

Walton Hall

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

Walton Hall Community Special School is a maintained residential special school with 134 students on roll. It provides day and residential education for students aged 11 to 19 years who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities including aspects of autism, emotional and social behaviours and other complex needs. The revised boarding provision presently offers short stays of up to two nights per week, for 54 young people. The allocation of residential provision is reviewed every six months based on individual need.

The school is located in a rural part of Staffordshire and serves children placed by the local education authority. Residential accommodation is provided in two buildings sited within the school's grounds. Goldstone House is a purpose-built unit offering accommodation to girls. The Old Hall is a Victorian listed building that provides two, mixed gender residential floors, and accommodation for school and communal rooms on the ground floor.

The residential provision was last inspected in March 2011.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for residential pupils	good
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the residential provision is good.
- The provision offers a very positive experience for a broad range of students for up to two nights a week.
- Being in residence enhances student's enjoyment of the school experience and provides valuable respite for parents.
- Excellent relationships have developed between carers, students and their parents that help to ensure that behavioural, academic and social objectives are realistic and achievable.
- Residential students benefit from excellent relationships with residential staff that provide clear boundaries and individual support within a safe and stimulating environment.
- The provision for safeguarding residential student's welfare is good. All school procedures are effectively implemented ensuring that young people are cared for in a safe environment by people thoroughly assessed as being suitable for their role. Staff take their duty of care seriously.
- Most of the residential accommodation is of a good standard in its presentation and decoration. Some areas await improvements to layout and decoration to raise the quality of the provision. Disability access for some 'listed' parts of the school is inadequate by not providing access to social areas for wheelchair dependent students.
- The residential provision at the school is well managed and organised. There is a very strong commitment to the ongoing improvement of all areas of the service.

All actions from the previous inspection are met.

- Diversity and individual needs are fully recognised in the planning and provision of care for all students. The school advocates for and provides equality of opportunity as far as is possible.
- The school meets the national minimum standards.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential students are good.

This is an inclusive residential community where the harmonious and positive relationships between students and their residential support staff facilitate good and in many notable circumstances outstanding outcomes. Residential students encourage each other evidently feeling relaxed, safe and included while living-in at the school. Students form an affiliation with their particular residential house but are able to enjoy themselves and socialise as a whole school community, usually through the performing arts.

The school's policies, procedures and evolving integrative practice enable students to make good progress addressing and overcoming emotional and behavioural difficulties. Most students exhibit tolerance, consideration and respect for other's behaviour whatever the difference in their circumstances. Students develop good social skills and subject to their ability are helped through their residential experience. They learn how to share, compromise and get on well with others from different backgrounds, cultures, ability and gender.

Through their nurturing residential experience, most students have made good progress in developing self-esteem and in some cases, emotional resilience. They have been helped to understand and overcome past difficulties that they may have experienced. Many looked after children are well supported by the stability and routine provided by the school. Many students acquire strong interests and practical life skills that can add significantly to their ability and enjoyment of life

Students make a very positive contribution to their residential community; they know how to involve themselves in a broad range of activities that enhance the educational and entertainment events in the whole school. By being active participants in musical events and sports, they help the school practically, and socially, engage in the wider district.

The school's healthcare arrangements promote physical, emotional and psychological health and students are well cared for if they become unwell. Liaison between the school and parents is well established and highly valued. Residential students learn key life-skills in how to keep themselves fit and healthy through diet and exercise.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the schools provision for residential students is good

Residential staff effectively provide for students' individual needs by offering pastoral support and practical personalised help that ensures the quality of care is good.

Academic and residential staff work cooperatively to ensure consistent support and behaviour management for students throughout the school day. This feature of the service is a strong development theme that positively influences all communal aspects of life at the school. There are person-centred resources available to support both academic and personal progress. Sensitive and personalised induction procedures, following a considered pre-admission assessment for all residential applicants, ensure that young people have every opportunity to settle into and enjoy their time away from home.

Excellent on-site facilities, such as the farm and motor cycle club, exist for boarders to enjoy outside of the school day. Resident students are encouraged to participate in a broad range of interesting extra-curricular or leisure activities, suitable for the ages and interests and disability levels. These actively support good, inclusive personal development and improve individual socialisation.

Where applicable, care plans show how the school will help students to achieve and are comprehensively detailed. They outline the specific needs of placements and are reviewed regularly. Daily living situations and the delivery of individual support carefully integrates issues of equality and diversity. There is a very strong understanding of diversity promoted by the residential houses. The promotion of disability and individual rights is a robust and live feature of the schools practice.

The arrangements for healthcare, including access to outside specialist services and community support, are good. There are appropriate levels of encouragement for some residential students to take responsibility for their own health and fitness. Because residential staff are trained and supported by the school nurse, the out-of-hours arrangements for the administration of medication are effective, well monitored and safe.

The food provided for resident students is plentiful, of good quality and provides sufficient choice to cater for most tastes and a range of individual special diets. Residential students enjoy opportunities to practice their social skills, such as cooking foods from different countries and making cakes, as a regular activity within their residential houses. The catering provision made by the school has received no complaints.

Most of the schools residential accommodation is of a good standard, safe and well maintained, so that students can feel warm and comfortable and keep their valuables and belongings secure. These residential areas support student learning and relaxation very well, enhanced further by the provision of popular, well-used sensory rooms. The school acknowledge some residential areas have shortfalls in quality. There is an active scheme of restorative work to address the layout and décor of the accommodation during the school breaks this year, to ensure that the disruption for students is minimised. The shortfalls in the accommodations identified by previous inspections have been satisfactorily addressed. The school has additionally identified schemes of work that would enable the Old Hall, an area currently well used for both

teaching and residential accommodation, to become fully accessible for students who are wheelchair dependent.

Despite these areas identified for improvement there are a number of strengths in this provision.

Residential pupils' safety

The school makes good provision to safeguard the welfare of residential students.

There are robust procedures for child protection and the recruitment and vetting of staff. All staff receive appropriate training and all know how to refer or deal with problems, so that young people are not subject to any risk. Senior management effectively instil the importance of safeguarding and protection of the vulnerable students looked after by the school. It asserts this stance by maintaining a regular and positive relationship with the local statutory safeguarding services.

The school gives a high priority to the safety of its students in residence by maintaining a safe, risk free environment and assessing the suitability of its facilities and activities. Effective site security is established by the use of security fencing and coded access and egress measures. The frequency with which boarders can go missing is minimised by staff supervision and active management of the environment. Fire safety complies with regulatory requirements by complying with all prescribed precautionary measures; however these have not been agreed as safe by the local fire and rescue service. Students learn how to look after their own and other's safety by practicing fire drills. They demonstrate that they feel safe at school by wanting to increase the amount of time they have in residence. They confirm that there are many staff with whom they would be comfortable to talk if they felt unsafe and know about telephone help lines. Because students only spend up to two overnight stays a week in residence, they continue to retain significant contact with their parents or primary carers. Parents say that they have absolute confidence in the safety of the school and its residential provision, and that once their children experience it, they want to stay in residence with their school friends.

Students are safe because school staff consistently implement the revised positive behaviour strategies. These visibly reward acceptable behaviour and achievement. This helps all students to develop interpersonal and social skills that aid them to manage conflict and develop positive relationships, irrespective of any disability based barriers they might experience. Restrictive measures, such as physical restraint, is used only where necessary and in accordance with a policy guidance from the Department for Education. Any incident of restraint is appropriately reviewed through discussion and reflection with the student concerned and their parents.

A revised, explicit anti-bullying policy is implemented by all school staff who remain vigilant recognising the vulnerability of very many students. The clear message is

that bullying behaviour is unacceptable. Resident students have various ways to report any concerns about bullying to their staff team. Records indicate that where this occurs the school will tackle it promptly and effectively. As a result, the incidence of bullying is minimised. Students generally feel they can learn and enjoy themselves in safety and without fear.

Care plans for residential students are comprehensive and live documents. They clearly identify risks and protective factors for each individual and situation. There are clear plans to promote them, and these receive regular monitoring and review.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The management and organisation of the residential provision is good.

The school has a clear and accurate evaluation of its performance following changes to its senior management team. Improvements have been well planned and implemented for the benefit of all students, including those who benefit from short residential stays.

The views of resident students are considered important and actively sought using formal and informal means of communication, such as key worker sessions, golden time and the school council. Young people feel that their ideas are given due consideration and they can contribute to the running and improvement of their school including their residential houses. This enables them to feel valued and proud of their school.

Residential provision is an important feature of the school that is used creatively to offer regular term-time short periods of respite and meaningful experiences for parents and students. The shortened period of residence affords significant benefit of the largest number of recipients. Care staff are fully committed to its success. They recognise the diverse needs of boarders and plan for them, so that each child can develop and achieve using the concentrated resources and timetable available. Effective leadership and management of the residential houses ensures that the aims of each placement are well understood. Busy residential routines run smoothly, students are well supported and cared for, and any weaknesses of the provision are quickly identified, enabling improvement action to be taken.

Sufficient, trained, experienced and suitable staff are on duty at all times to offer good care and support to individual residential students whenever they need it. Contingency plans to cover staffing shortfalls are effective for the present numbers and range of needs. Residential staff receive good support, are well supervised and their individual training needs are addressed. Annual appraisals, to identify further learning and practice needs, have yet to be fully implemented. Senior staff are familiar with revised boarding legislation and developments. They share good practice with staff to improve the effectiveness and quality of service. They play an active role in supporting the residential provision by working alongside students in

residence each week.

The school has strong self-evaluation procedures and demonstrates in practice the capacity for continuing improvement in the residential experience offered to young people. Based on its record of accomplishment and performance since its previous inspection, the school provides evidence of improvements including satisfaction expressed by stakeholders and students. While these features are anecdotally very strong, the current recording methods do not fully evidence the significant progress achieved across many areas of service delivery.

There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection and sustained good practice with several pockets of merit. The school has made good use of independent visitors' and other monitoring reports, where appropriate, to improve residential provision and outcomes. Parents play an active role in supporting the school in varying capacities, from attending weekly assemblies to support their children, to contributing significantly on the board of governors. The school maintains excellent relationships with carers, placing authorities and the wider community.

There are many significant strengths in the management and operation of the residential provision, underpinning its integral role in the operation of the school. There are some small aspects of national minimum standards that do not fully meet requirements, but these do not have a significant impact on outcomes for resident students. Most have already been identified for imminent action by the senior management team.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure that reasonable adjustments are made to provide adequate accessible accommodation for any child with restricted mobility. This should include suitable wheelchair access to social and recreational areas in Old Hall.
- confirm that the updated Fire Risk Assessment for all areas in the school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 by being considered satisfactory by the local fire service
- ensure that the learning and development programme for staff is based on an annual personal appraisal system
- devise a system that indicates how development objectives, that are identified addressed and achieved, are recorded to evidence the improvement that is being made

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25/01/2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Walton Hall

I recently visited your school to do an inspection and was fortunate enough to spend time with some of you in your residential houses. Thank you for showing me around, allowing me to have tea with you and talking to me about what it is like living at the school during the week.

You told me that you liked being at school with your friends and that there was lots to do all the time so you didn't get bored. Some of the girls told me that they particularly liked the 'pamper evenings' and using the sensory room to 'chill out'. I saw that you all had lots to do and often joined up with other residential houses to visit the school farm, go swimming or play football together. You told me that you all enjoyed the school motor cycle club but some of you were better than others at going around bends.

You said that the staff were really good and looked after you very well by helping you with personal needs such as medication. They help you develop social skills like keeping your things tidy and helping with the house chores. Generally you told me that being resident was good fun and the rules were okay.

I saw that some of the accommodation is not as good as it could be, so the headmaster and his staff have plans in place to improve it during the holidays. I have asked for the school to introduce some minor improvements to the way it records important tasks that confirm it is obeying the rules set for schools.

Overall I think your school is good; it is caring and supportive of you by helping you to make lots of progress that will be really useful as you get older.

Yours sincerely

Julian Parker

Yours sincerely,

Julian Parker