

Cedar House School

Cedar House School, Bentham, Lancaster LA2 7DD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Cedar House School is an independent, specialist day and residential school. The school meets the needs of a diverse group of children. The children have a range of complex needs, including social, emotional and mental health difficulties, alongside a range of other associated conditions.

There are currently 72 children on the school roll, aged between seven and 18 years. Fifteen children live in four self-contained residential houses adjacent to the school site. The school is on the North Yorkshire and Lancashire border.

The deputy head with lead responsibility for care has been in post since 2015. He has a level 4 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: 22 to 24 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: 4 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The children enjoy coming to school and they love staying in their residential houses. One child said, 'Residential is just the best thing ever in the world.' Other children described their experiences as 'sound' and 'brilliant'. For many children, this is the first time that they have had a positive experience of education and care. The children feel happy and settled here and this enables them to make excellent progress in all areas of their development.

The children's life skills and social skills significantly improve because of the wide range of community activities that they are able to attend, including going to local clubs such as gymnastics, marine cadets, rugby and football. One parent commented, 'The change in her confidence socially is just amazing.'

The children have strong relationships with the staff. The staff know the children exceptionally well. The children build trust and confidence in the staff and feel they can talk to them. Through specialist, individualised training, the staff have an in-depth understanding of children's very complex needs. The staff use their knowledge to make sure that each child's care is unique, and that it evolves as their needs change.

There is a seamless approach between the school and the residential provision. The children thrive as a result of the consistent staff responses and daily routines between the settings. Individualised approaches to learning ensure that the children make progress with their studies. For many children who have been out of education or have struggled to access school, this is a significant achievement.

The children's emotional well-being significantly improves as a result of access to a range of support services. For example, children access different types of therapy depending on their needs, including play therapy, occupational therapy and speech and language support. The children can also attend informal residential well-being sessions where they share their feelings. One child commented, 'This is good. This gives me a chance to talk about any anxieties.'

The staff are invested in the children's physical well-being. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, they have demonstrated dedication to supporting the children. Staff describe thinking 'outside the box' during the pandemic restrictions, to provide children with a range of physical activities to improve their health. Activities included mini-Olympics, den building, cycling, football and walking. The children continue to enjoy these activities and have new bicycles and a new outdoor all-weather sports area.

The children experience a range of other stimulating activities, such as 'you have talent' sessions, bush trials, making bird boxes, bug hunts and charity work. Through

the charity work, the children learn a sense of community and the importance of caring for others. For some children, given their own complex needs, being able to see beyond their own world is a significant achievement. The charity work that the children take part in is extensive and includes making hampers for the local hospital's intensive care unit, raising money to buy a cuddle chair for the local hospice, delivering cards and cakes to local businesses, making cakes for emergency services and supporting the local nursing home and food banks. One child has raised a significant amount of money by completing a 100-mile bike ride, supported by a relay of staff.

The children benefit from continuous learning across the 24-hour curriculum. Regular, individualised meetings between all professionals, including school staff, the therapy team and residential workers, ensure that children's learning is focused. The skills they learn for later life include using public transport, shopping and using money. The children gain accredited qualifications for their skills.

New children settle quickly into this setting. The children receive the information they need before arriving. They receive a handbook and undertake visits to the home. In addition, bespoke support is created where children need extra help. For example, children already resident at the home recently started writing to a new child to help form friendships before they arrived. The additional support reduces anxiety and helps children to feel welcome.

Children move on from this setting positively. All children achieve college placements, in courses such as looking after animals, public services and beauty.

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

The safety of the children is highly prioritised across the school. Leaders, school and residential staff ensure that the focus on safety is consistent. Staff are thoroughly vetted before starting work to make sure they are safe to support the children.

The leaders are robust and tireless in their response to safeguarding matters. They rigorously challenge other services when they do not think their response is promoting children's safety. They work out of hours where needed to make sure safeguarding concerns are followed through. The leaders hold other services fully to account and advocate strongly for the children. The quality of the recordings of some safeguarding chronologies varies, which makes it harder to follow the action taken in practice to keep the children safe.

The staff are dedicated to keeping children protected from COVID-19. During the pandemic, the school nurse and health and safety officer worked relentlessly to keep vulnerable children in school and reduce the spread of the virus. They created a COVID-19 testing centre at the school, which all children participated in. Given the differing levels of children's needs and understanding, this was a huge achievement.

When COVID-19 cases arise, staff and leaders change their own arrangements to ensure that children here are safe and well supported.

The children undertake work to learn how to keep themselves safe. Topics they cover include bullying, the risks of fire, keeping safe online and road safety. The work is delivered to meet each child's level of understanding. As children's risks reduce, they gain increased independence. Some children learn to go out into the community alone for the first time. For some children, this is huge progress and a step that some parents thought their children would never achieve.

The staff have an in-depth understanding of the risks to the children, and they manage these effectively. The staff allow the children to take small steps to manage planned risks to improve their life skills and experiences. The children's risk assessments are regularly updated, providing staff with clear strategies to follow to reduce the likelihood of risks occurring.

The use of physical restraint is a last resort. Minimum force is used for the least amount of time to help keep children safe. The staff help the children to reflect on any incidents. The children's voice is paramount to how they are supported. Their views and wishes are listened to and they help put their own strategies in place to manage their emotions. There is a robust and reflective management review of all incidents. As a result of the work staff do with the children and learning from incidents, there has been a 44% reduction in the use of physical intervention in the last two years. This greatly improves children's safety and experiences.

In the event of an allegation against staff, the headteacher takes swift action to protect the children. She shares information quickly with the right professionals to make sure the correct decisions are made to keep the children safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The school's deputy head with lead responsibility for care and the residential manager work closely together. They lead by example and they are ambitious for the children. The leaders promote high expectations of care and the staff mirror this approach. The managers have been fully active during the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting children and staff through this very difficult time.

The leaders strongly promote a culture of equality and respect. As a result, the children become confident to explore and develop a sense of identity. The children feel a sense of belonging as leaders ensure that differences are celebrated. The leaders promote learning across the school through experiences that all children can understand.

The staff team feels extremely well supported by leaders and managers. One member of staff commented, 'I honestly could not have got through this without them; we are extremely well supported.' The staff feel that they can talk to managers

at any time. Staff benefit from regular supervision that reflects the care that children receive.

Staff training is a priority. The staff report feeling confident in their roles and better able to support the children because they understand the meaning behind the children's behaviours. The school's therapy team uses a range of research-based therapeutic approaches to making sure children's needs are met and understood by staff. The staff follow approaches based on brain function relating to trauma, and adapt these depending on children's needs. Understanding exactly how individual children think helps the staff to maximise the children's potential by supporting them in the best ways possible.

The leaders' monitoring systems are highly effective. They have a range of monitoring tools that help them to track patterns and trends in children's behaviour and progress. The systems allow the leaders to spot any difficulties for children quickly, and they then put individualised strategies in place to support the children and ensure that they continue to progress.

The leaders work effectively with a strong network of professionals, including nurses, specialist mental health services, police and social workers. These close working relationships allow information to be shared effectively, which helps to ensure that the children have the specialist support they need. The leaders are keen to continue to build up the support for the children and their families and they continually research new ideas and approaches to do this.

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

Recommendation

- Improve the consistency of the quality of recordings in safeguarding chronologies. ('Keeping children safe in education', page 20, paragraphs 71 to 73)

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: SC040058

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Kathryn Taylor

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Inspector

Jamie Richardson, Social Care Inspector

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