

# Walton Hall

Walton Hall Academy, Walton, Eccleshall, Stafford ST21 6JR

## Inspection dates

1 March 2016 to 3 March 2016

## The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is outstanding because

- The quality of care is exceptional for all children and young people. They make excellent progress from their starting points.
- Staff know children and young people very well and maximise the opportunities for each of them to develop and to reach their full potential.
- Children and young people have access to a large range of activities and routines that help them to socialise as a group and to develop as individuals.
- There is an enabling and positive atmosphere. Children and young people are very supportive and respectful of each other.
- Staff are extremely responsive to children and young people's needs. Children and young people they are encouraged to be as independent as possible.
- Children and young people have the opportunity to try new experiences in a protected and nurturing way.
- Relationships between staff and young people are attentive, caring and very supportive.
- Children and young people benefit from using residential provision that is exceptionally well managed and organised.
- Managers provide effective leadership, which results in staff being clearly focused and guided in meeting the needs of children and young people.

## **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Evidence by whom and when employment references were verified and the outcomes of these checks.
  
- Ensure that the school's programme of continuous professional development includes an annual appraisal for all residential staff.

## **Information about this inspection**

The inspection of the school's residential and welfare arrangements took place following the appropriate notice period for this type of visit. One inspector carried out the inspection and reviewed policies and procedures, documentation, residential accommodation and organisation over a period of three days. The inspector spoke to key staff, managers, children, young people and the designated officer for the local authority in which the school is situated. In addition, observations of residential routines and practices were made at different times of the day and evening. Feedback was also gained from some parents and carers.

## **Inspection team**

Julian Mason

Lead social care inspector

# **Full Report**

## **Information about this school**

Walton Hall Academy is a residential special school with 123 children and young people on roll. It provides day and residential education for children and young people aged 11 to 19 years who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities including aspects of autism, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and other complex needs. The residential accommodation offers short stays of up to two nights per week for 61 children and young people. The school is located in a rural part of Staffordshire and serves children and young people placed by a number of local authorities. Residential accommodation is provided in three buildings sited within the school's grounds. Goldstone House is a purpose-built unit offering accommodation to girls. Shugborough House and Gainsborough floor, in the Old Hall offer accommodation to boys. The residential provision was last inspected in June 2014.

## Inspection Judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Children and young people's experiences, and the progress they make as they journey through the school, are outstanding. They benefit from being able to access residential provision that not only has a very a positive impact on their lives at school but at home as well. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about what the school does to help their child achieve academically and socially. Parents state: 'Can't fault them, some of the things they learn in residential they bring home and it really makes a difference to our family life'; 'My child is developing her independence and personal care skills through this very valuable provision. As a result of her achievements, her confidence and self-esteem have improved greatly' and 'Excellent services provided. Residential care is wonderful, my son loves going.'

Children and young people enjoy their residential stays and look forward to being with their friends and participating in a wide range of activities and routines on offer. They can easily reflect on their residential experiences and the progress they make, especially around improving their independence and personal responsibility. Children and young people state: 'The best thing about being in residence are the activities'; 'I love it, it's all good, I wouldn't change anything' and 'I'm better at looking after myself now.'

Relationships between children, young people and staff are excellent. Staff respond positively, helping to build confidence and skills that are consistent with individual abilities and potential. Attachments are strong between everyone and these bonds are used positively to ensure that everyone's residential stay is enjoyable and successful.

Adults act as good role models, helping to shape and influence behaviours and interactions that are based on trust, respect and consideration for others. Those who struggle with socialising and interacting experience patient and sensitive support that helps them to integrate and socialise. The staff team's approach is to be inclusive and to ensure that everyone benefits from their overnight stays. Management oversight is strong and standards of care are measured against professional knowledge and understanding, as well as evidence and research-based practice.

There are excellent arrangements for consulting and listening to children and young people. They are actively encouraged and supported to have their say about day-to-day routines and arrangements. Consequently, they are able to directly influence how they are looked after and what is provided for them. They confidently access and use a range of methods to ensure that their voice is heard. Many suggestions made by children and young people are implemented in practice. This helps to reinforce the school's stated culture and ethos of social inclusion and working together.

The school's arrangements for meeting young people's health needs are excellent. Young people clearly benefit from having a team of carers who are well informed and are focused on monitoring and promoting their good health and well-being. For example, staff have well-established partnerships with a range of healthcare colleagues to ensure that the right services and professionals are accessed when needed. The school nurse

also provides an effective link to external services, and this achieves a responsive and coordinated approach to healthcare. Health promotion and education are effective as they are delivered in a planned and coordinated way that is appropriate to the age, needs and circumstances of children and young people.

The range of activities on offer is exceptional. Staff make full use of the school's facilities, allowing for choice and preferences to be incorporated into evening routines. Children and young people are also fully supported to access a range of community facilities and venues, such as outdoor centres, clubs, places of interest and restaurants. One parent described the residential programme as being 'jam-packed' with activities to do. A young person states, 'It's great that I can be with my friends and we can do fun things together.'

### **The quality of care and support**

### **Outstanding**

Children and young people receive outstanding quality of care. They live in a structured, safe and child-centred environment where complex individual needs are recognised and met. They form strong trusting relationships with a stable, experienced and well-trained staff group. One parent stated what many express, 'The staff are very caring and dedicated to helping the children in their care.'

The physical standards of the residential provision are high and reflect the importance staff place on providing safe, comfortable accommodation. Each residential unit is unique and reflective of the children and young people who use the provision. Décor, furnishings and general standards of cleanliness are high. The living and recreational areas provide children and young people with a wide range of outstanding facilities, with all areas being fully utilised. They are able to move around the school site freely and to visit each other in different units if they wish. They feel safe and secure, and are proud to show off their school to visitors.

Children and young people's overall needs and welfare are closely monitored and promoted because staff are knowledgeable and aware of individual requirements. For example, medication is administered safely and is monitored for its effectiveness and its impact on young people's health. Detailed individual placement plans and risk assessments, as well as guidance from other professionals, ensure that needs are comprehensively identified. Staff are well informed about lifelong health conditions and diagnoses, such as learning disabilities and allergies. They are very observant and aware because some children and young people do not always openly say how they feel. This area of practice is embedded into residential routines and helps to ensure that everyone's comfort and well-being are key focuses of the staff team.

Children and young people are very positive about the quality, quantity and choice of food available. Balanced, nutritious menus provide choice and cater for a range of dietary needs and preferences. Consultation about food and menus is excellent. Children and young people benefit from well-organised mealtimes that are planned to provide opportunities for everyone to socialise and chat. Staff are attentive and enabling, ensuring that everyone is able to participate in this social routine. Because mealtimes are well managed, staff are able to help to develop social skills and relationships, and to promote independence that matches individual needs.

Staff are excellent at working with parents, and the team's ability to empathise with them cements positive relationships. Staff respect individuality and this allows the personalities of children and young people to develop and for familiar relationships to grow. Staff always see children and young people in a positive light. They are fully committed to enabling children and young people to overcome any difficulties they may have in support of them leading safe, happy and fulfilling lives.

Staff use excellent communication and interpersonal skills to develop positive and trusting relationships. There is open and transparent communication with parents, who have confirmed the frequent and reassuring dialogue with the head of care and the staff team. This communication results in parents being very confident about how their son or daughter is being looked after. One parent summarised this as, 'The staff in Res are brilliant and caring. My son feels safe there and I have only positive things to say about Res. He has grown in character and personality and is a lot more outgoing and positive as a direct result of the residential staff's expertise and planning.'

### **How well children and young people are protected**

**Outstanding**

Arrangements for keeping children and young people safe are excellent. This is because staff are very knowledgeable and clear about their roles and responsibilities. They work in partnership with each other as well as with other professionals to share consistently information that is necessary to promote everyone's welfare and safety. Successful lines of communication exist because managers provide effective leadership that clearly reflects the school's values and priorities in terms of safeguarding. Comprehensive policies and staff training underpin and guide the service's approach to child protection. Children and young people's privacy and dignity are also promoted very well by staff whose practice follows necessary guidance and individualised plans.

Children and young people are provided with highly effective support to help them to manage their behaviours positively. Detailed and individualised plans help to guide staff in their day-to-day work. Staff are trained in a way that reflects the school's behaviour management policy. Children and young people benefit from this approach as staff practice is calm, professional and well informed. Boundaries are made clear and in a way that helps individuals to learn and develop friendly, respectful relationships. Physical restraint or sanctions are not needed often. Staff use their training to good effect by regularly talking about what good behaviour looks like and by rewarding positive conduct.

The residential groupings over the four-night period are planned carefully to help to match children and young people together safely. Their ages, interests, abilities and behaviours are all considered, along with the views and opinions of children, young people and their parents or carers. Staff carefully balance their time to allow everyone the freedom and space to interact with each other, along with the necessary levels of supervision, to ensure that everyone is safe.

The team successfully integrate safe working practices into the residential environment. Risk assessments and procedures are effectively implemented, monitored and reviewed. All domestic installations and equipment are appropriately serviced and maintained in

good working order. All aspects relating to fire safety are considered and reflected in an up-to-date fire risk assessment. Children and young people are additionally protected because they participate in fire evacuations and know the correct steps to take in the event of an emergency.

There have been no serious accidents relating to the residential accommodation. All activities are risk assessed and verified by managers. Staff know how to minimise risks without hindering opportunities to explore new activities or experiences. Staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to health and safety. The environment is physically safe and appropriately secure, taking account of individual needs and circumstances.

Few changes have occurred to the staff group since the last inspection. Recruitment procedures include a range of required pre-employment checks that include criminal record vetting, which is renewed every three years. Necessary employment references are also obtained and verified but evidence of who the references are provided by and when this is done are lacking. This is an administrative shortfall and overall the school ensures that staff are suitable to work with vulnerable children and young people.

### **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

### **Outstanding**

Children and young people experience a strong, child-focused service that is very effective at maximising opportunities for personal growth and development. They benefit greatly from their experiences, because they are able to make and sustain progress personally, educationally and socially. Both staff and managers have an excellent insight into how well individual needs are being met and the outcomes that are being achieved. This is because the team closely monitor and evaluate progress against personal targets and goals. Parents and professionals are very positive about the service and the significant impact it has on children and young people.

There is a comprehensive range of publicly available information about the school, its values and how it is organised. The aims and purpose of the service are well known by staff, parents and other professionals. Staff display professional, caring attitudes and practices. They are provided with excellent support and clear guidance from competent, knowledgeable seniors and managers. They have access to a range of occupational and vocational training which underpins their practice. Staff training and development are identified through the school's programme of continuous professional development. However, this is not yet fully linked into a formal system of annual appraisal for each member of the residential team.

The head of care has a strong presence in the residential accommodation and is always available to give practical help and guidance. Staff feel very supported and involved in the running of the service and how they work directly with children and young people. Staff have a clear understanding of what each other does and how their work fits more widely into the school routines. They work cooperatively and purposefully to ensure that individual needs are met and that risks are managed effectively.

The residential team is led by a conscientious and effective head of care who is part of the school's senior management group. The operation of the residential provision is

underpinned by clearly written policies that reflect the high standards of professional practice and accountability that are expected. Managers have a cycle of quality assurance activities that produces a range of information about the residential provision's operation. This includes monitoring visits by a management committee member as well as other external quality assurance scrutiny visits. These activities contribute significantly to how the service develops and improves.

The residential provision is effectively integrated into the whole school setting. Managers, residential staff and teachers work together in their shared aspirations for children and young people. There is a shared approach to critical assessment of the services being provided and what could be developed or improved further. Parents' and children's and young people's surveys are used regularly to gain feedback about the service. This helps to reinforce the school's aim of working in partnership and to involve key people in how the school moves forward.

The head of care draws together information to formulate and implement development plans which are continuously reviewed and updated. Many implemented and proposed developments are researched and have an evidence base in terms of professional practice. Managers not only draw on the professional expertise from within the school but link with others in the sector locally and nationally. This puts the school in a position of being able to draw on a wide range of information that will potentially benefit those who use the service.

## What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	124507
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC038723
<b>DfE registration number</b>	

This inspection 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Residential special school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	123
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	11 to 19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Pauline Carmichael
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	12 June 2014
<b>Telephone number</b>	01785 850420
<b>Email address</b>	pcarmichael@bcfederation.co.uk

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