

Oversands School

Witherslack Hall, Witherslack, Grange-Over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6SD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Oversands is an independent day and residential special school at the edge of a small village in Cumbria. The residential accommodation comprises three houses on the school site.

There is a headteacher at the school, and a care manager who supports the residential provision.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 October 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 11 June 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive individualised care from a stable and committed residential staff team. Staff are helped to understand children's needs by regular input from a diverse team that includes a range of therapists and a psychologist. The school nurse also has a key role in supporting children's health and well-being and fosters an effective relationship with mental health professionals to ensure that children get the right help at the right time to meet their changing needs.

Children attend school and are often supported by residential staff, who are key in sustaining their engagement with education, either by supporting them in their classroom or offering them a quieter environment in the home. Therefore, children's learning is not disrupted when they are upset or anxious.

Children are enabled to make trusted relationships with residential staff. They are supported to participate in day-to-day decisions about their lives. Residential staff help children think about their circumstances and work hard with them to engage with the challenges. There is a culture of respect, tolerance and encouraging empathy of each other's needs. Together, they build relationships demonstrating trust and reliability.

Residential staff find activities and opportunities that children like, to help them build skills that they can use in the future. This increases children's confidence in their own abilities and offers insights into their needs and wishes. Residential staff support children's likes and interests, for example rugby, boxing and drama. Children are also involved in activities in the local community.

Children recognise that the care and support they receive from residential staff helps them develop a positive view and make positive friendships and relationships. Children talked happily about how their home lives have been transformed because they know that staff care about them, help them and help them to sustain improvements in their lives. One child said, 'Going to this school is worth it. Without it, I'd be nothing.' Another child told inspectors that they were now more able to choose more positive friendships at home and had better relationships with their family because residential staff had helped them to understand how this could happen.

Complaints are few because any issues are addressed immediately. However, when children do complain, it is taken seriously and resolved in a timely way, and parents and carers are informed so they can support children if they need it.

The headteacher and care manager ensure that children's needs are met, through regular liaison and well-established procedures. Leaders and managers understand children's plans, although these plans are held in different documents and places. This gives a disjointed picture of children's goals and staff's actions to support them.

This makes it difficult to accurately measure children's progress to know that they are achieving their full potential.

Children's moves in and out of the home are managed well by the staff team. This includes planned and unplanned moves. Children who are new to the home are welcomed sensitively and with careful planning. One child's carer told the inspector that staff went 'above and beyond' to help her child feel settled.

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

Staff identify, understand and manage risks to help children become increasingly safe. Children's risk assessments address known vulnerabilities and they are updated regularly. Children are supported to take age-appropriate risks. They take this learning back into their home, and children recognise that this helps them to make better decisions. Staff help children use the internet safely and this gives them the opportunity to use social media to communicate with their peers.

Children can identify a trusted adult. All children demonstrate positive relationships with a wide range of residential staff. They happily told inspectors that the staff make them feel safe because they care about them and they listen to them. Children say that they feel safe at school and told inspectors how residential staff have helped them to better manage the risks in their lives at school and at home.

Children do not routinely go missing from home. However, when they do go missing, children experience coordinated responses, including staff searching for them and contacting their families. Staff work with children after they return to help them understand the risks involved in going missing. However, on one occasion, staff were unable to contact the police within the timeframe in the child's missing-from-home risk assessment. Staff did not have an alternative strategy to contact the police through the emergency response service. This was addressed during the inspection.

The necessity to hold children is minimal because staff use positive de-escalation techniques and they know the children well. Positive behaviour is supported and there are positive support plans in place and related training for staff. Staff create alternative strategies with the children and conflict management is effective. This was observed throughout the inspection.

Contact with children's families is a strength of the school and creates an all-round effective safeguarding approach. Inspectors saw some very good safeguarding practice where staff recognise areas of concern and take prompt and effective action to ensure multi-disciplinary support for children when needed. This includes child protection referrals and addressing fragile mental health. However, inconsistent management oversight of safeguarding means that there are missed opportunities to review, and therefore enhance, safeguarding practice.

The physical environment is well maintained, but there were two areas where potential risks had been overlooked in relation to fire evacuation. These related to the fire escape and a missing fire extinguisher.

The school remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and residential children continued with their overnight stays. Leaders and staff worked under difficult circumstances to provide safe continuity of care and education for children. Staff maintained regular contact with children who were unable to attend school, including visiting them, so that their welfare could be monitored effectively. This approach maintained and reinforced the positive relationships between residential staff and children.

Updated training on government guidance ensures that staff are aware of the latest guidance. Inspectors noted from records that a range of staff had reported concerns about children, which demonstrates a keen understanding of safeguarding in practice. This is about home lives as well as school lives.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers, at senior leadership and operational level, are experienced and suitably qualified. Leaders and managers are child-focused and aspirational.

Leaders and managers actively monitor the quality of care through a strong relationship approach with children and staff. However, leaders and managers do not consistently review and evaluate the recording of incidents to enhance staff practice.

Monitoring by an independent visitor ensures that there is independent oversight. The independent visitor regularly visits and she was there at the time of the inspection. She was positive about the progress that leaders and managers make and told inspectors that leaders and managers routinely meet actions from her reports.

Leaders and managers understand children's plans, although they do not keep detailed records. This means that staff do not always know what goals children are working towards, so it is difficult to consistently measure and evaluate progress.

New staff are promptly enrolled for childcare qualifications. The availability of training has been limited due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have addressed staff's understanding of autism spectrum disorder, although they are aware that further training is required. Some of this training is delivered through the therapy team.

Staff have effective relationships with parents. Parents are positive about the residential staff team and describe staff as providing good-quality care for their children. External professionals are also positive about the support that staff provide for children.

Internal communication through team meetings and supervision provides staff with opportunities for reflective practice. The new initiative of child-focused meetings will further enhance staff practice.

Key board members have effective roles in governance, guidance and support. They are present and engaged. External quality assurance and self-evaluation have contributed to the creation of a realistic development plan, which is in progress.

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

Recommendations

- Improve the monitoring of issues specified in appendix 3, namely the use of reasonable force, records of children going missing, incidents and injuries to further enhance staff practice.
- The school needs to ensure compliance with the fire safety legislation through improved oversight of fire exits and emergency staircases.
- Further enhance the plans for children's development, to help them to reach their full potential through planned and targeted staff support that consistently matches the outcomes in their education, health and social care plans.

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: SC040063

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Sarah Roscoe

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Catherine Fargin, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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