

Oversands School

Witherslack Hall, Witherslack, Grange-Over-Sands, Cumbria LA11 6SD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is an independent day and residential special school at the edge of a small village in Cumbria. The residential accommodation comprises three houses on the school site.

There is a headteacher at the school and a head of care who supports the residential provision. The head of care oversees the residential provision daily. She is appropriately qualified and experienced in her role.

The school provides places for children between the ages of eight and 19 years. The school currently provides places for 73 boys. Of these, 10 stay in the residential provision in two of the houses. The children access the residential provision on weekdays and weekends during term time.

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

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 March 2024

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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: 21 March 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are incredibly positive about their residential experiences. They enjoy their residential stay, and they make friends with each other. The residential staff team is nurturing in its approach, and this helps staff to build strong and caring relationships with the children. Staff are positive advocates and exceptional role models for the children. They are enthusiastic about the progress that children make, and they recognise and reward children's achievements to boost their self-esteem.

The children's experience of residential has a very positive effect on their lives. Parents are extremely complimentary about their children's residential experiences. Children make exceptional progress because of the actions of the staff working with them in residential and their experiences while staying there. Parents said that the support from the residential team has significantly improved children's ability to manage their own behaviour and improve their family life at home.

Careful consideration is given to new children joining the residential provision. The induction for children into residential is meticulously planned and helps to ease any anxieties that children may have. The staff complete home visits, and children have an opportunity to visit the school and can stay for a long weekend before starting school. This provides an opportunity for children to meet staff and other children.

Children attend school regularly. School and residential staff work exceptionally well together to ensure that they are supporting children's needs consistently. They promote learning and have high aspirations for the children. Children are provided with opportunities to continue their learning when they are not in school. Children have achieved many awards that are linked to their individual targets, and there has been a significant focus on children reading daily with residential staff and each other.

The level of collaborative working between the residential team, the clinical team, and additional in-house services is excellent. This is facilitated through child-focused meetings, internal team around the child meetings, and children having additional access to specialist help that is tailored to their individual needs. It is practice that is worthy of wider dissemination. Children have the support and resources available to them to meet all their health needs, support their emotional well-being, and enhance their life opportunities.

Children's views, wishes, and feelings are held in the highest regard and fully embedded into the care that they receive. Children are consulted regularly through house meetings and some are an active part of the school council. Staff use topic-based house meetings with children to educate them in areas that are associated with their specific needs, such as sleep hygiene, personal hygiene, and healthy eating.

The independent visitor spends quality time with the children during his visits. He obtains children's views about their experiences in residential. An independent listener also provides an additional opportunity for children to speak to someone who is independent from the school about their home and residential life.

Staff complete regular direct work with children. It is well planned, resourceful, and educational. Children are supported to work towards their educational targets, independence goals, and social development. Staff make excellent use of tracking tools to monitor children's individual progress. These systems demonstrate that children make excellent progress in the residential provision.

Staff recognise how difficult being away from family members may be for children. They support children to maintain regular contact with their family members. When children struggle to be away from their families, the residential and school staff work closely with families to support children back into school and residential.

As children prepare to move on from residential, their transitions are carefully planned and supported. They are helped to prepare for adulthood, supported to make decisions about their future, and encouraged to access further education or job opportunities that are associated with their interests. One child has successfully earned themselves a part-time job in the school as an art technician and is arranging relevant work experience through the school that is associated with their career choice.

Children are supported to take part in a wide variety of extracurricular activities that are based on their interests, such as drama group, swimming, bowling, and fishing. They also engage in a wide variety of community events and have been involved in raising money for local church groups. They have friends from school for tea, and as they become more independent they spend time with their friends in the community.

The residential provision is homely, warm and inviting. It is decorated to the highest of standards and this supports children to have pride in where they stay. Children's bedrooms are personalised nicely and show their individual interests, characters, and identities.

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

Safeguarding is of paramount importance in this school. It is central to everything that the school and residential staff do. Because of this, children have a strong sense of safety and security. The staff team provides the children with clear and consistent boundaries. Children respond positively to the structures that are implemented by staff. Consequently, they flourish in the safe and predictable environment.

Leaders and managers demonstrate a consistent oversight of safeguarding. Highly effective planning takes place to ensure that risks are managed and children are kept

in a safe environment. Managers and staff work together with other professionals, so that there is a shared approach to risk management. A board of governors also ensures that safeguarding practice is monitored and consistently maintained to a high standard.

Designated safeguarding leads have key responsibility for managing safeguarding concerns and promoting multi-agency safeguarding practice. They have up-to-date training and provide continuous safeguarding support to the residential provision. Safeguarding knowledge and training is delivered clearly to the residential and school staff. This ensures that everyone has the necessary skills and knowledge to manage a wide range of safeguarding issues.

Residential staff have an excellent knowledge of individual children and their risks. This enables them to identify and respond to children's changing developmental needs. The staff demonstrate an initiative-taking approach to safeguarding children and use the positive relationships they have with the children to support them.

Children's support plans are child focused. Their views, wishes and feelings are fully considered and regularly reviewed by the key people in their lives. Staff work closely with the clinical and specialist support teams to ensure that there is a consistent level of information-sharing. Together, they identify creative ways to support children when they become distressed. The residential staff also offer highly effective support to children and their parents when they are experiencing challenges at home.

Behaviour management is exceptional. Children do not go missing from the residential provision. This reflects a settled cohort of children. Staff use the strategies in children's individual support plans consistently. This helps to quickly de-escalate and minimise the number of incidents. Reward systems are used to encourage and support positive behaviour. When children are given consequences, they are related to the child's behaviour. However, the effectiveness of the consequence is not always evaluated to make it clear if the measure used was fair and proportionate.

The school has a rigorous approach to the prevention of bullying. A group of residential children form an anti-bullying champions group, which is supported by a lead member of staff. This helps to build and sustain children's positive relationships with one another and ensure that they share a positive residential experience.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers collectively work together and have a shared ambitious vision for driving improvements in the residential provision and changing children's lives. They are innovative and exceptional role models for the children. They have high aspirations for the children, including a strong focus on supporting children into adulthood. Leaders and managers can demonstrate progression of the residential provision over a sustained period.

The head of care understands children's individual plans. She is proactive in identifying ways to drive achievements, goals and permanence for children's futures. The head of care meets regularly with the company's group of residential schools to share exceptional practice and make changes. She uses effective monitoring systems and case studies to monitor children's progress, identify trends or patterns, and develop practice further.

Staff receive highly effective support to develop their practice and skills. Staff appraisals are focused on developing the service, using research-informed practice to improve children's lives, and upskilling staff through continuous professional development. Leaders and managers place high importance on staff well-being and the support systems available to them. Consequently, staff feel highly valued and supported in their roles.

For staff who are new to their role, their induction process is carefully monitored by the head of care to ensure that they receive effective support and guidance. All staff are trained in a variety of areas that are bespoke to children's needs. Subsequently, children are helped by adults who have the knowledge and skills to support them. On the rare occasion that there have been any practice issues, the response by leaders and managers has been proactive. They ensure that children's well-being is prioritised and learning outcomes are quickly embedded into staff practice.

The residential development plan is focused on promoting a nurturing and supportive environment, developing research-informed practice, preparing children for adulthood, and triangulating paperwork to evidence children's progress. Alongside this, the head of care's self-assessment toolkit evidences the excellent progress and development that has been achieved in the residential provision.

The governor arrangements hold the school to account to ensure that there are the highest standards of care. Governors are enthusiastic about the residential provision and the impact it has on supporting families and changing children's lives. The residential provision is a standing agenda item on governor meetings, which provides a sole focus on children's residential experiences. Governors review and provide feedback on the independent visitor's reports. Regular visits by an allocated governor into residential provides an extra layer of scrutiny and accountability in relation to the residential provision.

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

Point for improvement

- A clear and unambiguous written record is kept of major sanctions and the use of any restraint. Records include the information in Appendix B (use of restraint (including restrictive interventions)). The record is made within 24 hours and is legible. Specifically, the effectiveness and any consequences of the sanction are clearly recorded within the sanction record.

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: SC040063

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Edward Sherratt

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

Cheryl Field, Social Care Inspector

Kimmy Feeley, Social Care Inspector

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