Walton Hall

Walton Hall Special School, Walton, Eccleshall, Stafford ST21 6JR

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Walton Hall Academy is a residential special school for secondary-age and post-16 children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including autistic children and children with social, emotional and mental health needs as well as other complex needs. There are 216 pupils on roll, and the school offers 63 residential places. Currently, there are 61 children who access the residential provision. The school is in a rural part of Staffordshire. Residential accommodation is provided in 2 buildings in the school's grounds. Both boys and girls stay in the residential provision.

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

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 June 2026

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	outstanding

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 21 October 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Summary of findings

Improvements have been identified in the leadership and management in residence. Children benefit from enjoyable and safe experiences during their stays. This contributes to their overall good progress.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Leaders and staff provide children with enjoyable, development-focused activities. Staff have a good understanding of each child's individual interests and preferences, and children are offered a wide range of opportunities. Recent activities have included trips to the theatre, cinema and gaming shops, as well as camping and bushcraft experiences. As a result, children develop new skills, broaden their experiences and create positive memories.

Relationships between children and staff are generally trusting and supportive. Most children told inspectors that they enjoy staying in residence and have positive experiences. A small number of children gave mixed views, explaining that their enjoyment of residence is sometimes affected by their relationships with particular staff members. Leaders have demonstrated a commitment to understanding and addressing these concerns to improve the experience of all children.

Leaders and staff actively promote children's independence. Children have bespoke targets that are linked to both their residential and educational plans. Staff work collaboratively to review each child's progress. Children develop practical life skills, including preparing their own breakfasts, completing laundry tasks and supporting their peers. Children aged 16 and over also benefit from activities in preparation for adulthood, including adulthood evenings and world-of-work sessions. This helps to ensure that children are better equipped to live independently when they move on from residence.

Leaders and managers have processes to gather and consider the opinions of children. Regular pupil and residential meetings provide children with opportunities to share their views and experiences. The head of care has oversight of this process and monitors the actions arising from children's feedback. This has led to positive changes in the residential provision, including improvements to meal choices. As a result, children feel listened to and valued.

Leaders and staff work effectively with children's families. Parents receive regular updates about their children's experiences and progress during their stays. One parent said, 'Residence has been transformative for [child]. Staff are amazing. The way they support and communicate goes above and beyond. Communication is second to none.'

The residential environment is welcoming, nurturing and child focused. Children are encouraged to personalise their rooms with their own belongings to help them feel at home. Leaders have clear plans to further improve the environment, including redecorating communal areas and replacing carpets.

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

Leaders promote a strong safeguarding culture within the residential provision. Leaders and staff receive extensive safeguarding training, including recent training on knife crime and online safety. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of safeguarding procedures and are confident in identifying and reporting concerns. Leaders work effectively with partner agencies to help keep children safe. As a result, children report that they feel safe in residence.

Leaders and staff have a clear understanding of each child's individual vulnerabilities and risks. Children receive support to understand how to keep themselves safe both online and within the wider community. Children who are at greater risk of harm benefit from nurturing and consistent care. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place and are reviewed regularly by leaders. This contributes to the safe and consistent care that children receive.

Safer recruitment practices are well established. Records clearly demonstrate that residential, voluntary and ancillary staff are recruited safely. Leaders also ensure that robust checks are completed on adults living on site. This helps to ensure that suitable individuals support children.

Staff have a secure understanding of the home's behaviour management approaches. Leaders have implemented an effective electronic recording system that enables staff to monitor children's needs, progress and support strategies. Staff use this system effectively to provide consistent care. As a result, behavioural incidents are infrequent and managed appropriately when they occur.

Leaders maintain a robust approach to health and safety. They work effectively with health and safety professionals to ensure that all required checks and maintenance arrangements are completed. Consequently, children benefit from a safe and secure environment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders are highly ambitious for children and are unwavering in their commitment to providing high-quality experiences that prepare children for adult life. The head of care is inspirational and has established a culture in which children are supported to achieve meaningful and lasting success. As a result, children benefit from enhanced opportunities and make significant progress.

The head of care is a passionate advocate for voicing children’s opinions. He has supported with the development of the school's new radio station initiative, ensuring that children's views are captured and shared across the wider school community. This has strengthened a culture in which children's perspectives are highly valued and has led to more personalised experiences.

Staff speak very positively about the support they receive from the head of care. One member of staff said, 'One of the most supportive managers. His office door is always open, and we do not have to wait for supervision to receive support. Staff retention speaks volumes, especially in residential care.'

Monitoring and quality assurance systems are robust and effective. Leaders' welcome additional scrutiny from the safeguarding governor and the trust's safeguarding director. This strengthens oversight, drives continuous improvement and contributes to safer experiences for children.

Staff benefit from a wide range of training and development opportunities. Leaders have high expectations of staff and invest significantly in their professional development. The head of care actively supports staff to gain additional qualifications, including the level 5 Diploma. Staff also participate in a comprehensive training programme alongside education colleagues. This ensures that they have the knowledge and skills required to provide consistently high standards of care and support.

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: SC038723

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mrs Julie Wood

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

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