

The Robert Ogden School

Clayton Lane, Thurnscoe, Rotherham, South Yorkshire S63 0BG

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The Robert Ogden School is an independent school managed by the National Autistic Society (NAS). The school has 114 children on roll, all of whom have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Children attend the school between the ages of five and 19 years and all have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. There are places for 10 children to use the residential provision, Thurnscoe House and Studios. Currently, one child attends the residential provision four nights a week and seven children stay one or two nights each week.

The school uses the framework developed by the NAS to understand and support pupils with ASD. This framework also underpins the ASD-specific training that all staff receive, including residential staff.

The school was awarded advanced status of the Autism Accreditation Scheme by the NAS in April 2019.

The care of residential pupils is supported by the on-site personal support team, which provides specialist occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and psychological and behavioural support.

The head of care has been in post since September 2019. She has a level 5 qualification in care and leadership.

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

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 September 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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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: 2 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children's experience of staying in the residence makes a remarkable difference to their lives. They develop strong, trusting relationships with staff, some of whom they have known for many years. Staff are passionate about the children and do their utmost to understand and meet their needs. The strength of these relationships means that children respond very positively to the care that staff provide for them. As a result, they improve or even develop skills that they have not accomplished elsewhere.

Parents know that staff look after their children very well. This reassures them and puts their minds at ease. For many parents, their children's stays at the residence allow them to spend valuable time with other members of their family, including other children. Parents regularly comment on the support they get through their children's stays at the residence. One parent said: 'I can't speak highly enough of what my child gets. It has such an impact on the rest of the family – it is amazing really, given it is only one night.'

Children's health needs are fully met by a highly trained staff team. Staff use this knowledge to know when a child is not well. This is essential, given children's particular communication needs. Staff take children to essential medical appointments, to help some parents. Parents and professionals are extremely grateful for this intervention. For some children, this support has a life-changing impact on their health.

The emotional well-being of children is also well supported in the residence. Staff provide a calm and nurturing environment. This helps children's anxieties to reduce. When necessary, children receive support from a member of the personal support team. Most children make progress in understanding and managing their own emotional needs, because of the support they receive in the residence.

Children attend school regularly and make progress with their education. Staff reassure parents who are anxious about their children returning to school following the COVID-19 pandemic. Resuming full-time learning promotes children's social and emotional well-being, as well as their educational attainment. Given the needs of these children, they have needed help and support to go back into education. However, the children's return to school is a significant achievement for them.

Children learn and practise personalised skills across the residence and school. Unified targets are linked to their EHC plan. Targets are reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain valid. The relationships that staff build with parents mean that some children carry on this learning at home. This improves the likelihood of targets being met and progress being sustained. Some children make a level of progress that surprises their parents and staff.

Children's views are sought and valued by staff. Staff design personalised children's complaints forms. This means that children can express their thoughts about staying in the residence, regardless of their communication style. Staff respond to children's views. For example, air conditioning was installed in the residence, after a child said that their room was too hot. This approach to listening to children is exceptionally important. Children learn that their views matter and that they have a right to be understood and to influence their world.

Children continue to do activities that interest them, despite the impact of COVID-19. Many activities have an extra focus, such as helping children to develop skills or working towards a goal. Children also raise money to support charities of their choice. Recently, one child raised a considerable amount of money for a small charity. This money will have a real impact on that organisation's work. These activities expand children's views of the world, as well as being enjoyable.

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

The safety of children is a priority across the school, including in the residence. Children's risks are very well understood. Easy-to-follow risk assessments clearly set out what staff need to do to reduce the likelihood of harm. Staff keep children protected from COVID-19. In the early days of the pandemic, this included changing their own arrangements at home. This attention to the protection of children reassures parents, several of whom say that they allow no one else to look after their children. For some parents, this approach means that they felt able to let their children return to the residence.

Children are helped to be safe online. Some children are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation due to their unique characteristics. They learn to make safer choices when they use social media and online gaming. This work takes place seamlessly across school and in the residence. This is helpful for any child, but for these children, it is a crucial part of their learning.

Local police officers are working with children to help them understand the risks from exploitation. This work is exceptionally important, due to some children's vulnerabilities. In addition, the head of care works closely with specialist police officers to make missing-from-home protocols more pertinent to autistic children. This work is well received by the police, who want to improve their understanding of ASD. Although children do not go missing from the residence, this innovative approach will ensure that children who go missing from school or home will receive the response they need from informed officers.

Staff use individual support plans to help manage children's difficulties. Well thought-out strategies are very detailed, so that staff know exactly what will help a child. For example, if a child responds well to distraction from a television programme, the programme is named in the plan. Residential and teaching staff follow the same plan.

This means that children receive a consistent response, whoever is looking after them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The head of care is an inspirational and dedicated manager. She leads by example and staff share her ethos and determination to meet children's needs. Staff, parents and professionals speak very highly of her ability to understand individual children's needs while also ensuring the overall running of the residence. The head of care is very well supported by her skilled deputy manager. They have complementary skills and work very well together. As a result of their commitment, children make progress and the residence continues to develop, including during the pandemic.

Staff receive the training that they need to care for children to a high standard. In addition to general training, staff learn about children's unique needs, including individual medical or behavioural issues. Training is often provided by members of the personal support team, meaning that it is timely and specific. Newly appointed staff are provided with wide-ranging learning as part of their induction. The commitment to training means that staff have the skills and knowledge to understand and meet the needs of children in their care.

The residence is not yet fully staffed. The head of care is aware of the impact of this issue and is pleased that the situation is improving. She continues to ensure safe staffing levels, using experienced staff who are familiar to the children. She raises these issues with the headteacher and chair of governors. They support her plans to increase interest in working in the residence. As a result, children continue to be cared for by staff who know them, and the impact of staff vacancies is limited.

The head of care is relentless in trying to secure the right services for children. She holds professionals to high standards and challenges them when they fall short of her expectations. This means that children receive the service they need, when they need it. For some children and their families, this has a significant impact.

Leaders have improved the monitoring of the residence since the last inspection. Gaps in practice or provision are clearly highlighted, as are areas of excellence. This means that the head of care can target learning opportunities or resources where they are most needed. Leaders also respond well to external monitoring. The chair of governors and the independent visitor review children's progress and well-being during their contact with the residence. The head of care consistently acts on recommendations made. This response to monitoring means that leaders are driving forward improvements in the residence.

Leaders thoughtfully promote issues of equality and diversity within the residence. For example, when discussing topics such as sexuality, resources are adapted to suit the individual communication needs of children. Time is taken to ensure that children understand the topic. Given the complexities of communication for this group of children, this approach means that their learning is not left to chance. As a result,

children are more confident to talk to staff about their own emerging sexuality. This is an example of very good practice.

Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal of their practice. The induction of new staff includes shadow shifts. This enables relationships with children to develop before staff take on shift responsibilities. The staff team regularly meets to consider points of learning arising from practice. The head of care does not always help staff to reflect on barriers to performing well consistently. This is a missed opportunity to develop the skills in the staff team.

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

Recommendation

- Leaders should enhance existing arrangements for supervision to help staff to reflect on barriers to consistently performing well. (NMS 19.6)

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: SC473713

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mrs Lorraine Dormand

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Jane Titley, Social Care Inspector

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