

Walton Hall School

Stafford Road, Eccleshall, Stafford, ST21 6JR

Inspection dates

11–12 June 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Inadequate	4
	This inspection:	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils		Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching		Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience		Good	2

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Although the majority of students are now making better progress in reading, writing, mathematics and communication, achievement still requires improvement.
- Some students are making good progress but there are still a few, including some of the oldest, whose progress is not good enough. Key Stage 5 also requires improvement.
- In some lessons, the tasks that students are given to do or the questions they are asked are too complicated or too simple to help them make good progress.
- Leaders make variable use of information about students' progress to help them improve it. Individuals who fall behind are helped well, but leaders do not check carefully how well groups of students are doing in different subjects and year groups.
- Not all staff have the right knowledge and skills to help students who are just starting to read and write to make good progress.
- Sometimes students copy too much from books or worksheets instead of being allowed to put things into their own words.

The school has the following strengths

- The school has improved considerably over the last year. Leaders have set high expectations for the whole school community. Staff have worked very well with leaders to improve all aspects of the school's work.
- The interim executive board (IEB) provides good support and challenge. Senior leaders, supported by the IEB, have taken effective actions to improve the quality of teaching. They challenge underperformance well.
- Students broaden their experiences well through drama, music and sports.
- Students are enthusiastic about school, work hard, get on well with each other and with staff, and learn how to keep themselves safe.
- Students' achievements are celebrated around the school. Good use is made of the extensive grounds.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The residence supports students' personal development and independence skills very well.

Information about this inspection

- Walton Hall was placed in special measures in March 2013. Since then, it has received three visits from one of Her Majesty’s Inspectors to monitor its progress. This inspection was the fourth monitoring visit to the school. An inspection of the residential provision took place at the same time and the findings are included in this report.
- Inspectors observed 11 lessons and parts of three other lessons, of which four were observed jointly with a member of the senior leadership team. An inspector also observed an assembly.
- Inspectors talked informally with students during breaks and lunchtimes and between lessons, and discussed their work with them during lessons. An inspector met with a group of students to talk to them about their learning. Students brought some of their writing to discuss with the inspector.
- The social care inspector spent time with students in the residence during the evening and the morning and talked with students about their experiences of boarding.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the deputy headteacher, the head and deputy head of care, the leader in charge of assessment and tracking, a group of staff, the Chair and three members of the IEB, and a representative of the local authority.
- A range of documents were reviewed, including the school’s evaluation of its strengths and weaknesses, information about students’ achievement, senior leaders’ observations of lessons, and information about behaviour, attendance and safety.
- There were insufficient responses on Parent View for any results to be shown. Inspectors considered parents’ and carers’ responses to the school’s own questionnaire.

Inspection team

Sue Morris-King, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Jeremy Spencer

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Trevor Hall

Social Care Inspector

Full report

In accordance with section 13 (4) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires special measures.

Information about this school

- Walton Hall serves the whole of Staffordshire. The school is not easily accessible by public transport and students almost all travel to school by taxi or minibus.
- All the students at Walton Hall have a statement of special educational needs. Students mainly have moderate or severe learning difficulties, and some students have autistic spectrum disorder. A small number of students have social, emotional or behavioural difficulties.
- The school has residential provision during the week for up to 20 students each night. Around half the school's students stay for at least one night a week; a few stay for two nights.
- The majority of students join the school in Year 7 and stay until the end of Key Stage 5.
- Around a third of students are eligible for the pupil premium - extra government funding for students known to be eligible for free school meals and the small number in local authority care.
- The majority of the students are White British.
- The school belongs to a federation that includes two other Staffordshire special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and the progress that students make, particularly in reading, writing and communication, by:
 - giving teachers and teaching assistants the training they need to be able to teach and support well the students who are at the early stages of learning to read and write
 - maximising the chances that students have to write in their own words rather than copying paragraphs of text
 - making good use of key words to support the development of students' subject-specific vocabulary, spelling and understanding
 - extending the good work done so far to develop the use of signing and symbols to support communication.
- Improve students' understanding of new concepts, and therefore their progress, by ensuring that teachers ask questions and set tasks at the right conceptual level for the students.
- Ensure that senior leaders make full use of all available information about students' progress to:
 - gain a clear picture of how well groups of students are doing in different subjects, and whether this picture is improving quickly enough from term to term
 - help the IEB to ask even sharper questions about what is working well and what still needs to improve.
- As a result of the inspection of the residence, the following good practice recommendation has been made:
 - increase the number of staff with boarding responsibilities who have a suitable first aid qualification and the number who have a suitable basic food hygiene qualification, in order to enhance the safety of boarders.

Inspection judgements

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- Some of the weaker teaching that students have received in the past is still showing in their achievement in English and mathematics, particularly in Key Stage 4. In Year 10, many students are now making steady progress towards their targets and are on track to gain a range of qualifications where appropriate, including in English and mathematics. In Year 11, students have more gaps in their learning, and progress is patchier.
- Gaps are evident across the school in the progress made by students with the lowest levels of literacy, and those with the more complex needs.
- Progress in writing for those at the early stages of learning to write is insecure because students do not have enough opportunities to practise their emerging skills. Students are now being given more opportunities to write in their own words in their English lessons, which they were able to show inspectors. However, in other subjects such as history and geography, too often they copy out whole paragraphs of text that they cannot read or understand, rather than writing less but in their own words.
- In Key Stage 3, progress in reading is improving as a result of better strategies being used to teach reading and more suitable books for the students to read. Students are reading daily and are becoming better at using a range of strategies to read unfamiliar words and to understand what they are reading.
- Progress in mathematics is improving across the school and more students are on track to achieve their targets.
- Progress for the students with the more complex needs, although still patchy, is much improved. Many are now making steady progress, particularly with their communication skills. Signing and symbols are often used well to assist their communication but this is not entirely consistent across the school.
- Students who are eligible for the pupil premium are benefiting from a good range of additional support, which is helping them to make progress in line with their classmates.
- The changes to the curriculum in Key Stages 4 and 5 are allowing students to make better progress than in recent years and to take more suitable qualifications. This year, six students are on track to gain GCSEs or equivalent in English, mathematics and science. Other students are on track to succeed in a range of accredited courses.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- Teaching is not always pitched at the right conceptual level for the students. At times, the questions they are asked or the tasks they are given to do are too abstract and do not match their current level of understanding. At other times, the more-able students are not stretched enough and spend too much time repeating learning that they have already mastered.
- The teaching of reading has improved. More teachers are now using good phonics (the sounds that letters make) strategies to teach reading. However, teaching assistants have not been trained in phonics approaches. This means that teachers have to teach early reading to whole classes rather than splitting them into small groups when they think this would help students to

make better progress. The lack of training also limits the extent to which teaching assistants can support the students they are working with.

- Key words are not used well enough to support the development of students' subject-specific vocabulary or their reading or spelling of new subject words. Teachers identify the key words in their planning but do not always display these in a lesson or rehearse them with students.
- Teachers use an assessment system which enables them to track students' achievements in small steps. This information is being used increasingly effectively to plan courses and lessons. Leaders have identified that assessment is not always accurate, and can depend on teachers' subject knowledge.
- Students generally take a pride in their work. In the best examples, staff systematically remind them about their presentation, which is effective.
- In Key Stage 5, staff have created a relaxed but focused working atmosphere, where students are rightly treated as young adults. Students are supported but are also expected to be self-motivated and to respond maturely to the demands that are made of them. This approach has a good impact on students' attitudes to learning. Occasionally teaching in Key Stage 5 is still not demanding enough to enable all students to make good progress.
- Teaching for the students with the more complex needs has improved. Students now have more time with qualified teachers. Staff have higher expectations of what the students can achieve, the teaching is more closely matched to their needs and students are making better progress as a result.
- The use of signing is much improved. Although not yet used consistently, staff frequently use signing to support students' communication and students are also signing with more confidence and accuracy. Symbols to support reading and visual timetables for those who need them are also being used more effectively.
- Teachers and teaching assistants work closely together in effective teams. Teaching assistants make a strong contribution to ensuring that all students are included in lessons. They focus closely on learning as well as helping to manage behaviour when needed.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

- The behaviour of students is good. This is the case both in the school and the residence. The school has a calm and relaxed atmosphere. Students interact positively with each other and with adults. Many students are quick to support and encourage their peers and offer assistance to adults.
- Students have good attitudes to learning. In lessons, students are keen to do well and respond very positively to encouragement from staff. In several lessons, inspectors observed students showing good levels of perseverance when their work was challenging.
- The school's thorough records and analysis of behaviour and the views of staff, parents and students indicate that the behaviour and attitudes observed during the inspection are typical.
- Students are keenly aware of how behaviour has improved over the last year. They feel that behaviour keeps getting better and that incidents of bullying, including the use of name-calling and inappropriate language, are far less frequent than in the past. Students are confident that if

bullying does occur, or when they have problems with friendships, staff, both in school and in the residence, quickly 'get things sorted out'.

- During the inspection, students moved calmly and sensibly around the school. They understand and comply with the clear rules that apply to where they can go at different times. Their mature behaviour enables leaders to allow older students to make the most of the extensive grounds.
- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Any concerns about students' safety and welfare are followed up promptly and appropriately. The school responds to safeguarding concerns and works with other agencies in order to provide support for students. Detailed written records provide an account of all the actions taken by the school and identify what needs to happen next.
- Good attention has been paid to teaching students how to keep themselves safe. Crucially, students receive regular teaching about e-safety, including the dangers of grooming and the implications of the use of social media.
- Students are clear that they feel safe in school and at the residential provision, and know that they can talk to adults who will help them when they 'have worries'.
- Attendance remains below the national average overall, but many students attend very well and the number of students who are persistently absent has halved over the last year. The school is working more closely with parents and students to improve attendance.

The leadership and management are good

- The executive headteacher and the head of school, well supported by the deputy headteacher, have led the school through significant turbulence to a point where it is stable, well managed and improving fast.
- Senior leaders have set a clear direction for the school. Staff understand what is expected of them. They have risen to the challenge of improving students' achievement. Teaching is improving at a good rate.
- Over the last year, senior leaders have taken a wide range of effective and decisive actions to improve the school. They have made it a much more inclusive place, with all students taking part in lessons and activities together and no one group being isolated from their peers as they were in the past. Good relationships have developed between students, who are now relaxed and much happier. The impact of these changes can be seen in their improved behaviour and attendance.
- The curriculum has improved considerably. Courses are more suitable. For example, students move on to more challenging or broader courses at Key Stage 5 rather than repeating some of what they have already covered at Key Stage 4. Those who are able to take public examinations are doing so.
- Good improvements have been made to teaching and the curriculum for the students with the more complex needs. Qualified teachers are teaching the classes for most of the time, and where higher-level teaching assistants are leading they are being supported well by leaders. There are good plans to improve the provision further from September.
- Leaders have a good knowledge of the progress being made by individual students. Challenging

targets are set for English, mathematics and science, and where these are not being met a range of support is provided. However, leaders do not use the assessment information strategically to look at patterns across year groups, classes or subjects.

- Middle leadership still needs improvement in places. Where leaders are established, they are effective. For example, good improvements have been made to teaching and achievement in Key Stage 5 and for the students with more complex needs, the management of behaviour and the residential aspect of the school. Some subject leaders are quite new and have not had much time to develop their subject areas, and currently no leader has the oversight of Key Stage 4.
- The local authority has supported the improvement of teaching, learning, leadership and the residential provision effectively. Good support has also been provided by the federation of schools to which Walton Hall belongs.

■ **The governance of the school:**

- Governance is good. The Chair of the IEB was determined from the outset to make sure that the school improved quickly. She worked closely with the senior leaders to secure the support they needed. She is very well supported by the other members of the IEB, who bring a good range of skills and expertise. The IEB has worked hard throughout the period of special measures, meeting fortnightly and being demanding as well as supportive of the school’s leaders. The IEB has improved its own practices over time, becoming better at asking the right questions. Its members have a good understanding of the quality of teaching and challenge leaders about teachers’ performance appropriately. They know about individual students’ achievement although do not receive a clear overview from senior leaders of the progress that groups of students make in different subjects. The IEB has ensured that the pupil premium funding has been spent appropriately and has looked carefully at its impact on the achievement of eligible students. Good attention is always paid in meetings to any safeguarding concerns, and to the residential aspect of the school.

Outcomes for residential pupils	are good
Quality of residential provision and care	is good
Residential pupils’ safety	is good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	are good

- Students clearly enjoy the residential experience they receive at Walton Hall. It has a significant impact on their development, giving them the opportunity to improve their social skills in a safe and nurturing environment. They learn social awareness, consideration and self-reliance whilst enjoying time with friends in a structured, safe environment. The residential experience enhances and enriches the students’ educational experience.
- The residential experience is clearly valued, not only by those who use it, but also by their parents and carers and the social workers who are involved with some of the families. Relationships between students and staff are excellent and this is the cornerstone of the school’s success with the residential aspect. Staff are appropriately mindful of parents’ and carers’ anxieties, and encourage them to maintain a regular and healthy dialogue.
- Students receive a high quality of care provided by a motivated, dedicated and well-led staff team. Care planning is personalised and effective communication ensures that each student’s needs are well known and effectively met. Students are valued as individuals; their personalities

and different characters are recognised and their achievements are celebrated.

- The residential provision has been significantly enhanced by the refurbishment of both Goldstone house and Gainsborough Landing in the Old Hall. The relocation of Shugborough Landing to the new residential unit, Shugborough House, has also significantly improved the physical environment. This investment has done much to raise the profile of the residential provision within the school, creating a nurturing living environment that better supports the students' social development. The students themselves really appreciate the improvements.
- Safeguarding procedures are very well known and understood by all staff. Senior managers understand their responsibilities within the wider safeguarding framework, which helps to ensure that students receive a fully integrated service. Students state that they feel safe and happy when staying in residential facilities at the school.
- The leadership and management of the residential provision continue to improve. Earlier structural and operational changes are now having a clear impact in practice. Consistency has improved, particularly in respect of the application of monitoring procedures and in policy review. The residential provision now forms an integral part of the whole school structure and fully complements the education component of the school. Good leadership is provided by senior staff leaders, who share high aspirations for the students who access this service.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>
Residential provision		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	124507
Social care unique reference number	SC038732
Local authority	Staffordshire
Inspection number	439414

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	122
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	36
Number of residential students on roll	61 (20 at any one time)
Appropriate authority	Interim executive board
Chair	Sally Osborne-Town
Headteacher	Jim Kane (exceutive headteacher)
Date of previous school inspection	28 February 2013
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