

# 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 75 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.

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: 25 to 27 June 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 residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of last inspection:** 23 May 2023

**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 make good progress in the important areas of their lives because of their residential experience. There are clear targets in place to enable staff to support and monitor children's progress. Leaders and staff work hard to make continuous improvements to make this more effective. As a result, children benefit from consistent and personalised care, which helps them to feel valued.

Children spoke positively about their experiences and the support they receive. Many children rated their experiences as eight or nine out of 10 and said that the best thing about the school was the opportunities it creates to spend time with their friends. One child said that they have gone 'from feeling isolated in a mainstream school' to now feeling that they 'belong and no longer stand out'.

Developing and improving children's independence skills is a strength of the school. For some children, this may mean learning how to make choices, and to manage their own personal care independently. For others, this involves them doing tasks such as their own laundry and cooking. One child spoke with pride because they are now able to shower independently. Consequently, children grow in confidence and learn skills which support them into adulthood.

Staff support children's complex health needs well. There are clear health and safety plans in place for children, which help staff to understand each child's specific health needs. Medication is stored safely and securely, and records are maintained of all medication dispensed.

Children become more confident and their communication skills improve considerably at this school. This is because of the joined-up approach that exists between school staff, medical staff, kitchen staff and the residence. For example, children meet regularly and talk about menu choices. Also, staff have ensured that they have responded to children's views and wishes effectively in relation to proposed changes to residence.

Staff ensure that children have an abundance of fun in residence. Children enjoy each other's company and, together with staff, engage in a wide range of stimulating activities. Staff creatively adapt activities to enable children of all abilities to participate. Children also regularly take part in off-site activities and talk about their experiences.

Children are supported to maintain regular communication with their loved ones. While some parents are nervous about proposed changes to residence, most parents are positive about the school and the experiences it provides to their children. One parent said, 'I love them [the staff]. They have gone above and beyond for my

daughter. This school has been a lifeline for us, and I feel that it is more than just a school, it is everything that goes with it.' Another said, 'We are extremely happy with the school and the support our child receives could not be matched at any other school.'

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

Children said that they feel safe in the school and residence. Staff encourage children to use good manners and ensure that there are clear boundaries and expectations for children. Children feel settled and significant incidents are rare. When asked about children's safety, one child said, 'You don't need to worry about us, we are all doing fine.'

Leaders ensure that there is a good safeguarding culture in the school. Safeguarding procedures are clear, and staff know the processes to follow if any concerns arise. This includes working with and sharing information with external professionals. Staff receive regular safeguarding training, and the safeguarding lead uses quizzes to test their understanding. This contributes to an all-round effective safeguarding approach.

Staff understand children's complex needs and manage their anxieties well. Children requiring additional support have safety plans in place. These provide school and residential staff with specific guidance to follow. Children's parents are confident in the school's safeguarding systems. One parent said, 'I raised a safeguarding issue, and it was dealt with straight away. I don't ever doubt that my son is not safe, secure and happy.'

Leaders take allegations and significant incidents seriously. They ensure that the relevant external professionals are notified and that detailed investigations are carried out. These actions help to reassure children and protect their welfare.

The site and environment are safe and secure. Staff ensure that visitors are closely monitored, signed in and chaperoned. Maintenance is of a good standard and minor repairs are completed quickly. Therefore, the residential accommodation is free from hazards and children are physically safe.

Overall, safer recruitment systems for vetting new staff are good. Thorough records detail all necessary information for new and existing staff. As a result, children are mostly cared for by adults who have been appropriately vetted. However, on one occasion, leaders failed to obtain a reference from a staff member's most recent employer.

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

A child-focused and highly organised head of care manages the residential service effectively. She is suitably qualified and an enthusiastic leader who focuses on meeting children's individual needs, supporting their progress and providing them with an enjoyable residential stay.

The head of care is part of the senior leadership team. The senior leadership team is committed to providing good experiences for children, and to them making progress. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses and are not afraid to make difficult decisions and changes. Children's well-being and safety are central to the school's ethos.

Monitoring systems and leaders' oversight of residence are good. The independent visitor carries out regular visits. The school's governing body monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the residential provision. There is a clear focus on promoting the safeguarding of children and children are involved in governor visits. As a result, management monitoring systems develop and help improve the residential provision.

Supervision, training and systems for developing staff are of good quality. Leaders ensure that the systems used support staff development and enable them to reflect effectively on their practice. Staff attend regular team meetings. As a result, many staff feel valued, and they continue to strive to improve the care that children receive.

However, some staff have not responded well to the proposed changes coming into effect in the school and residence. They have said that they do not feel valued or supported. On occasions, some staff have not responded appropriately or acted professionally to the information they have received. Consequently, these responses have had an impact on some children and increased their anxieties at a time when they required support and reassurance.

Staff and leaders have established good working relationships with a range of agencies and external professionals who are involved in children's care. This ensures that appropriate support is in place to encourage children's progress and maximise their potential. One external professional said, 'The safeguarding focus and approach is what stood out for me. It's an item which is at the top of the agenda.'

## **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 fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 2.4)
- Staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children resident in the school. Staff are well trained and up to date with professional, legal and practice developments and the policies and legal obligations of the school. In particular, that staff have the skills to support children effectively through changes taking place in the school, in line with their individual needs. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 26.1)

### **Point for improvement**

- Leaders should ensure that they operate safer recruitment procedures by seeking references for new staff from their last employer.

### **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**

Dean Wilton, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Chanel Bryant, Social Care Inspector

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