



## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Children are provided with good-quality support from staff who are knowledgeable, caring and nurturing in their approach. Children form strong and trusting relationships with residential staff, managers and leaders.
- Children enjoy and participate in an extensive range of activities and new opportunities.
- Leaders and managers have a strong focus on welfare as well as enhancing the educational development of children. Leaders and managers convey to staff their ambition for the school to continually improve, and lead by example.
- Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Strong collaboration with parents, carers and social care professionals ensures that prompt action is taken to protect and support children.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Continue with the plan to move into the purpose-built residential accommodation in the spring term 2018, followed by a refurbishment of the existing residential accommodation.
- Ensure that all records of any sanction or missing-from-care incident are complete.
- Consider strengthening the reference request from referees to determine the applicant's suitability to work with children.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Following an incident of a child going missing, maintain clear evidence of the contact made with other professionals to ensure that a return home interview occurs.
- Enhance the records of any sanction to fully review the effectiveness of this action.
- Further improve safer recruitment by amending the reference request. Specifically ask the referee if there is any known reason why the applicant is not suitable to work with children.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children build secure, positive relationships with staff that enable them to feel safe in the residential environment and have some fun. Children benefit from being looked after by staff who demonstrate that they care for them and would not reject them in response to any behaviours. Staff are passionate about their role in promoting the learning and well-being of the children in their care. One child said, 'I really love this school, I don't want to leave it.'

Children benefit from the strength of relationships among all of the staff at the school. The passion and commitment of the staff team are evident. Catering staff say, 'We don't get missed out, we are always included. It is like a family here.'

Children are central to creating bespoke plans for care and education. The curriculum is built on individual interests and strengths to maximise children's engagement so they can work towards their chosen career path. Care plans include personal targets and these are identified from initial assessments and subsequent reviews. Leaders and managers are passionate about the use of a model to assess the emotional development of the children. This approach enables staff to understand the emotional state of each child and focus on the cause of behaviour. Termly assessments track children's progress and the effectiveness of the strategies used. By using this assessment tool, all staff increase their understanding of the children's basic emotional needs and how these impact on their ability to learn.

Children make progress in relation to their education, behaviour, health and general well-being. Children recognise the progress that they make and in turn are proud of their achievements. This is encouraged through a culture of praise and celebration. To enhance the work of the residential staff team, the school counsellor and intervention worker contribute to helping the children to develop emotional resilience.

Personal targets in school and residential time support children with a focus on improvement. With a key worker, children meet to discuss how they are working towards the targets and what will help them. Care plans include the views and wishes of children. An extensive range of activities promotes learning outside of the classroom. New experiences such as surfing, learning to play the drums and participating in a Ten Tors challenge extend children's learning and interests while allowing them to have fun. Arrangements to experience a short flight from a local airport have been one highlight of the year.

Weekly residential care has been in operation since September 2017 and, after some initial adjustments, staff report very positively on the impact of this. The consistent approach has been strengthened with staff present every day for the children and communication has improved. Another benefit is that many children are driven to and from school by residential staff when previously this occurred through the use of

taxi. This consistency of care is welcomed by the children and provides an extension of the pastoral care delivered by residential staff. Parents and carers are able to have direct contact with staff at the times of these journeys to share important information. Some children are supported to use public transport to increase their independence.

A few parents expressed their disappointment that only weekly residential care is available. Leaders and managers are liaising with parents and carers to identify activities and support networks in their home area. Survey responses from parents and carers agree overwhelmingly that their views about their child's care and support are listened to and seen as important. For children who have established membership of sports teams in their home area, staff arrange transport home during the week in order to attend training sessions. Staff are keen to ensure that children are not missing out on local connections by being at a residential school. Staff commitment is also given to taking children to see family members that they do not live with when this is part of an agreed plan.

Positive feedback from parents includes comments such as, 'They really go out of their way to help; it is continuous, there is no stopping point' and 'I do not know where my son would be now if it wasn't for this school and the staff.' One parent said, 'The school is absolutely amazing. They give children with extra needs a chance in life.'

Children are consulted daily at an informal level through their strong relationships with residential staff. More formally, there are group meetings and a school council. Extensive consultation has occurred about the new residential accommodation. Children have visited during the building stage, selected the colour scheme for decoration and will continue to be involved as the project nears completion and becomes lived in. The current residential accommodation is comfortable and safe yet in need of refurbishment. Plans for this are scheduled once the majority of the children can move into the new building.

Leaders and managers strive to ensure that children leaving the school are equipped for the next stage of their lives. This means, in addition to academic qualifications, children are supported to achieve awards in food hygiene, the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, emergency first aid and a motorcycle test. A car with dual control pedals enables children to experience driving with staff as a taster for driving lessons towards their independence. Five out of six children who left school in July 2017 secured college placements or an apprenticeship.

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

Risk management is good and supports children to feel safe in conjunction with the strong relationships that they have with the staff. Children are involved with identifying what support the staff can provide to help them to feel safe, particularly when they are feeling upset. This can include a safe space to go to and key people to talk to. Written risk assessments provide staff with guidance and strategies that are

needed to provide a protective environment. Children are equally encouraged to take measured risks to enable their growth and development, for example adventurous activities, independent travel and learning motor vehicle skills.

The procedures for staff to follow when children go missing are clear. Essentially, this involves the staff looking for the children. Incidents of children going missing are minimal and when there are repeated incidents, meetings are held with the child to discuss and consider how to stop this pattern of behaviour. School staff request a return interview from an independent person in line with statutory guidance. Leaders and managers lack persistence in chasing this request as the visits do not always occur.

Safeguarding arrangements are strong. Designated staff manage all safeguarding concerns, maintaining excellent records and making prompt and appropriate referrals to external agencies. Safeguarding practices support children and their families. Liaison with other agencies has led to support services being provided within the family home. Twenty parents responded to an Ofsted survey and they all agreed that the school keeps their child safe.

All school staff are trained on how to report concerns or suspicions of abuse. Records confirm that staff are professionally curious and report any concerns they have. Children are learning how to keep themselves safe through group discussions, one-to-one key-work time and engagement with national campaigns such as anti-bullying and internet safety. Staff are preparing to discuss the recent initiative to raise awareness of terrorism, 'Run, hide, tell'. Records confirm that children feel confident to talk to adults at times when they do not feel safe. This enables staff to take swift action. One child said that bullying happens 'a bit', but staff sort it out when they know or see it happening.

An information system is used to record daily events. In addition to positive comments, staff use this system to record any incident of behaviour that requires staff intervention verbally and physically. Any incident of bullying is recorded and a designated member of staff monitors these reports in order to take action. The school council is revising a leaflet for children on how to deal with bullying.

Staff strive to support and de-escalate any child that becomes upset. The skill and patience of staff are used to good effect, leading to minimal use of physical intervention. When children are restrained, good-quality records evidence what led to this action and how it was managed. Leaders and managers have excellent oversight of these records by receiving instant reports, and through their analysis of the details. The safety and welfare of the child remain the priority and children are offered to see the school counsellor after any incident of restraint. Some children make use of this support.

Rewards and incentives support children to manage their behaviour. Following an incident of behaviour that placed themselves or others at risk, there may be a sanction or an agreed plan to increase staff supervision for a particular child. The

increase in staff supervision can impact on the availability of activities off site and this is effective as the children do not like to miss out. Staff review sanctions daily and praise children as they make positive changes in their behaviour and attitude. Records of sanctions fail to routinely record the effectiveness of the action taken. This is an area for improvement.

Leaders and managers strive not to criminalise children when extensive damage is caused. Minimal reports to the police have appropriately occurred when staff have been assaulted. There is a good working relationship with a local police officer who visits and provides education to children about the law and personal responsibilities.

Comprehensive health and safety systems protect children, staff and visitors. Staff are trained in fire safety and children have experienced evacuations of the building. The employment of staff follows safer recruitment guidance with in-depth exploration of career history and references. Referees are asked questions about the applicant's suitability but not specifically about their suitability to work with 'children'.

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

Leaders and managers successfully create a culture of high expectations for the children to achieve. Similarly, the staff are expected to deliver a high standard of care and aspire to do their best to support children to make good progress. The residential provision is managed exceptionally well with good evidence of repeatedly taking action to improve the quality of care provided. Leaders and managers learn from incidents, audits and inspections. One area to improve from the previous inspection was to ensure that children who make a complaint are given the opportunity to state their level of satisfaction with the outcome. The children's complaint form has been amended and, after one complaint was received, the child has recorded that they were satisfied. Since the previous inspection, the residential manager has achieved a level 5 qualification in leadership and management.

Leaders and managers have made a significant change to the school by reducing from termly residential provision to weekly. Staff report that this was a difficult time of uncertainty as employment for the whole team was at risk. The consultation process was effective and staff were kept informed. This decisive action was driven by the need to secure the future of the residential provision, to ensure that it remained financially sustainable. Leaders and managers recognised the threat to the future of the school as a result of their in-depth understanding of the strengths and weaknesses.

Changing from termly to weekly residential provision led to some staff redundancies. The current staff team has reframed its focus to ensure that the children can gain maximum benefit from the shorter week. All residential staff now work every school day, ensuring consistency of care and stability for the children. This pattern of working has strengthened communication as staff no longer have to account for some staff having weekdays off if they were working over a weekend.

The residential staff belong to a strong cohesive team with clear leadership and direction. Weekly team meetings enable shared decision-making and the creation of ambitious plans for staff to enrich the residential experience for the children. Core training equips staff with the skills to provide a safe and caring environment. Specialist training on the mental health of adolescents, attachment theory and childhood trauma has increased the staff team's understanding of the children's presenting behaviours and childhood experiences.

Collectively, residential staff have numerous years of experience in working with children who have social and emotional needs. Many staff have skills and qualifications in sport and outdoor pursuits in order to deliver a wide range of activities safely. Staff are supported extremely well in their professional development with two senior residential staff undertaking a qualification in leadership and management at level 5. Succession planning has identified other staff to study this qualification in the near future. Time for reflective practice discussion is held every term during supervision and appraisal meetings. The residential manager writes a personal letter to each member of staff after their appraisal. This letter recognises individual strengths, and identifies targets and areas for development. The manager praises his team and in turn staff feel valued and motivated.

Leaders and managers undertake extensive monitoring of the quality of care provided. Records relating to behaviour, restraint, bullying and emotional development are interrogated and thoroughly analysed. The analysis is assisted by the good quality of the records made. Leaders and managers make their expectations clear on the importance of quality record-keeping and support staff through training and providing exemplars.

Leaders and managers promote the aims and objectives of the school with an emphasis on learning and preparation for independence. Extensive networks with partnership agencies ensure that children receive the best possible opportunities to support their learning. When leaders and managers identify a need for a child, and their family, they take the initiative to call a meeting of key professionals to secure resources either at school or in the home environment.

The residential provision receives rigorous scrutiny from the governing body and the independent visitor. The chair of governors plays an active role in the school with weekly contact with the principal. Representatives of the governing body receive an email alert every time there is an incident involving physical restraint. This provides instant access to the reporting of the incident and enables the governors to review that correct procedures are being followed. Additional monitoring by the independent visitor is very thorough during the termly visits, scrutinising records and consulting with children.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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:** SC022231

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Keith Bennett

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Clare Davies, social care inspector



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