

Saxon Hill

Saxon Hill Special School, Kings Hill Road, LICHFIELD, Staffordshire, WS14 9DE

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Saxon Hill is an academy school for children with a wide range of physical, complex medical, sensory, communication and/or learning difficulties. The school has a 14-bed residential provision called the Sleepover Club that offers overnight care to children who attend the school and are aged between five and 18 years.

There is a dedicated team of care staff that operates independently of, but in close liaison with the teaching staff and other members of staff. The sleeping accommodation comprises of six twin bedrooms and two single rooms. There are currently 129 children on roll at the school, of whom 42 currently access the residential provision.

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

Inspection dates: 30 September to 2 October 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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 November 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The quality of the relationships between the children and staff is exceptional. Staff speak about the children with love, warmth and enthusiasm. They demonstrate unwavering commitment to them. Children are also incredibly positive about the care that they receive. Children hold hands and request hugs from the staff who care for them. One child said: 'The best thing about sleepover is the fun I have with my friends and the adults who care for me.'

Staff work hard to ensure that the residence is extremely welcoming, warm and nurturing for children. Children's photos, certificates, toys, books and games fill the communal living areas and reflect children's individual hobbies, interests and achievements. A well-maintained environment, inviting decor and the thoughtful organisation of the physical space demonstrate that the children who stay here are important, valued and respected.

Staff organise activities that enrich children's lives. Children have fun and experience a variety of different activities they might not normally do at home. Staff are constantly thinking of new ideas to enhance children's lives as well as listening to what children would like to do.

Care and education are harmoniously entwined with one another. This cohesive approach supports children to excel beyond their expectations. Leaders have done extensive work to develop and embed the 'Golden Threads for Learning and Life' pathway and children benefit from this 24-hour curriculum. This curriculum-based model captures children's development needs, which informs staff of achievable targets to set. All children have individual targets that link to their education, health and care plan.

There is fluid, effective information sharing between residential staff, school and parents. Their collaborative approach means that everyone works towards the same goals, and this consistency is hugely beneficial to children. Children love having residential stays at their school. Most pupils in school also want to stay overnight as they know how much their friends enjoy staying over. One parent said, 'They are like a family to them.' The residential provision is a seamless extension to what the school offers for all day pupils.

Positive communication is a priority and is always in the child's preferred method. The dedication from staff to get this right is immense. Staff use communication aids constantly to ensure that information is communicated to children in a way they can understand. The child's mechanism to have a voice is always with them. For example, communication aids and devices travel with children at all times. In addition, communication signs and symbols adorn the residence, and staff can confidently sign to children who use this method.

Children's health needs are expertly addressed. The staff work in partnership with medical professionals effectively, and they respond to the evolving care needs of the children. They use information and guidance, alongside research, to help them modify their practice for the benefit of the children. This enables the children to have stability, security and consistent care from a team that fully understands their needs.

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

An extremely positive safeguarding culture is embedded across the whole school. Leaders have excellent oversight of safeguarding. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe. The knowledge and understanding that staff have about children, their vulnerabilities and potential risks helps to safeguard children incredibly well. Any risk is well managed and mitigated.

Staff know the children exceptionally well. They notice social cues if children are struggling and need some support. Staff have a high level of intuition, are responsive to children and understand them. This means that children quickly get the support they need before their behaviour escalates. In addition, they also support children to manage and regulate their emotions. As a result, incidents have reduced.

The depth and consistency of the relationships that children have with staff help children feel secure. This means that the use of physical intervention is rare, this has not been used since 2018. Staff have a strong understanding of children's individual needs, and they take steps to minimise factors that could cause them any frustration and distress. This includes being mindful of how children's behaviours affect their peers and using appropriate strategies to avoid tension between children.

Children respect one another and each other's differences. Bullying is not an issue. Children know the expectations of their behaviour and are part of developing and implementing them. Consequences are not part of the ethos and children receive praise as a means of promoting positive behaviour.

The day is well structured, and staff provide children with a good routine. This creates an atmosphere where children know what to expect and what is expected of them, which promotes a calm and positive environment. Children know which staff are caring for them and which staff are on duty throughout the night.

Staff ensure that keeping children safe is a priority. Regular safeguarding training ensures that staff are aware of children's vulnerabilities and that they are vigilant to safeguarding concerns. The recording, reporting and monitoring of safeguarding concerns by staff and leaders are highly effective and ensure that any emerging concerns are identified and responded to promptly. Excellent communication and effective multi-agency working avoid delay and ensure that children are protected from harm. If necessary, leaders escalate concerns to the local authority, highlighting

increased risks around children. In some instances, they challenge the decisions made by external professionals, improving outcomes for children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The school is led by experienced and inspirational leaders who have children at the heart of everything they do. Residential leaders are part of the school senior leadership team. This unity demonstrates a strong message to all staff that they are one team. Consequently, residential and school staff frequently come together to share information and work out any challenges. This creates a consistent experience for children.

Leaders ensure a culture of enablement and inclusion where there are no barriers to children's progress. They have high aspirations for children and incredible oversight of their progress and experiences. This means that they can quickly identify when changes to children's plans or targets are needed.

The senior leadership team members are influential, reflective and open to learning. They have weekly safeguarding discussions and monthly governance meetings to explore actions, strengths and areas for development. These meetings involve some respectful challenge while remaining solution focused, and improvement driven. The commitment and oversight of the senior leadership team are exceptional.

The head of care and deputy head of care are positive role models for staff. They clearly demonstrate their expectations and the high-quality care they expect staff to provide for children. The members of the care team work consistently with one another. They know their roles and responsibilities well. Staff work with each other respectfully, support one another and ensure that children have a happy and consistent experience in the residential provision. One staff member said, 'The head of care has brought a new lease of life to sleepover club, it is so refreshing to see. He has made such a huge impact to the residence in such a short space of time. We are so excited to be on this journey with him and see what we can achieve.'

Staff feel supported and are led by a team of highly skilled and experienced leaders. Good-quality and frequent training, supervision and appraisals support staff's development to ensure that they can meet the needs of children to a high standard. The integration of care and education means that staff have access to specialist professionals in the school should they need additional training. For example, training has been recently delivered in tactile signing for sensory learners and postural support.

Leaders take responsibility for their own learning and development, including keeping up to date with new initiatives and research specific to the children's individualised needs. They have been hugely creative in their thinking and are constantly looking for new ingenious ways to support staff, to sustain the highest quality of care for children. Learning from research into postural support is implemented in practice.

This research-based practice has enhanced children's experiences and the quality of their stays.

Governance is strong, and academy councillors take their role seriously. Academy councillors carry out unannounced visits at important times of the day to enable them to see morning and evening routines. Children know the councillors and are confident to talk to them and share their views. Reports are comprehensive but do not always provide an evaluation of the quality of the provision and effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded.

Families provide unanimously positive feedback about the leaders and how they ensure that their children are well cared for. Families say that they trust leaders to meet their children's very complex needs and feel comfortable with them doing so. One parent said, 'They have made such a huge difference in all our lives, we would be lost without them. They constantly go above and beyond in everything they do. No words can describe the work they do and the care and love they give to my child. It allows my child to have the same opportunities as other children, going for their tea and having a sleepover with their friends, with their medical and feeding needs still met.'

The remarkable leadership of the residence and school, and the quality of care create an environment where staff are proud to work, and children are proud to stay.

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

Point for improvement:

- School leaders should ensure that independent visitor reports include an evaluation of the quality of the provision and effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded.

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: SC038728

Headteacher: Mrs Maggie Candlish

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Inspectors

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