

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 76 children. 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: 19 to 21 November 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: 12 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are exceptionally happy during their residential stays and have warm and trusting relationships with dedicated staff. The overall experience of their residential stays and the excellent quality of care make an exceedingly positive impact on the lives of each child. Children are well supported to develop their own identities and personalities, achieve familiar and stable routines and plan positively for their futures. Consequently, children are making excellent social, personal and academic progress.

The admission and induction of children into the residential provision are extremely well planned. Before moving into the setting, children and their parents can visit the school to view the residential facility and meet with staff. This supports parents and carers in making an informed decision about their child using the residential facilities.

The residential provision remains an integral part of the school. Relationships are such that school staff use the residential staff to support children in school when needed. This provides children with continuity of care, stability and tailored support from people who know them very well. Moves to and from school are seamless because of the highly professional working relationships between school staff and the residential team.

Children have access to services on site to improve their emotional well-being, including the pastoral care staff and the clinical care team. Children benefit greatly from having the time and space to explore their feelings and emotions. Specialist staff provide children with the tools and strategies to be able to cope with any concerns and worries. These approaches are shared with residential staff to ensure that there is a consistent approach to care and support. When necessary, referrals are made to external agencies to obtain specialist input for a child. The clinical team has extensive links in the community to support this.

Meaningful key-working sessions, day-to-day discussions and children's meetings help children to explore their behaviours and emotions. The views of children are valued and are central to the operation of the residential provision. The head of care and residential staff are excellent advocates. Staff celebrate achievements, no matter how small, and highlight these with children daily.

Meals in the residential provision are balanced, nutritious and good quality. Choice is actively promoted, and specific diets are catered for. This ensures that the range of food caters to children's individual needs and preferences, some of which relate to their allergies or religious preferences.

Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their own environment, and they take great pride in keeping their bedrooms tidy and clean. The children's bedrooms are personalised to reflect their interests and hobbies.

Targeted and focused activities are carefully planned and overseen by staff to help children to learn how to share, negotiate and compromise. The quality of the activities and attention to detail mean that children make significant progress in their interactions with each other. Staff regularly review activities to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the children and provide them with positive experiences and opportunities to learn.

Children make significant progress in developing their independence skills. They respond very well when staff give them responsibility for their belongings, self-care, budget management and cooking. This prepares them for adulthood.

Children have been supported exceptionally well as they prepare to leave the school. Because staff are so ambitious for children, the children develop higher expectations for themselves. Children are encouraged and supported to challenge themselves and make ambitious choices about their futures. Staff maintain a clear connection with children and continue to provide effective support after they have left the school.

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

Safeguarding children is a high priority in the school and residential provision. Systems for reporting concerns about children are strong. Staff understand their responsibilities for protecting children. They promptly pass on their concerns to experienced designated safeguarding officers, who take appropriate action. Referrals to external safeguarding agencies are made if necessary. Successful partnership working between the school's safeguarding team, external safeguarding agencies and families ensures that all children are protected.

Individualised risk assessments and behaviour support plans are detailed, regularly reviewed and provide staff with clear and valuable guidance. Effective teamwork means that staff inform each other of different approaches that work to safeguard individual children. Staff manage peer relationships and the environment to reduce anxiety for children.

Physical intervention is seldom used and only as a last resort. Children are appropriately debriefed afterwards, and staff use incidents to learn, reflect and develop their practice. Children talk openly about their behaviour towards one another and communicate any concerns to staff with confidence. This openness provides children with additional protection from bullying.

Close collaboration and ongoing dialogue with families, school staff and health professionals ensure that staff are fully apprised of any issues arising in children's lives and respond appropriately. Managers and staff review all information about children to identify patterns or trends that might indicate that children are at risk. This effective multi-agency approach to safeguarding prioritises prevention and ensures that all children are protected.

There is a whole-school approach to supporting children to improve their behaviour through nurture, individualised attention and interaction. The school provides holistic interventions that are tailored to each child's changing needs. The interventions are adapted continuously so that children benefit from therapy and relationships that meet their needs. This means that staff are well placed to identify safeguarding concerns as they arise and to act immediately.

Health and safety checks are all conducted in a timely way. Staff undertake fire safety checks at required intervals and conduct emergency evacuation drills.

Safer recruitment and vetting procedures ensure that only suitable adults are responsible for children. All visitors to the school and residence are required to sign in and are appropriately supervised on site. Visitors cannot move around the settings independently, and an electronic release mechanism protects internal and external doors. These systems assist in providing a safe environment for children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership, management and organisation of the school's residential provision are outstanding. Children benefit greatly from their residential experiences because the provision's stated function and purpose translate into an exceptionally well-run service.

The residential provision has a strong record of delivering high-quality care and building on children's achievements and progress made in school. The head of care has an energy and passion that transmits itself to the staff, who are motivated and committed to achieving positive outcomes for the children.

Experienced, dedicated staff provide excellent care to children. They are creative, reflective and thinking all the time about ways to improve children's experiences and the progress that they make. Staff praise the support from managers and hold leaders in high regard.

All the staff share a common aim of providing an excellent residential experience for children, to enhance their life skills, experiences and learning. Staff have access to a range of training courses to assist them in their roles. Staff receive regular supervision, and their care practice is subject to regular review. All staff have the required qualifications, and they undertake training and development to enhance their knowledge and skills.

Board members have effective roles in governance, guidance and support. They work with the head of care to monitor and support the residential provision effectively. Members regularly visit the school and report their findings to the head of care. Members strongly support the head of care and the headteacher to address any challenges and uncertainties. Managerial monitoring and review systems are thorough. The head of care actively seeks feedback, ideas and challenge from

families, children and other professionals. She shows an exceptional level of attention to detail and understanding of the impact that all aspects of the service have on the experiences and progress of children. If she considers that children are not receiving all the services or support they need to thrive, she challenges the local authorities on their behalf.

Research-based practice and specific models of care are implemented by residential and school staff. All staff have had their knowledge tested about recent updates to safeguarding guidance. Staff are confident in their responsibilities and collectively describe how they safeguard children. Professional development is an important part of staff progression. Opportunities have also been created for staff to step into senior roles.

Communication and partnership working with external professionals are excellent. Parents praised the participation of staff in important meetings relating to children, valuing their professional expertise and input. The head of care attributes much of the success of the school to the strength of their relationships with families and professionals. Nurturing these relationships ensures that children receive coherent and consistent care across all areas of their lives.

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: Edward Sherratt

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Dave Carrigan, Social Care Inspector
Stacey Ilaboya, Social Care Inspector

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