support with all forms of concern when they need it. This has been extremely helpful during the pandemic, when other professionals have been less available. Consequently, children are safeguarded immediately, including in complex situations.

Recruitment is rigorous and prioritises the safety of children. Safer recruitment processes are followed for all staff. This includes those in a non-care role and those who transfer from other posts within the school. References are always verified. As a result, staff are only employed when all checks and references show that they would not pose a risk to any child.

Health and safety processes are matters of extreme importance in the residence. The head of care learned of a significant shortfall in safety standards that had not been identified in previous professional checks. She closed the residence for the necessary repairs to be made. This had a significant impact on the children and their families, as the setting was closed for three weeks. However, until the work was complete, the children were not safe. Parents and carers can be assured that their children will only attend the residence when it is safe for them to do so.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The head of care is an exceptional leader. She constantly strives to bring about the best outcomes for children. She ensures that staff have the support they need to perform well. Despite the impact of the pandemic, she continues to further the development of the residence. She is extremely responsive and makes herself available to staff, families and professionals when they need her. Her leadership of the residence is key to its long-term and ongoing success.

The head of care ensures that the individual needs of children are met. She works closely with residential staff, with staff in school and with other professionals to understand children's needs. She operates flexibly when this is appropriate, for example to provide emergency support to a family in crisis. However, she is tenacious in holding to account those who do not act swiftly for children. She makes difficult decisions, when children need her to do so. This means that delay to

children's planning is reduced. Where there is a delay, the impact on children is limited.

The monitoring undertaken by the head of care is highly effective. Her oversight of children's progress and the performance of the staff team is prompt and accurate. This monitoring helps others, such as the headteacher and the governors, to understand how the residence is functioning. Identified actions to make improvements are specific and are reviewed. This oversight is responsible for driving forward progress.

The head of care gathers and evaluates the views of everyone involved in the residence. The breadth of people who are consulted is broad. For example, those who transport the children to and from their stays are included in questionnaires. The head of care provides her responses to those consulted, so that they understand any action taken. This means that consultation is effective, both for those providing their views and for the development of the setting.

The head of care regularly engages with external organisations and consultations. For example, as well as the online award, the school has been reaccredited with the National Autistic Society. Staff are provided with additional training and support because of these awards. This means that the care provided to children is highly attuned to their needs. The head of care also contributed to two national consultations. In one, children gave their views about how they had been affected by the pandemic. Another project considered the school's approach to physical intervention. These consultations add to the wider debate about the care provided to children with disabilities. They also emphasise that children with disabilities have voices that must be heard, if their experiences are to be understood. This is invaluable for children generally and a wonderful opportunity for these children and their families.

Staff speak very highly of the support they receive from their leaders. Staff work hard to meet the high standards set by the head of care. They value the training they receive. Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal of their practice. This includes additional welfare checks to consider the impact of the pandemic. Staff feel that their leaders value them and staff turnover remains extremely low. This is reassuring for children and adds to the consistency of care that staff provide.

The school continues to be ably supported through its external monitoring. The governing body holds senior leaders to account, while also representing the school's position with the local authority. Despite ongoing restrictions, governors know what is happening in the residence. They take an active role in the development of the residential provision and know about the progress of individual children. The independent visitor is similarly thorough in her role. She continues to examine the day-to-day experiences of children regularly. For example, she ensures that the health and safety arrangements in the setting remain fit for purpose. The quality of children's experiences in the residence are confirmed, due to the oversight provided by the governing body and the independent visitor.

## **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:** SC056736

**Headteacher:** Lesley Davis

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspector**

Jane Titley, Social Care Inspector

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