

New College Worcester

New College, 2 Whittington Road, Worcester WR5 2JX

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

New College Worcester is a non-maintained special school. It provides education and care for up to 72 children aged between 11 and 19 years who are blind or vision impaired and may also have additional needs. Children can access the national curriculum and progress to study beyond the age of 16.

The school can accommodate 72 boarders. Most children stay in the residential provision on a termly or weekly basis. Accommodation is provided in five residential houses, all located on campus.

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

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 May 2023

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	requires improvement to be good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 12 July 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

At the time of this inspection, 63 children were using the residential facilities.

Children receive well-planned individual support from a committed staff team. Staff have developed individual plans for children, which are regularly reviewed and updated. Staff often think creatively to improve the quality of care given to children. For example, they use phone apps to help with day-to-day tasks. As a result, children have become more confident and make progress with their independence.

Children who spoke to the inspectors spoke fondly of the school and those caring for them. They say how much the school has changed their lives. They now have friends who understand how a visual impairment impacts on them, are encouraged to do tasks and participate in activities which before would be considered too risky. Consequently, children are much more aspirational about their futures.

Staff encourage children to try lots of new activities, including sports which they previously would not have thought they could do. For example, children enjoy shooting club, paddleboarding, football, basketball and judo. This has helped them develop new interests and realise that having a visual impairment is not a barrier to having fun.

Staff encourage children to participate in social events, for example, to attend youth club, parties and house events. Many children are very musical and enjoy playing instruments, singing and dancing. Staff take children to theatres to watch musical performances and children put on their own performances for staff and children. This helps children to develop their social skills, confidence and creativity.

Promoting independence is an area the school excels in. Children are helped by staff to be as independent as possible. Staff teach children the skills they need for life after school, such as how to travel independently on public transport, and to develop skills in self-care, cooking, budgeting, laundry, cleaning and how to use technology to support their independence. For example, they use online maps and phone apps which identify items at the supermarket, face recognition and colour of clothing, which is especially important when doing the laundry. As a result, children are more independent than they may have otherwise been and are well prepared for their futures.

Children are helped by staff to understand the importance of education. Some children who before moving to the school were reluctant attenders are now attending full time and enjoying learning. Children are aspirational about their futures and clear about their career aspirations. When children leave the school, many go on to further education, such as college or university.

There is good multi-agency working. Children receive help from staff and other professionals with their emotional and mental well-being. There is an awareness that some children do struggle, and support is readily available through school counsellors and mentoring and from other professionals, such as child and adolescent mental health services. As a result, children are supported to understand their feelings and develop coping strategies.

Staff treat children with dignity when their health needs are being met. Medication is administered in accordance with children's prescriptions by staff who are suitably trained. When children are unwell, staff are proactive in seeking medical advice. They support children to attend hospital when needed and other health appointments.

There are positive relationships between parents, professionals and the school. Many parents are complimentary about the care given and how their children have progressed.

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

Leaders have continued to develop and improve the safeguarding practice at the school. For example, they put in place additional training for all leaders and staff, develop robust systems for the recording and monitoring of concerns and challenge poor practice. As a result, staff have a greater awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities and are reporting concerns, no matter how minor they may appear.

Children attending the school are vulnerable due to the nature of their disabilities. Staff know the children well and have developed individual plans which help them to keep children safe.

Staff pick up on the subtle cues when children may be upset or anxious. This is particularly important for those children who may be at risk of self-harm. Staff have developed robust risk assessments and safety plans, and when needed, staff closely monitor children to help keep them safe.

Staff have helped children to develop their knowledge and skills so that they become more independent in relation to their own safety, for example, their personal and environmental safety. In addition, staff help children to develop their knowledge of online risks and how others may try to take advantage of their vulnerability. As a result, children have a greater awareness of risks and have developed strategies to help keep themselves safe.

Overall, children are well behaved. Staff manage poor behaviours effectively through discussions around expectations and, on rare occasions, with consequences. There are few incidents. Staff have not needed to use physical intervention and children have not gone missing. There have been some incidents of what may be perceived as bullying, however, these are managed appropriately. Staff take action to safeguard children and children who may bully others are supported to learn about the impact of this behaviour.

Overall, the residential accommodation is well maintained. Repairs are promptly carried out by the school's maintenance team. Leaders have a long-term plan to further improve the accommodation for children.

Leaders make sure adults working with children, including volunteers, are only employed once full safer recruitment checks have taken place. Staff who live on site and have family members living with them are also checked for suitability. This reduces the risk of those who should not have access to children doing so.

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

Since the last inspection, there have been some changes to the leadership team at the school. A new principal and head of care have been recruited.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the areas which need improving, for example, embedding monitoring systems and the improvements that are needed to the residential accommodation. Leaders have plans in place to address these areas. However, while changes are being made, there are still some weaknesses in the leadership team.

Leaders have challenged staff's practice when it has fallen below the expected standard. However, on one occasion, leaders did not follow up a concern with the monitoring of a staff member, which resulted in a further concern being raised. The concern was appropriately reported and investigated. This omission had the potential to put a child at risk for longer than necessary.

Leaders' monitoring systems are improving, though not yet fully embedded. On one occasion, records showed a possible emerging concern of a member of staff inappropriately telling a child they were tired/discussing their own feelings of being tired onto a child. This had not been identified during monitoring of records and could have had an impact on a child.

Leaders are not afraid to challenge other professionals when they feel decisions being made are not in the best interests of children. For example, leaders escalated a concern about a child returning home during the school holidays. The child was voicing concerns about the care they received at home. This resulted in alternative arrangements being made to ensure the child was safe.

Leaders encourage children to express their views about the care given and about the residential provision. Concerns are taken seriously and leaders respond to those concerns. As a result, children feel listened to.

Leaders' monitoring of staff training has improved. Records clearly show the variety of training staff undertake, along with refresher training. These records now give

leaders confidence in knowing that staff have the skills and knowledge they need to care for the children

Staff say they feel well supported by leaders. They receive regular supervision, along with annual appraisals. As a result, staff have an opportunity to reflect on their practice and develop skills to improve the care given to children.

The governance of the school is effective. One governor has oversight of the residential provision and is kept informed of things that are happening. In addition, the governor has regular leadership meetings to discuss the residential provision, any concerns and how the leadership team is responding to concerns raised. This helps to hold the school principal to account.

There is good partnership working with parents and other professionals, such as police, health and social workers. As a result, children are at the centre of everything, with the focus on making sure children receive the best possible care from people who are skilled at providing that care.

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's leadership and management, including governors, trustees and proprietors, demonstrate effective skills and knowledge appropriate to their role, and actively promote the safeguarding and welfare of children. Staff with management responsibilities undertaken appropriate training in the management and practice of residential care. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 2.3)
- The school's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 2.4)

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: SC043048

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Rachel Perks

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Debbie Bond, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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