

Barndale House Special School

Barndale House, Howling Lane, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 1DQ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Barndale House School is a residential special school that is maintained by a local authority. The school is in the heart of the town of Alnwick. It provides education for 60 children aged from two to 19 years. All children have complex needs, including those with autism spectrum disorder. Many children also have multi-sensory needs and education, health and care plans.

The school has a residential provision. Currently, 17 children stay for a minimum of one night each week. Up to five children stay each night.

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.

The inspector only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 December 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 22 October 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children enjoy staying in residency. Children's comments to the inspector included, 'I love it here; I like playing games,' and 'I like coming here to see my friend.' The children's social skills and confidence significantly improve. They are provided with opportunities to socialise with other children. For some, this is the only place they can make friends and experience a range of social events and activities. The children missed their stays in residency when it closed for a period during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The staff know the children well and understand their complex needs. The staff work closely with the speech and language therapist. This ensures that the children's very individualised communication needs are understood and that their voice is heard. The staff's knowledge of each child allows appropriate and close relationships to develop between children and the staff.

The children are benefiting from financial investment in the residential environment. New single bedrooms provide private spaces for children and this helps to promote their independence. One child commented: 'I love my new posh room.' A new dining room is a work in progress. Dining facilities are currently located in a room on the residential floor. This makes transitions easier for the children with physical and sensory needs.

Children benefit from a consistent approach between residency and school. Learning across the 24-hour curriculum helps to reinforce and develop children's skills. The children are supported in both residency and school to complete work around social skills, independence and safety. The care staff worked in school while the residency was shut during the first COVID-19 pandemic lockdown period. From this experience, the staff have developed a wider understanding of children's learning needs. They have enhanced their skills to provide education, and this better supports the delivery of the 24-hour curriculum in residential.

Helping children to maintain good physical health is a priority in residency. The children enjoy a range of activities that they may not be able to access without the support of staff. These physical activities include walking, cycling and ball games. The children's emotional well-being is supported through trusting relationships with the staff. The children talk to staff about their feelings. One professional said: 'Children talk to staff and trust them. It's a safe space there.' For children who need additional emotional support, they work with external specialist mental health agencies.

The children learn a range of practical skills that prepare them well for later life. Skills include how to wash themselves, brush their teeth and safely access the local community. The children are working towards awards for their efforts, which helps them to see their own progress and celebrate their achievements.

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

There is a strong focus on children building skills to recognise danger and risks to their safety. The children complete work which is delivered at their differing levels of understanding. This work helps children to recognise risks such as fire, crossing the road and stranger danger.

The children benefit from the nurturing approach of staff. The staff know the children well and use this knowledge to identify and pick up on the smallest of cues when the children are becoming upset. They are quick to use positive strategies to help the children. As a result, there is no use of physical intervention.

The staff understand the risks to children. They know each child's own personal risks and they plan well to make sure that risks are reduced. For example, they provide extra staffing levels where needed. Risk assessments detail what staff need to do when a risk occurs. All risks for one child have not been included in the risk assessment, although in practice the risk is well managed. The lack of information in the risk assessment could lead to inconsistent approaches. This was addressed during the inspection.

The staff complete a range of training courses to help them understand how to keep the children safe. These courses include online safety, peer-on-peer abuse and criminal exploitation. The staff have a good knowledge of procedures to share safeguarding concerns and say that they feel able to use these to protect the children.

Recruitment checks are in place for new staff. However, the verification of references is not consistent for all new recruits. On one staff file, there was no evidence of any reference verification checks. Missing checks were completed during the inspection and new procedures are being put into place to make sure that reference verification is more robust.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The school has been through a restructure in 2020, resulting in one dedicated head of care instead of the dual-post arrangements that were in place. A new headteacher came into post in September 2020. Both the headteacher and the head of care are invested in the development of the residential provision. The staff mirror their enthusiasm. Feedback from staff and other professionals to the inspector includes: 'There is most definitely a buzz about our school now,' 'The effective leadership boosts staff morale and it's completely turned around,' and 'There is a shift in aspirations for pupils in school and residential.'

The head of care knows the service well and she can identify the strengths and areas for development. She is driving forward improvements where she knows they are

needed. She has a development plan in place and this helps her to focus her work. The monitoring systems used by the head of care are effective. The systems allow her to track children's progress and identify areas where they need extra help.

The children's voice is at the centre of their care planning. The head of care ensures that staff listen to their wishes and follows them through where safe to do so. The children are consulted about their residential stay, choosing their own meals, rooms and bedding. The children bring in their favourite toys. They also have special toys that they save here which they enjoy during their stay.

The head of care maintains good relationships with other professionals to make sure that children receive specialist help. The services she works closely with include speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, social workers and specialist mental health services. The leaders are strong advocates for the children and provide appropriate challenge to other professionals to make sure that children have the help they need.

The head of care ensures that the staff complete mandatory training and training to help them understand the children's complex needs. The staff speak highly of the support they receive from the head of care and the headteacher. The staff receive regular supervision which enables them to reflect on their work and the children's progress.

The governing body monitors the effectiveness of the residential provision. New governors bring a range of skills to the board. They provide questions and challenge to school leaders where necessary to ensure that the residential provision runs effectively. The independent visitor knows the school well. His reports support leaders to monitor the effectiveness of the provision. Leaders act on his recommendations for further improvements.

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 for residential special schools:

- Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (NMS 14.1)

Recommendation

- Ensure that children's risk assessments contain all relevant risks to the child, providing staff with clear direction of how to manage the risk. (NMS 11)

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: SC041487

Headteacher: Mark Phillips

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Jamie Richardson, Social Care Inspector

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