

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-aged and post-16 children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including aspects of autism spectrum disorder, emotional and behavioural difficulties and other complex needs. The school is in a rural part of Staffordshire. Residential accommodation is provided in two buildings within the school's grounds and houses boys and girls.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 September 2022

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 last inspection: 7 December 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Outcomes for children are outstanding. The overall experience of their residential stays and the excellent quality of care make an exceedingly positive impact on the lives of each child. They are well supported to develop their own identities and personalities, and to achieve familiar and stable routines and plan positively for their future. Consequently, children are making excellent social, personal and academic progress.

Children make exceptional progress because of spending time in the residential provision. There are strong links between education and care staff. Staff from both groups provide overlapping help and support through the school day and in residential time. This provides children with continuity of care, stability and tailored support from people who know them very well. Transitions to and from school are seamless because of the highly professional working relationships between school and the residential team.

The high quality of individualised care provided by staff has been instrumental in the progress children make. Residential staff work in partnership with parents, carers and teaching staff to find ways of helping children overcome any barriers or difficulties they face. This outstanding practice means that children's progress is measurable and sustainable and is a key factor in the success of the residential provision.

The admission and induction of children into the residential provision is extremely well planned. Children and their parents can visit the school to view the residential facility and meet with staff. This enables them to make an informed decision about their child using the residential facilities.

The residential provision is highly popular with the children. The children who are established in the residential provision give positive testimonies and act as superb role models. This gives the residential provision a positive profile that makes it attractive to other children who may move in.

For some children, the opportunity to attend the residential provision has supported them and their families through challenging periods in their lives. It has also had a significant impact on children's engagement and achievement in education. One parent said: 'He has learned a wide range of skills at this school the several years he's been here. The staff support me at home too, with sending home any social stories I need to support my son, which shows how caring they are about the children inside and outside of school.'

The school nurse works closely with children to promote their health and well-being. She provides direct support to children and guidance to staff. The care staff are highly effective at monitoring children's health needs and at ensuring that

they have the appropriate support. Through liaising closely with parents and carers, the staff have the necessary detailed knowledge of the children's medical conditions and medication requirements. Medicines are administered safely, and effective processes are in place.

Children have access to services on site to improve their emotional well-being, including the well-being team and a counsellor. Children benefit greatly from having the time and space to explore how they are feeling. Specialist staff provide them with tools and strategies for coping with their concerns and worries. These approaches are shared with residential staff to ensure that there is a consistent approach, and the support is available across the school. When necessary, referrals are made to external agencies to obtain specialist input for a child. The well-being 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. Children have an independent listener who visits them, as well as quality assurance visits from the local authority. Staff celebrate achievements, no matter how small, and highlight these with children on a daily basis.

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

The children enjoy their stays and have fun socialising together and enjoying activities in the extensive grounds. The bushcraft activity is popular, along with many other art and gaming opportunities. Children were observed to be having great fun, in both group activities and their own individual interests.

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

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

The whole-school approach to helping children to improve their behaviour through nurture, individualised attention and interaction and session-by-session review of each child's needs is excellent. 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 at any given time. This means that staff are well placed to identify safeguarding concerns as they arise and to take action immediately.

Residential staff and managers receive regular and comprehensive safeguarding training. Systems are in place which staff understand and use to identify when early intervention may be appropriate. Highly effective systems are also in place to report any welfare concerns. Any identified concerns are promptly shared with the designated lead for safeguarding, and consultations or referrals to the relevant safeguarding agencies are appropriately made.

Children told the inspectors that they feel safe. Safeguarding procedures are effective. The school's designated safeguarding leads all work closely with the staff, who are committed to ensuring that children in their care are kept safe. The staff, regardless of their individual roles, undertake safeguarding training to enable them to identify and report concerns.

Comprehensive risk assessments form part of children's care plans. These risk assessments enable staff to minimise and manage risk. If a child's needs change, new information becomes available or new behaviours emerge, the risk assessments are updated. High-quality monitoring and supervision of children contribute to the fact that they do not leave the site without permission. This means children can take managed risks and develop their skills and independence.

There is a calm and effective approach to behaviour management. Staff have developed a good understanding of the circumstances and factors that contribute to children becoming frustrated and anxious. Staff are trained in behaviour management and this training is refreshed annually. They use well-planned and effective individualised strategies to manage children's sometimes complex and challenging behaviours. Staff use their relationships with children to de-escalate difficult situations effectively, which avoids the need to use more formal measures such as consequences.

The monitoring of health and safety and actions taken to maintain the school building and grounds are effective and timely. Staff undertake fire safety checks at required intervals and conduct emergency evacuation drills in residential time.

Detailed recruitment and vetting procedures keep children safe. 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 provides clear leadership that shapes a child-focused approach to the work of

the whole team. The head of care is well supported by a deputy and the residential team, who all actively contribute to the provision's successful operation. This whole-school approach helps influence and secure improvements that positively benefit all children.

The staff team is very stable and highly motivated, and staff greatly enjoy their jobs. 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.

The sharing of information between leaders and managers, teachers and residential staff is exemplary. This includes daily handover meetings and team meetings and ensures thorough communication with all staff who support children.

Managers have an excellent insight into how well children are being looked after and supported, and the progress they make in residence. Monitoring systems highlight areas for development and the strengths of the service. Monitoring is evaluative and reflective of the views and opinions of others. For example, the head of care uses questionnaires to seek feedback on the quality of care and suggestions for improvements. Governors provide excellent oversight and independent scrutiny. They understand and celebrate the achievements of children in the school and understand the contribution that the residential provision makes to improving the lives of children. They provide constructive challenge and promote learning across the school and residential provision to drive improvement. The head of care is well supported in his role and fully understands the aims, objectives and purpose of the residential provision.

Intensive research leads to new initiatives and improvements. The senior leaders explore resources with care and consideration. For example, staff have completed training in child-accelerated trauma therapy, which supports the trauma-informed therapy approach the school uses. The staff test and research areas of interest. There is a constant drive to improve and sustain new approaches that improve practice and ultimately improve the children's lives.

Parents and professionals are uniformly positive about the service and can readily identify the impact the residential provision has had on children's lives. Communication between staff and parents is excellent and indicative of the positive relationships that exist. There are clear lines of accountability that are further enhanced by effective oversight by the school's senior leadership team. The residential service is seen as an integral part of the school, which consistently provides further opportunities for children to develop personally and socially.

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

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Inspectors

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