

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, who have a range of complex needs, including social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

There are 83 children on the school roll, aged between seven and 18 years. There is capacity for 26 children to receive residential stays at the school. Currently, 11 children stay in three residential houses on the school site. Children's stays can last for one week, two weeks or a half term, depending on their circumstances.

The school is set in a rural location 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 caring for children and young people.

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

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 September 2022

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: 22 September 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thoroughly enjoy being part of the residential provision at this school. They spoke with warmth and pride about their experiences. Parents and carers are equally happy. One parent said that being part of the residential provision was the 'very best thing' that had happened for their child. Another said that their child staying at the school had been 'life-changing' for their whole family.

Children make remarkable progress in the residential provision. They improve their ability to understand and manage their emotions, which helps them to become happier and more confident. This has a positive impact on their self-esteem, which in turn helps them to try new experiences. Progress made at school is sustained at home. Children recognise how far they travel on their individual journeys. They are justifiably proud of themselves.

Children form strong, trusting relationships with staff. Children come to know staff very well and are relaxed and comfortable in their company. Staff are passionate about the children in their care. This gives children a powerful message about how much they are valued. Children also form strong connections with each other, regardless of their varying characteristics. They present as brothers and sisters, taking an interest in each other's lives. This adds to the cheerful, nurturing atmosphere of residency.

The residential provision is an integral part of the school. Children benefit from the seamless approach between care and education staff. For example, several initiatives that began in the residential provision are now used across the school. A significant amount of work takes place between care and education staff. This ensures that all staff consider children's wider needs throughout the day. Children's attendance and attainment improve, including when this had been a serious challenge in the past. For some children, the success they achieve is extraordinary.

The support for children's emotional well-being is exceptional. The highly skilled clinical team works closely with residential staff. Clinicians provide staff with the theoretical basis for children's individual needs. This enables staff to respond consistently well to each child. Children who need direct clinical input receive this without delay. This significantly increases the value of this help. The support for children's emotional needs has developed a great deal over the course of the last year. Children are making notable progress as a result.

Staff meet children's physical health needs, supported by the dedicated school nurse. If children are unwell, they can stay in their own bedrooms, where they are looked after by staff they know well. This is possible because staff remain on duty throughout the day. Many children live too far from their family to be able to return home if they are ill, so this care is extremely beneficial.

Children take part in a wide range of activities. They enjoy wonderful, family-style holidays. For some, this is the first time they have been able to have such experiences. Children continue to reach out to the wider community through charitable events. Children are also learning about the importance of the environment. These and other activities show children that they have a right to take a full role in all aspects of their lives. They learn that being marginalised because of their difficulties is not acceptable. This is a powerful message for these children.

Children learn skills to help plan for their futures. They begin to take increasing responsibility for themselves. For example, children practise household tasks and begin to travel independently. Staff help children to think about what they want to do when they are older. This support is successful. When children leave school, they go into further education or work-based placements.

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

Children feel safe when they are in the residential provision. High levels of supervision mean that staff know where children are and what they are doing. Children learn about issues such as exploitation, substance misuse and fire safety. This important work is particularly valuable when children are away from the security of the school.

Physical intervention in the residential provision continues to reduce significantly. The increased input of the clinical team means that staff understand children's needs. This helps staff to use strategies consistently and effectively. When staff have restrained a child, they talk to leaders about what could be done differently in future. Leaders and staff apply learning from these discussions to children's plans. As a result, staff successfully help children to become calm without the need for physical intervention.

Children rarely go missing from the residential provision. If children do leave, staff realise quickly. They search the area and call the police. Children talk to staff on their return about why they felt the need to leave. Staff are interested in contextual issues and do not focus narrowly on the missing event. The approach of staff is effective, and children do not go missing again.

Staff create individualised risk assessments and positive behaviour support plans. These plans have specific strategies to keep children safe and to support their behaviour. The clinical team contributes to these plans, which means that they are attuned to children's particular needs. Staff know the content of plans and follow them closely. The success of this approach is a significant strength of the setting.

Staff undertake considerable work with children around the impact of bullying. Such behaviour is rare in the residential provision. Several children are anti-bullying ambassadors, having achieved a nationally recognised award. Children know much

more about the harm caused by bullying because of this work. They are now confident to encourage other children to talk about being bullied. This work has also given children involved a powerful message about their self-worth.

The approach to the health and safety of the school is extremely thorough. Risk assessments for the site are accurate and all checks are up to date. A detailed approach to risk management means that children can take part in a wide range of activities away from the school. For some children, this is the first time they have been able to take part in such events. Children's lives are enriched as a result.

When one child moved to another school, there was a delay in passing on information. Leaders had attempted to identify the new school but had received a poor response from the local authority. This was rectified during the inspection. Leaders accept that more stringent efforts should have been made. They have improved their processes to assure themselves that this gap in practice will not be repeated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential provision is led by highly motivated and skilled leaders. They create an aspirational culture that is based on a shared commitment and passion for children. Leaders continue to develop new ideas, to provide the highest level of care to children. Leaders inspire staff, whose enthusiasm to make a difference for children is palpable.

Leaders understand the residential provision's strengths and shortcomings. Meticulous monitoring systems help leaders to highlight any shortfalls in practice. They review all incidents to ensure that staff understand and meet children's needs fully. They learn lessons when this is required and are not afraid to examine gaps in their own oversight. This enables leaders to act without delay and ensure that the service evolves to meet children's needs.

Staff receive excellent support from leaders, who are accessible and approachable. Leaders encourage staff to develop their own proposals to improve the service. This recognition of their skills helps staff to feel valued. Staff, as well as leaders, are helping to strengthen the care that children receive.

Staff receive the training they need to care for children well. This includes bespoke training from the clinical team, as well as a comprehensive package of mandatory learning. Leaders use research as a way of understanding and modelling best practice. They cascade this learning to staff with the support of the clinical team. This ensures that staff have the knowledge to keep children safe and to meet their changing needs.

Staff receive regular, reflective supervision of their practice. When staff want to develop their careers, they have opportunities to do so. Capability issues arise

infrequently, due to the high levels of support provided. However, leaders address any such concerns effectively and practice improves rapidly.

Leaders have effective relationships with other professionals. This multi-agency approach keeps children at the centre of professionals' thinking. As a result, plans for children focus on the issues that matter most to them.

The school is supported by an experienced board. Members of the board both challenge and support the senior leadership team. The development of the residential provision is widely discussed at board meetings. The school also benefits from the half-termly visits from the independent person. Reports from these visits look in detail at the experiences of children. Leaders appreciate this external monitoring and respond swiftly to any recommendations made.

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

Point for improvement

- School staff should be proactive in sharing information as early as possible when a child moves to a new school. This is to help staff at the new school identify, assess and respond to risks or concerns about the child's safety and welfare. (Keeping Children Safe in Education, DfE 2022, page 31, paragraph 117)

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: Stephen Salt

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Jane Titley, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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