

Walton Hall

Walton Hall Academy, 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 autism spectrum disorder, emotional and behavioural difficulties and other complex needs. There are 201 pupils on roll and the school offers 63 residential places. There were 16 children resident at the time of the inspection. The school is in a rural part of Staffordshire. Residential accommodation is provided in two buildings in the school's grounds and houses boys and girls.

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

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 November 2023

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 last inspection: 13 September 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children have exceptionally positive experiences in the residential provision. The provision makes a significant difference to their lives. Children benefit from meaningful relationships with staff and their friends. This is something that may not be possible without this service. Parents, professionals and teaching staff celebrate the positive impact residency has on the children's lives, including on their social, emotional and education development A parent said:

'The residential provision is excellent and gives my son the only chance he has to interact with peers outside of the school day without his parents being there. It has given him confidence in his ability to be independent and has shown him that, in the future, if he keeps working hard at life skills, he could go to college, away from home, which he really wants to do.'

Children's accommodation is welcoming, safe, clean and tidy. Sleeping arrangements are sensitively assessed and reviewed so that children can share with their friends. Separate rooms are available for children who prefer their own space. Rooms are personalised and reflect children's personalities. As a result, children love going to the residential provision and speak highly of the staff who care for them. Children said that without the residential provision they would not be able to maintain the special friendships they have with other children.

Children's time in residence is rewarding because staff provide fun and interesting activities that are creative and innovative. Staff are exceptionally skilled in planning activities that ensure that all children, regardless of their individual support needs, are included. For example, all the children enjoy forest bushcraft activities. This approach by staff creates a culture that is inclusive and continues to promote learning. As a result, children develop their life skills.

Staff have warm and friendly relationships with children. They are acutely in tune with each child's needs. Children receive well-planned, bespoke care that is focused on their life skills. Children's plans are detailed and illustrate each child's journey. This helps children make significant progress in all aspects of their lives.

Children have trust and respect for the staff who support them. They are encouraged and supported to have a voice and to be involved in decisions made about their life at school. Children attend forums that empower them to make suggestions that improve their experiences. This helps children to feel a sense of pride, value and belonging.

Children have been key in the development of the residential children's charter, which details children's expectations of staff and themselves. Dignity and respect are

threaded through this document. This is a new initiative. Children spoke positively about their involvement in this during the school council meeting.

Transitions between school and the residential provision are seamless. Excellent partnership working between care staff and education staff ensures that children receive continuity of care. All staff at every level know the children and aim to provide them with the best care. They are all dedicated, committed and invested in providing children with incredible opportunities that enrich and add value to their lives.

Relationships are such that school staff use the residential staff to support children who are struggling in school time, with incredible outcomes. These trusting relationships allow children to calm and access their educational routines.

Staff support for children who are non-verbal is exceptional and intuitive. This attention to detail, with a child-focused approach, reduces children's anxiety while they enjoy time in the residential provision.

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

The children accessing the residential provision are safe and protected from harm. Safeguarding concerns are managed quickly and effectively. Any identified concerns are immediately shared with the designated safeguarding lead. Referrals are made to the relevant safeguarding agencies. By doing so, staff shelter children from any impact on their emotional or physical well-being.

The designated safeguarding lead uses a collective approach to safeguarding so that decision-making is never made by individual staff in isolation. All safeguarding concerns are discussed by the senior leadership team, who review and agree a safe course of action.

The groups children are placed in are carefully and sensitively considered. This means that children are safe to flourish and develop meaningful relationships with each other. Risk assessments are comprehensive and enable children to take managed risks. This supports children to develop crucial life skills for independent living.

A team of site staff and manager ensures that comprehensive systems, relating to the maintenance of the residential accommodation and the school grounds, are monitored to effectively safeguard children. Children are consulted and inform decision-making. For instance, speed bumps have been put in place after children said they feel unsafe when some cars drive too fast along part of the school's driveway.

Staff are highly skilled in recognising and identifying when children are at risk of exploitation or harm. The provision has a wraparound approach that enables staff to

work closely with the children on their risks and vulnerabilities. As a result, children receive carefully considered support to help educate them to stay safe.

Staff use a calm and nurturing approach that helps children to feel safe. There has only been one incident when staff used physical intervention. This was proportionate and necessary to keep the child safe. Children receive continuity of care from staff who know their individual risks and vulnerabilities. Praise and rewards are a regular occurrence that help children to feel proud of their progress. Children are kind and caring to each other. This behaviour is reflective of the behaviour of staff, who are amazing role models.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are dedicated and have high expectations for the children, staff team and the school. Care for children's needs is well planned and individualised. The partnership working between school and the residential provision is seamless. This joined-up working is a particular strength that promotes exceptional outcomes for children.

Excellent communication resulted in leaders and managers quickly becoming aware of a concern for one child when they were at risk of exposure to criminal exploitation. Swift action was taken to support this child in the residential provision while professionals involved put the appropriate support in place for the family. This child continues to flourish at the school and is now a mentor for other children.

The dedication of the staff team ensures that the children make exceptional progress. Despite ongoing pressure and uncertainty about the future of the service, staff remain diligent, steadfast, committed and unwavering in the care that they provide for children.

The leadership team goes above and beyond to expand the staff's skills, knowledge and experience to ensure that they continue to develop. Staff have stepped up to new roles at short notice when senior staff have left. Their ability to quickly adapt has benefited children and provided them with the stability that they need.

Staff say that they feel supported on every level by leaders and managers. This support means that there have been minimal staff changes in a significant period, which brings greater stability for children. Staff are encouraged to reflect on their practice. Time for staff to consider children's lives is protected, for them to consider improvements they can implement with children.

Leaders and managers use research to improve the staff's knowledge and improve children's experiences. Managers and staff continually strive to drive improvement and sustain new approaches that improve practice.

Relationships are nurturing, respectful and caring. Children love coming to the residential provision. Parents speak highly of the support they too have received from

staff and leaders. This extended arm from staff to parents is imaginative and creative and gives a sense of wraparound care that also benefits the children.

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: Julie Wood

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Michelle Spruce, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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