

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 who have 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 sited within the school's grounds and provides accommodation for boys and girls.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 December 2021

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 **good**

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

Date of previous inspection: 27 January 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy their residential experience. Most only stay for one night each week and they achieve much in that short time. Staff help children to build on the progress they make in education. Children make good progress in learning social and practical independence skills. They explore how to be independent of their families in a safe and nurturing environment. This prepares them well for their future adult lives.

Staff build positive relationships with children within a safe, nurturing and supportive environment. Staff understand children's needs well. Staff are patient and make sure that each child, irrespective of their levels of communication and comprehension, are listened to and treated with respect and consideration.

Extended days and overnight stays are planned carefully. Staff and managers make sure that they have detailed information about each child prior to their residential stay. Children visit prior to overnight stays so that they are familiar with the environment.

Children's medical and wider health needs are well met. Medication is stored securely, and clear records are maintained of all medication administered. Children have access to the on-site emotional well-being nurture team, which uses a range of research-based therapeutic approaches to make sure children's needs are met and understood by staff.

A strength of the residential provision is teaching children life skills. This promotes their independence. Parents commend the success of this life skills programme. One parent reported, 'It has helped his independence and shown him he can feel safe and stay away from home.'

Children enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities. These include sporting and recreational activities, trips and social occasions. This means children develop new interests, make new friends and expand their horizons. Therefore, their day-to-day experiences are enjoyable and meaningful.

The head of care, leaders and managers are dedicated to children and families. Their work in supporting families during the pandemic has been excellent. They maintained contact with families throughout and conducted home visits to families to drop off food parcels along with laptops so that children could still access their education.

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

The staff approach to safeguarding is effective. The designated safeguarding lead ensures that procedures are followed rigorously. The system of monitoring safeguarding concerns ensures that records detail the immediate action taken to protect children's welfare. These records enable the swift assessment of whether

further action is necessary. A response to a safeguarding concern relating to a child demonstrates staff's strong awareness of safeguarding procedures along with staff willingness to work with different agencies to protect children. Weekly safeguarding meetings ensure that all concerns are formally recorded and reviewed if necessary. Staff have undertaken the relevant training to help them safeguard children.

Risks to children are well understood. Staff have clear strategies to minimise potential risk. However, risk assessments have not been regularly reviewed, which means that staff could miss important information needed to safeguard children.

Children's needs are central to how the school operates. The school provides a nurturing environment where children can express themselves and be safe. This approach supports children to manage their emotions more confidently and be able to talk about difficult issues.

Health and safety within the residential provision is well managed. Routine servicing and checks take place as required. Fire safety precautions are checked on a regular basis, including the servicing of firefighting equipment, testing of fire alarms and carrying out evacuation drills.

When appointing staff, the school follows safer recruitment practice guidelines. This means that only those deemed suitable to work with vulnerable individuals look after children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Senior leaders strive to deliver high-quality care that focuses on helping children to achieve their full potential. They demonstrate collaborative working relationships across all aspects of the school and residence. Consequently, children enjoy a seamless journey through the school and residence. As a result, they continue to make excellent progress in key areas of their lives, including their education, communication, independence and emotional well-being, and their confidence and self-esteem.

Staff receive regular supervision and attend weekly team meetings. They are cohesive and supportive of one another. This results in good team morale and ensures that staff clearly understand their responsibilities and roles. The staff speak positively about the headteacher and head of care, who they feel are approachable and supportive and listen to new ideas that may improve the quality of care for the children.

Staff have had the training they require to meet children's specific needs and are qualified in their roles. Appraisals take place and allow staff to reflect on their performance to identify their areas for development.

Leaders and managers are clear about the strengths of the provision and the areas for development. Monitoring by the governing body, local authority and the

independent visitor takes place on a regular basis. They hold conversations with children, staff and the head of care, which is reflected in their written reports. Governors are committed to the residential provision. They are confident about challenging the school and managers about the residential provision and are enthusiastic in ensuring that it remains an indispensable part of the school.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (NMS 13.4)
- The issues specified in Appendix 3 are monitored, and action taken to improve outcomes for children as appropriate. (NMS 13.9)

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

Telephone number: 01785 850420

Email address: jwood@waltonhall.shaw-education.org.uk

Inspectors

Dave Carrigan, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Michelle Spruce, Social Care Inspector

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