

Walton Hall

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Jackie Callaghan
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Date of last inspection	11/02/2010

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Walton Hall is a residential special school situated in a rural part of Staffordshire. It provides day and residential education to pupils aged 11 to 19 years who have learning difficulties and/or disabilities including aspects of autism, emotional and social behaviours and complex needs. The boarding provision is available for up to four nights per week.

The residential units are situated in two buildings placed within the school's grounds. Goldstone House is a purpose-built unit offering accommodation to girls. The Old Hall is a Victorian listed building and provides three residential units: Gainsborough, which offers residential placements for senior boys; Broughton, which provides places for post-16 girls, and Shugborough, which accommodates post-16 pupils.

The school is situated within its own extensive grounds, which offer a range of facilities including football, tennis and basketball. It has a motorcycle riding and maintenance area, an adventure play area, a small animal farm and a conservation area. These all contribute to the 24-hour curriculum approach. There are currently 39 students receiving a service from the residential provision with 15 of these students present throughout the three day inspection. Students contributed to this inspection in many ways which included; direct discussion, student questionnaires or through observations of interaction between students and staff.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

At this announced, full inspection all the key standards were inspected. The recommendations made at the previous inspection were also followed up.

A new headteacher took up post in January this year. This headteacher has been proactive in taking action to ensure that the three recommendations made at the last inspection have been met. However, the issues identified by that visit do not appear to have been tackled by the previous headteacher. As a result, two out of the three recommendations made have been fully met. The third recommendation set as yet to be fully addressed. The new headteacher recognises that staff practice needs to be informed by a variety of training and, therefore, agrees that this recommendation needs repeating.

The school's head of care is currently off poorly and the school has an acting head of care in post. The school recognises that the current covering arrangements are not sustainable in the long-term but it is acknowledged that it is currently the only appropriate solution.

Students receive satisfactory care, guidance and support. They are happy and they show trust with the adults around them. Although the overall rating is satisfactory there are some areas of continuing outstanding practice. All of the shortfalls identified within this report have already been identified by the new headteacher on his arrival to the school. This headteacher recognises that it will take time to make all of the necessary changes in order to improve practice and agrees with all seven recommendations raised as a result of this inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The school has provided all staff with suitable child protection training which has deepened their knowledge on how to keep students safe. All staff now receive supervision as required by national minimum standards. As a result, staff are feeling supported and state 'this helps us improve care for the students because we feel empowered'.

Staff as yet, are to receive a full range of training in order to help them interpret and understand the holistic needs of those students they care for. Training is beginning to take shape under the new headteachers guidance; however, this has yet to be fully implemented as it will take time. As a consequence, staff are still using some inappropriate language in documentation, such as risk assessments. Therefore, the recommendation regarding staff training is to be repeated.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Health promotion is a prominent feature at the school. The physical, emotional and mental health needs of each student are actively identified on admission and comprehensively supported throughout their school life. For example, excellent partnership working with nursing and occupational health departments means the school provides holistic care for students.

Staff receive accomplished ongoing training in medication administration and wider medical procedures. Students' medical files are confidential and are kept in a locked cabinet in the staff office. The excellent partnership between the schools' residential care staff and the school nurse means that students receive prolific personal, social and health education. As a result, students are enabled to make informed decisions regarding their diet, sexuality, health and exercise.

Students receive a healthy and nutritious diet and excellent messages about healthy eating. Mealtimes are very pleasant and sociable occasions which unreservedly enhance the social development of all students. Students are actively involved in menu planning, ensuring that their likes and dislikes are catered for. They help tidy away and wash up after mealtimes. One student confirmed this view 'the food is really nice and we can make ourselves snacks and drinks'.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Students enjoy an appropriate level of privacy and confidentiality in all aspects of their daily living; this helps them to feel safe and protected. Personal care and particular health issues are dealt with very sensitively and staff recognise that the dignity of students is of great importance.

The complaints procedure is easily accessible to students. There are good relationships between students and staff. These relationships and an open culture, encourage students to raise any issues they have easily with staff members on a day-to-day basis. Students say they can easily talk to staff and they sort out concerns. They talk to staff about bullying issues. Staff have a clear understanding and commitment to implementing the school's anti-bullying policy and in ensuring and enabling students to express any concerns they may have. One student confirmed this view by saying 'staff listen to me and help sort out difficulties and problems'.

Incidents of absence without permission have not occurred since the last inspection. However, systems are in place to ensure staff would respond to and record such incidents appropriately if they did occur. The school has a policy in place to support staff and students regarding absence without permission. This has been developed in-line with local police protocols.

The safety and welfare of students has a very high priority in the school and students say they feel safe during their stay. Staff understand and are clear about what they should do if there is a safeguarding issue. Staff are trained in safeguarding issues and are aware of vulnerability issues for students in residential care. Each student has their needs and risks identified in documents. However, the action that needs to be taken in order to show how risks can be minimised is missing. This means that these documents may hinder actual practice when it comes to helping keep students safe.

Students' behaviour is well understood by staff and they know what the triggers are for more challenging behaviour for individuals. Staff have completed training and are competent in diffusing situations to avoid the use of physical intervention. Incidents of physical intervention are very infrequent, demonstrating that staff are effective in practise. Staff have good relationships with students and see them in an extremely positive light. The emphasis is on positive intervention with rewards that are achievable for students. This helps them to progress in their overall behaviour.

Fire drills take place regularly as do tests on all fire equipment in the building. Staff and students are very confident about what they need to do should there be a fire. Inspection of the gas and portable appliance testing are all up to date ensuring the safety of all who use the building.

There is a robust recruitment system in the school which maintains good levels of

safety for students. This includes Criminal Records Bureau checks at enhanced level, proof of identity and references prior to employment. The overall management of the system is effective, therefore, the students are well protected.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people receive a high degree of individual support. Physical, emotional and social needs have a very high priority and all students have targets to work on during their stays. However, current activities and care programmes are not clearly showing how the residential provision is contributing to the student's educational progress.

There is an effective range of structures in place to support students in the residential areas of the school. Students are able to identify different staff that they would talk to if they wished for support. Young people freely initiate interaction and seek help with various staff members on duty. They are each allocated to a key person to ensure their continual care needs are met. As a result, the extended day and residential provision proficiently enables students to develop in confidence. Students' comments include, 'I have lots of fun at school', 'its fun and the staff are brilliant' and 'I like the staff in the house'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Assessment and care planning inform staff about how to meet each student's needs on a day-to-day basis. The documents set out the needs, which the staff are fully conversant with. They know the students extremely well and as a consequence the quality of care is effective.

Students are supported when they move into residence. They stay because they want to and as a result enjoy the experience. They receive a welcome pack which sets out the rules, how to complain and what to expect. Staff also sit with them and spend time explaining what to expect so they are as prepared as they can be.

Contact with families is very good and parents feel that staff are approachable. One parent commented that 'all of the school's residential staff are brilliant and work very hard for the pupils. Nothing is too much trouble for them and I can phone anytime to speak to a member of staff if I have any concerns about my son.' The school provides good access to a telephone that students can use freely ensuring that they can speak to their family whenever they wish.

The staff ratio is good, therefore, time is spent with students. This helps to ensure that their views about life at the school can be established. A lot of time is spent planning activities and outings with the students to ensure that their needs are fulfilled and that their stay is enjoyable.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The school has developed effective systems for improving life skills which will support students after leaving the school. This transition development is constantly being used throughout students' school life. Both care and education staff are fully involved with developing each student's independence with some residential students currently undertaking work experience.

The residential accommodation for students in Goldstone is of a high standard; however, Old Hall is satisfactory. Some exterior window frames in Old Hall appear to be rotting and are potentially dangerous. Decoration is being carried out within the residential area on a rolling programme. The students' bathrooms and toilets within Old Hall are in a poor condition and as a result of the age of fittings are difficult to keep clean. Also the doors on toilet cubicles are not full doors and do not afford complete privacy and dignity of students. The grounds of the school, however, offer a pleasant range of areas for students to relax or play.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The leadership and management at Walton Hall have undergone some considerable change. The school now has a new headteacher who has a clear vision of where the school should be and how this is to be achieved. The residential provision currently has an acting head of care in place. This head of care is currently a head of care from another school and splits his time between both provisions. The headteacher recognises that this is only a short-term solution. However, it is acknowledged that it is the only viable solution currently, as the school's existing head of care is unable to return to work due to poor health. The impact of the new headteacher is beginning to have a positive effect. The residential staff, like the rest of the school staff, is now benefiting from empowerment and ownership at all levels.

Students' have good information about what they can expect from the school, how they will be cared for and who they are likely to share with. Parents and external professionals have a clear statement on how the school operates. The establishment's staffing policy is included in its Statement of Purpose and is broken down to reflect the minimum staffing expectations in the school.

Staff share their understanding of the many different behaviours that pupils exhibit. Although this demonstrated they have a good understanding in practice, some of the language used in some documentation, such as risk assessments, is inappropriate.

All new members of staff are required to undergo a process of familiarisation within the work place in order to enable them to function effectively and safely from the day they take up their appointment. The formal staff supervision programme and staff meetings take place consistently and within the recommended timescales. Time

for care planning is essential to ensure that students' development is considered in order to set student targets and drive staffs' practice. However, the current residential staff rota is at risk of not allowing enough scheduled time to ensure the completion of these important records.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. Students are receiving a good individual service in the school which is designed to meet their personal needs.

Monitoring of the areas as requested by the standard is being completed. This takes place by a range of people as designated by the headteacher, with documents being signed once records have been checked. Detailed reports show that a designated person from the local authority regularly visits the school. These visits cover all the areas identified within the standards and paint an accurate picture on which priorities for improvements can be formed. However, the governing body currently are not apart of this monitoring process and as a result, are at risk of not truly understanding how the current boarding environment functions.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- develop the risk assessments to show the steps taken to keep young people safe (NMS 26.1)
- increase the opportunities to ensure that care staff and teaching staff work together to identify means of encouraging each child's personal, social and educational development and achievement (NMS 12.6)
- ensure that the exterior of the school is maintained to a good state of structural and decorative repair, this specifically applies to the windows at Old Hall (breach of national minimum standard 24.3)
- ensure that all baths, showers and toilets are of a good standard and are designed to take account of the children's need for privacy. This specifically applies to Old Hall (breach of national minimum standard 25.1 and 25.5)
- develop the staff training in order to inform staff about the needs of children accommodated at the school. This specifically relates to the use of language used in documentation (NMS 29.6)
- examine the impact of the current staff shift pattern with the view to ensure that time is given to meet all of the requirements of the national minimum standard (NMS 31.5)
- consider developing the current monitoring of welfare arrangements to involve visits from the governing body (NMS 33.2)