

# Elmore Hall School

Elmore Hall School, Littletown, Durham DH6 1QD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Elmore Hall School is a maintained residential special school for pupils who have social, emotional or mental health difficulties. In September 2021, the school expanded to incorporate another residential special school, Windlestone School. The expansion also involved another alternative provision. There is one headteacher across all three sites, who is supported by his senior leadership team.

There are 176 pupils on roll at the two sites with residential provision. Accommodation is provided for up to 25 boys at the Elmore Hall School site and for up to 20 girls and boys at the Windlestone School site.

The school provides flexible stays for pupils, from one to four nights per week, depending on their needs.

Accommodation is provided in single rooms within or close to the main school buildings. Both sites have outdoor space which can be enjoyed for activities, such as playing sport and bushcraft skills.

There are three heads of care across the two sites. All are experienced and suitably qualified.

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

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: 28 to 30 March 2022

|   |             |
|---|-------------|
| <b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account | <b>good</b> |
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|   |      |
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| 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:** 20 November 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children like attending the residential provision and look forward to their visits. They develop strong relationships with staff, which is a significant factor in their enjoyment of the setting. Children who have attended for a long time show obvious pride in being part of the residential community. One former student spoke eloquently about how staff are positive role models. Children are invested in the residential provision. This helps them to benefit from the care provided.

Children make good progress in the residential provision. Staff measure children's personal and social skills. They use their sound knowledge of children to adjust the support they provide when this is required. Children learn important skills due to the time that staff spend with them. As children get older, they practise independence skills, such as travelling on public transport and buying items in a shop. This makes life easier for children to navigate. It also has a significant positive impact on their self-esteem.

Children thoroughly enjoy the activities that staff arrange. The number and variety of activities is notable. Off-site options include ice skating, ten pin bowling, and going out for meals. Some children go to the theatre. Children talk about these and other activities with great enthusiasm. Many children do not experience such a rich array of pastimes when they are not at school. As well as being great fun, these activities mean that children improve their social skills and develop their confidence.

Children's educational needs are met. Children who stay in the residential provision have excellent attendance in lessons. This increases their access to learning. There are strong links between the school and residence, as staff regularly work across both parts of the setting. Children respond well to support provided by residential staff in school because of the trust that has been established. As a result, children's learning is increasingly focused, and their attainment improves.

Staff help children to be healthy. They talk to children about nutritious meals. Themed nights inspire children to try a wide range of food and children thoroughly enjoy these experiences. The arrangements for medication are good and audits are sound. Children are encouraged to be active and to have good sleep routines. Supporting children's health and well-being means that they are ready and available to learn in lessons.

Children are encouraged to provide their views about their residential provision. They attend formal meetings to look at their choice of activities and they know how to make a complaint. They have regular discussions, often at mealtimes, about topics of interest. This helps to develop children's social skills. Children have the telephone numbers for independent people, such as the Children's Commissioner. Staff encourage children to learn that their voice has as much value as anyone else's. This is a powerful message for these children.

Staff speak regularly to children's parents and carers. This contact is generally well received by parents and carers, who value the support that staff give to their children. Parents and carers also talk to staff about difficulties they might experience at home. They welcome the advice that staff provide. This extends the care that staff provide to children as parents develop their confidence and learn new skills.

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

Staff help children to become safer, both in school and in the community. One child said, 'I couldn't get any safer than when I'm in the residence.' Staff talk to children about risks such as exploitation. Children respond positively to these discussions because they trust staff. As a result of the support that children receive, they are increasingly aware of how to reduce the impact of risks they encounter.

Children do not go missing from the residence. This means that, during the time they are in school, they are safe. Representatives of agencies, including the police, talk to children about issues such as antisocial behaviour and substance misuse. This increases children's knowledge of these risks and they learn strategies to avoid them. These activities also help children to develop confidence in the police. For some children, this is significant.

Staff prepare risk assessments to ensure that children's issues are understood and their well-being safeguarded. Risk assessments include strategies for staff to use to keep children safe. Risk assessments are used across the school. This means that there is a shared understanding and a unified response from all staff working with children.

The behaviour of children in the residential provision is very good. This is largely because of the strength of relationships that children have with staff. Staff are clear in their expectations. When required, staff develop positive behaviour plans. Staff have an appropriate level of authority with children, alongside a very warm and nurturing approach. As a result, children do what is asked of them most of the time.

When there are incidents, staff use their skills to de-escalate situations effectively. There has been one occasion when a child was restrained in the residence. This incident was well managed by staff, who worked together to ensure that the child was helped to become calm. Afterwards, the child gave their views about what happened, and learning from the event was added to the child's plans. Although such intervention happens rarely, staff responded appropriately and in the best interests of the child.

Generally, staff have an excellent understanding of children's home circumstances. This helps to inform risk assessments and positive behaviour plans. However, staff do not always know the reasons that children are subject to a child protection plan. This means that staff might not understand the impact of a child's behaviour or

comments. Essential information might not be shared appropriately, leading to missed opportunities to safeguard children.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The expansion of Elemore Hall School has been a significant event. The headteacher has steered both sites extremely well during the period of change. Staff have responded positively to the changes. They consistently provide good standards of care to children. The residential provision on the Windlestone School site is open after a lengthy period of closure and is building momentum. Many children are benefiting as a result.

Leaders are passionate about children and hold high aspirations for their development. Leaders view the residential provision as an important aspect of how children can meet their potential. The senior leadership team on both sites, including heads of care, provide excellent day-to-day management of the school. This frees up the headteacher to concentrate on strategic priorities. As a result, children do well in a school that is constantly developing and improving.

The heads of care have good levels of oversight of what happens in the residential provision. They know children's needs and how well staff perform. The heads of care use the recent changes in the school to develop new ways of working and to consolidate previous successes. For example, the framework which is used to track children's progress is now adopted across both sites. This means that children benefit from the combined knowledge of staff across the whole school.

Staff receive the training that they need to enable them to perform well. Training programmes are evaluated by senior leaders, to ensure that they provide staff with the skills and knowledge they need. Staff value the emphasis on learning. Some of this training involved staff from the two sites coming together. This helped them to develop their relationships with each other. This is helping to build a culture of one school on two sites.

Staff, including learning support assistants, achieve the required qualifications within appropriate timescales. This enhances staff knowledge and equips them to provide good-quality care for children. Senior leaders monitor staff performance. Staff work towards individualised targets, which are reviewed at annual appraisals. This means that all staff, including those who are new or very experienced, are helped to perform consistently well.

Staff receive regular supervision of their practice. The recording of supervision is being developed by heads of care, who plan to ensure a common approach across both sites. The response to staff development means that they receive the support that they need. Staff are proud to work at the school and recognise the value they bring to children.

The school is very well supported by the governing body. Governors provide both help and challenge to the headteacher, including advocating on the school's behalf. A governor with responsibility for the residential provision helps to raise its profile. Governors have a great deal of experience relevant to their role. They play a significant part in ensuring that children receive the care and support they require.

An independent visitor undertakes regular visits to the school. Reports from these visits are reviewed by the heads of care and recommendations acted on. However, these visits do not yet provide staff with an evaluation of the quality of care they provide to children. The independent visitor does not always speak to children and some visits are made during the school day. Senior staff accept these points and are taking steps to improve the impact of the independent visitor's visits.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Leaders should ensure that staff know pertinent information about children, in order to safeguard their well-being. This is likely to include understanding the reasons for children being subject to child protection plans. (Residential special school: national minimum standards 11.1)
- Leaders should ensure that the visits undertaken by the independent visitor evaluate the effectiveness of the care provided to children. Reports from such visits should make it clear that the independent visitor has spoken to children. (Residential special school: national minimum standards 20.2)

### **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:** SC040508

**Headteacher:** Mr Richard Royle

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspectors**

Jane Titley, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Aaron Mcloughlin, Social Care Inspector



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