

Walworth School

Walworth School, Bluebell Way, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 7LP

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is a maintained special school for boys and girls. It provides primary education and residential care for children up to the age of 11. The children have social, emotional and/or mental health needs. Many of the children have additional needs, including autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder. There are 79 children on the school roll, and 12 children board one night per week.

The headteacher has been in post since September 2021. There is an acting head of care who has been in post since September 2021.

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 inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 February 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of previous inspection: 4 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

The residential provision was closed during the most restrictive periods of the COVID-19 pandemic. It closed from March 2020 until September 2021. Parents were offered ongoing support from staff through home visits and telephone calls.

Currently, staff absences are having an impact on the delivery of the residential service. Consequently, the two groups of children who attend residential can only stay one night per week each. Although they continue to make progress, the limited access to residential does not provide them with extra opportunities to reinforce the skills that they learn. The staff are working hard to cover shortages in order to make sure that the children are being supported by staff they know well.

The policy for the auditing, storage and administration of over-the-counter medication is not clear. As a result, staff do not have sufficient guidance to follow in order to make sure medication procedures are carried out safely. Managers complete audits of prescription medication. The recording of these audits does not confirm what medication was checked. Sometimes the administration of controlled medication is not administered in line with policy, and witness signatures are added by individuals who did not observe the procedure. The lack of clear and safe procedures around medication practice creates a risk that medication errors may occur, and this places children at risk of harm.

The children like to stay in the residential provision. They said that they like their bedrooms and the staff. The staff make sure the children's voice is heard through one-to-one sessions, residential meetings and through the student council. The children choose their activities and make suggestions about what they want to do in the evening. The children's requests are listened to. During the last two children's meetings, they have raised issues about the quality of the mattresses on their beds. The headteacher listened to this and was quick to act and allow staff to buy new ones.

The children's social skills improve. They make friends with each other. For some children, this is the first time they have experienced friendships. The children enjoy lots of new experiences and fun activities. Their stay in the residential provision helps them to build confidence and gives them opportunities to try new experiences. The children's favourite activities include computer time, arts, crafts, walking, ice skating, go-karting and curling.

The children's independence skills improve. They learn new skills such as brushing their teeth, washing and dressing. One parent commented, 'It is making a real difference. Now [child's name] gets dress alone and he can get ready for school.'

The children benefit from a joined-up approach to their learning between the school and the residential provision. Shared targets help to reinforce learning from both settings. Residential staff and school staff share information about the children to make sure the children receive the support they need.

The children learn how to stay healthy. They complete work to help them understand how to eat well and about the importance of exercise. The children benefit from input with the school nurse, who also provides advice around healthy lifestyle choices.

Children's emotional well-being is extremely well supported. A dedicated therapist is on site two days a week to offer individual therapy sessions and therapeutic group support. She also completes assessments for autistic spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder. The on-site work that she does helps to expedite the external assessment process. As a result, children get the specialist support they need quicker. Online mental health support has continued for the children throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Occupational therapists provide sensory and motor programmes for the children. These programmes are integrated into children's support plans, and their programmes are carried out in residential activities. The programmes children follow are shared with parents so that children can benefit from the support at home.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

The children respond well to reward systems. For example, they work hard to be 'wizard of the week' for displaying good behaviour and for helping others. For this achievement, they receive a certificate, and they can look after the house teddy bear. The staff are trained to use positive behaviour support strategies to help the children in crisis. The staff know the children well and quickly pick up on issues before the children get upset. As a result, there is no use of physical restraint in the residential provision.

The staff receive training to provide them with the knowledge on how to keep the children safe. The training they complete includes safeguarding, online safety, child sexual exploitation and first aid. The staff all know who the designated safeguarding leads are and the procedures to follow to report concerns.

The children learn how to keep themselves safe. They complete work in one-to-one sessions and in groups. The work they complete includes stranger danger, staying safe online and bullying. The children said that they feel safe in the residential provision and they feel they can talk to the staff about any worries.

The staff know children well and they understand each child has different risks. The children's risk assessments work in line with their behaviour management plans. The

plans inform staff on how to reduce risks to children and what actions they need to take to protect the children from harm.

The staff are thoroughly vetted before they start work. All necessary checks are completed to make sure they are safe to work with the children.

The designated safeguarding lead and the deputy leads work closely with other professionals. The professionals they work with include the local authority designated safeguarding officer, social workers and the police. Their positive relationships with other agencies mean that concerns about children are promptly reported and information is shared to help keep children safe.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The headteacher is new in post. He has a good understanding of the strengths of the school. His knowledge of the residential provision is not as strong. He recognises this and he is highly motivated to develop his understanding of the residential service. He started a new improvement plan during the inspection to focus on identified shortfalls.

The acting head of care has been in post since September 2021. She started when the service reopened after the main restrictions imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. She is working towards a residential leadership qualification. She lacks experience of working in and leading a residential childcare team. She is motivated to develop her role and is being supported by the headteacher.

The delivery of the residential provision continues to be disrupted for children by the COVID-19 pandemic and by staff absence. The residential provision is offering a limited timetable to make sure some children can still stay over one night per week. The current statement of purpose does not reflect changes to the service. The lack of up-to-date information does not provide parents and stakeholders with the information they need to make sure this service is right for their child.

The staff receive supervision. However, the frequency of supervision has been disrupted by sickness. Individual staff supervisions do not focus on children's experiences, needs, plans or feedback. In some staff supervision sessions, there is no effective challenge and no follow-up of issues raised. As a result, some poor practice concerns are not addressed.

The management team ensures that the staff complete a range of courses to make sure they know how to look after the children and how to keep them safe. There is a regular review of whole-school training. However, managers do not effectively evaluate the learning and development programme for residential staff. This is a missed opportunity to develop the care practice for the children.

Leaders promote tolerance and help children to celebrate their differences. This helps to develop the children's self-identity. Children learn about value and diversity by taking part in events such as a fashion show to celebrate different sexualities.

The governing body has a representative for the residential service. He visits the residential provision and knows the strengths of the service and areas where improvements need to be made. The headteacher keeps the governing body up to date with regular reports, so they can monitor the service and have input into changes.

Leaders ensure that they listen to children's views. They make sure children play a part in the planning and review of their care. The monitoring systems to formally monitor progress in the residential provision are new and work is ongoing to embed these. Progress continues to be tracked through weekly targets, regular summaries and through the education, health and care plan reviews. This regular monitoring ensures that issues are picked up and addressed so that children can continue to learn.

Leaders are strong advocates for the children. They have links with other services such as the school nurse, social workers, specialist mental health services and occupational therapists. Leaders work closely with these agencies to make sure that they share information and children receive the complex support that they need.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- The school has, and implements effectively, appropriate policies for the care of children who are unwell, and ensures that children's physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing is promoted. These include first aid, care of those with chronic conditions and disabilities, administration of medicines (including controlled drugs) and dealing with medical emergencies. Policies for administration of medication should reflect guidance provided by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (Handling of Medicines in Social Care) ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 3.6)
- The learning and development programme is evaluated for effectiveness at least annually and is updated if necessary. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 19.4)
- The school's leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 13.3)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 13.4)
- A suitable statement of the school's principles and practice to be known as the Statement of Purpose is available to parents and staff, is made known to children through an appropriate method of communication and is seen to work in practice. The statement describes the overall purpose of the school and describes any theoretical or therapeutic model underpinning the practice of the school. It also explains the ethos and philosophy of the school, and provides an outline of provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 1.1)

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that managers and staff receive regular and effective supervision focused on children's experiences, needs, plans and feedback, and that staff and leaders receive effective support and challenge from those supervisions. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 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: SC040510

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Roland Cooke

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01325 300 194

Email address: walworth@durhamlearning.net

Inspector

Jamie Richardson, Social Care Inspector

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