

Dallam School

South Westmorland Multi Academy Trust

Haverflatts Lane, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 7DD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

South Westmorland Multi Academy Trust operates this school. The school is a state school and so all tuition is free. Students' parents pay for the cost of boarding, which is an affordable attraction of the school.

The school is located over two sites, a day school and a separate boarding facility. The Heversham site accommodates the boarders. The main school campus is located on the edge of the local town centre.

There are 1002 students on roll at the school. A total of 140 boarders can be accommodated at the school. At the time of the inspection, 69 students were boarding, 25 of whom were exchange students.

A new head of boarding has been appointed. She started her role in September 2023.

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

Inspection dates: 30 January to 1 February 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Date of last inspection: 14 March 2023

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Overall, children speak positively about their experience of living at the school. They told inspectors that they have fun together and some children said that the boarding community feels like a family. Children value the close friendships that they make during their stay. They told inspectors that they also have positive relationships with individual staff, who they can speak to if they have any worries or concerns. One child said, 'The best thing is the staff, they are caring and helpful.'

Parents said that children make progress while living at the school. They mature, build confidence and are supported to develop their emotional resilience. Children have regular communication with their parents and families, which helps them to settle into the boarding community.

The arrangements for children moving into the boarding provision have improved. Transitions are well planned, and children's individual needs are carefully considered. The head of boarding liaises closely with parents, boarding staff and the nurse before children move in. One parent said, 'The staff are open and proactive. During the transition, they answered all my questions and reassured me.'

The boarding community welcomes children from other countries. They enjoy sharing their home and experiences with them. The headteacher and head of boarding work closely together and use feedback from children to develop and strengthen the 'Dallam experience' and to continue to welcome international students.

The medical facilities have significantly improved. Should children become ill, they have a private area where they can be appropriately monitored and rest. A new school nurse has developed caring and trusting relationships with the children. An effective recording and monitoring system has been introduced to ensure that all children's health needs are understood and appropriately met. Parents are also provided with regular updates on their child's health.

Children enjoy a wide range of meaningful and stimulating activities. Most children said that the leisure activities and opportunities have improved. Children are encouraged to actively participate in the local community. Children led the Remembrance Sunday service and were involved in the local carol service. Children are also provided with lots of opportunities to develop their independence and life skills in a safe and structured way.

The head of boarding is proactive in identifying opportunities for children to have their views heard. Alongside the weekly boarding leadership team meetings, she has introduced daily meetings with the boarding community and the boarding tutor groups. She ensures that children's views are raised at the trustee committee meetings. Children have also been involved in interviews to recruit staff, including the head of boarding. However, children told inspectors that they do not yet feel fully

involved in some of the day-to-day decisions about their lives and that some rules have been implemented that they do not understand or they have not had a clear explanation provided. This specifically relates to the use of door alarms in boarding and the agreed time that children can spend independently in the local community.

Leaders and managers demonstrate a consistent approach to promoting equality and diversity. This is embedded in the ethos of the boarding provision and is supported by the children who access it from all over the world. Children's identity and individuality are supported. Boarding staff are trained in LGBTQ+ and one child is a member of the school's alliance supporting members of the LGBTQ+ community.

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

Children are protected from harm. They said that they feel safe and secure. Boarding staff know the children well and understand any potential risks or vulnerabilities for them and the action that they should take.

Leaders and managers are committed to keeping children safe and protecting them from harm. Alongside the designated safeguarding lead and the safeguarding trustee, leaders and managers have effective oversight and monitoring of all reporting and records relating to safeguarding concerns.

Following safeguarding incidents in relation to boarding provision, the senior leadership team and the designated safeguarding lead have demonstrated a thorough approach to learning. They have spent time with the boarding staff, undertaken training and implemented any changes to systems and procedures to further strengthen safeguarding practice.

Boarding staff identify children who need additional support with their emotional health. They work closely with the nurse and families to ensure that children have appropriate support in place. This includes weekly access to a specialist childcare professional to support children in maintaining good mental health and emotional well-being. This also gives children another forum to share any worries or anxieties.

Positive behaviour management is effective because boundaries, structures and expectations are now clearer. One child said that the boarding experience is more organised and less unpredictable. Children are encouraged to live with one another respectfully. The school has an effective approach to managing any conflict between children to prevent it from escalating.

Children do not go missing from the boarding provision and rarely engage in any other risky behaviours. They are provided with clear routines and their whereabouts is monitored appropriately to prevent them being placed at risk. A risk assessment for the use of door alarms at night has not been implemented. This indicates that leaders and managers have failed to regularly review the suitability of the use of alarms in relation to meeting boarders' needs and monitoring any risks.

The boarding team works in partnership with the school and the police to support children to keep themselves safe and to educate them about issues such as child exploitation, county lines and internet safety.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The head of boarding is now part of the school's senior leadership team. Leaders, managers and trustees work collectively together. They have a shared ambitious vision for the boarding provision and changing children's lives. Combined, they have the skills and experience to ensure that the operation of the boarding provision is effective.

Leaders and managers understand the children's plans. They monitor children's progress effectively and can demonstrate progression. The head of boarding uses progress reports and monitoring audits to demonstrate the positive impact that living at the school has on individual children's progress and life chances.

The head of boarding offers stability and reassurance to the children and boarding staff. She has developed positive relationships with most parents and is focused on developing and sustaining regular communication with them. The headteacher and head of boarding have spent time bridging a relationship between the boarding and education staff so that they have a sense of shared ownership and work closely together to support the children.

Leaders and managers recognise the strengths and weaknesses of the boarding provision. The boarding improvement plan provides evidence of change and progression, and it drives improvements in children's experiences of boarding. Boarding staff are very complimentary about the changes and transparency that the head of boarding has brought to the boarding provision. They are more motivated in their roles and place the children at the centre of everything they do.

Boarding staff receive regular support and guidance from leaders and managers. This includes weekly team meetings, regular inset days and weekly practice-related supervision sessions. However, supervision sessions are not recorded effectively to evidence the discussions had in relation to professional development and children's experiences, needs and plans.

Boarding staff are trained in a variety of areas that are bespoke to children's needs. They have their performance appraised annually, which sets out clear aims and objectives linked to the boarding improvement plan. The head of boarding recognises areas for staff development and has plans to further model and embed positive practice.

The board of trustees holds the school to account to ensure that the standard of care is good. A separate boarding committee is in place. This ensures that there is a sole focus on the children's experiences and an extra layer of scrutiny in relation to the boarding provision. The chair of trustees carries out termly boarding champions visits

to gain further oversight of the boarding provision. Visits from additional trustees also take place, and they attend events such as the boarding Christmas meal, to allow them to spend time with the children.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve? Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for boarding schools:

- Boarders are actively encouraged to contribute their views to the operation of boarding provision. There should be clear and easily accessible systems for boarders to provide their views and raise concerns. Boarders' views are considered in decisions about the running of the school and boarding provision and boarders are provided with feedback about their expressed views.

Recommendations

- The records specified in Appendix B are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate. Specifically, leaders and managers should ensure that staff supervision sessions are recorded effectively to evidence that staff receive the required support and guidance in relation to meeting children's needs and to evidence that staff practice is reviewed and any areas of development are clearly recorded.
- Sleeping arrangements and accommodation provided for boarders are well organised and managed with ongoing assessments of risk (which should be documented) and findings acted on to reduce risk for all boarders. Specifically, leaders and managers should implement and regularly review a risk assessment for the use of door alarms in relation to their suitability of meeting boarders' needs and monitoring any risks.

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.

Boarding school details

Social care unique reference number: SC040074

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Steven Henneberry

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspectors

Cheryl Field, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Judith Birchall, Social Care Inspector

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