

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-age and post-16 children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including autistic children and children with social, emotional and mental health needs as well as other complex needs. There are 216 pupils on roll and the school offers 63 residential places. Currently, there are 61 children who access the residential provision. The school is in a rural part of Staffordshire. Residential accommodation is provided in two buildings in the school's grounds. Both boys and girls stay in the residential provision.

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

Inspection dates: 30 September to 2 October 2024 and 16 October 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 7 November 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy their residential experience. They enjoy spending time with the staff and with their friends. Staff have warm and nurturing relationships with children. They support children to gain independence skills, such as making their own bed, preparing a meal and doing the washing-up. Children make good progress towards their independent living skills because of the time they spend in the residential provision.

Parents are positive about the experiences their children have and the progress they make in the residential provision. They say that their children are safe and gain independent living skills. A parent said: 'He is developing his own independent personal care and now helps to pack his suitcase on a Sunday night, remembering what toiletries and clothes he needs. This is huge for him. As a family, this is helping all of us to prepare for his future and adulthood.' Another parent said: 'The wonderful staff there have helped him to improve on his people skills, life skills, and structuring his time constructively, whilst learning to take personal responsibility for himself and also getting involved in group activities which he loves.'

Moving in and out of the residential provision is well planned and carefully executed. This means children settle quickly. When they move out, staff keep in contact with the children if that is what they want. For example, a young adult who previously attended the school regularly meets up with staff and children to play in a gaming café. This provides the young adult with a friendship group and continued support.

Children have rich and varied experiences and opportunities at this school. For example, a child has been offered an apprenticeship when potential employers saw that the child had the right skills for a job when he was on an annual school trip on a tall ship. Other children have been camping, where they spent time next to a campfire listening to stories about the local area.

Diversity is celebrated in this school, and children are accepted for who they are. For example, one child who was exploring their identity wanted to wear a dress to the school prom. The school sourced a prom dress for the child, which they wore. The school celebrated Pride Month by holding its own 'Pride Parade' through the school grounds.

Children's and staff's emotional well-being is supported well, through interventions such as bushcraft, wilderness therapy, mental health first aiders, a therapist and a school counsellor. A school nurse provides staff with training for the safe administration of medicines and is available for support and guidance.

Consultation with children is embedded into the culture of the provision. Staff enable children to have their say about how they are looked after and what happens while they are staying in residence. For example, staff are currently supporting children to

have a better understanding of their education, health and care plans as well as have a say about what is written in their risk assessments. This means that children gain confidence in decision-making and making positive choices.

The houses that the children stay in vary in homeliness. Children's artwork adorns the walls, but some is from a few years ago and some of these children no longer access the provision. Some pictures have fallen off the wall, leaving a space. Both houses are looking tired and in need of redecoration. This has been discussed and the academy has been approached to fund this. In addition, there are aspects of the cleanliness of the environment that require addressing.

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

Keeping children safe is central to the work that staff do. The designated safeguarding lead is the headteacher. She is very well supported by a team of safeguarding officers, one of whom is the head of care. This ensures that safeguarding concerns are responded to quickly and effectively.

Leaders and managers take effective action to ensure children's immediate safety when there are safeguarding concerns between children. Safeguarding concerns are managed well, and reporting processes are effective. Staff have a good understanding of the safeguarding reporting system. The safeguarding team maintains good oversight of any concerns and escalates them appropriately. In addition, leaders and managers maintain good relationships with external agencies and work effectively with them.

Staff are fully aware of the risks for children and know the strategies to reduce them. There is a collaborative approach between residential and school staff to create and inform children's risk assessments. This ensures that both school and residential staff implement strategies consistently. However, children's risk assessments do not distinguish between the different risks and strategies relevant to each setting. This is despite some risks at school not being applicable to the residential provision or strategies to managing risk being different between the two. Although this has not had an impact, as staff know the children well, it is not always clear what risks apply to the residential setting or how staff should respond to them.

Staff are not always evidencing the support they are providing to children to reduce children's risks and the level of restrictions put in place to protect them or others. As a result, it is not demonstrated that these strategies or restrictions are being reviewed to ensure they remain necessary and proportionate.

Good health and safety processes support children's safety. There is a well-coordinated approach to ensure all health and safety processes. Children know what to do if the fire alarm sounds because they have regular fire drills. Fire drill evaluations are written after each evacuation, and no concerns have been identified.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The head of care is part of the senior leadership team and has a clear vision for the residential provision. He is experienced and qualified. He has a range of internal and external monitoring systems that help to ensure the health, safety and well-being of children.

Staff are positive about the children, the team and where they work. All staff are qualified, and they all attend regular training that equips them with the skills to meet the specific needs of the children.

Staff feel very well supported. They know the children well, and this ensures that children receive good care and support from skilled and knowledgeable staff.

External scrutiny of the residential provision is good. Children are visited regularly by an independent person, an independent visitor and the academy council member responsible for safeguarding children and the residential provision. This means children have a number of opportunities to talk to people outside of the school about the help and care they receive.

Members of the academy council know the school's strengths and challenges well. They provide good support and challenge. They are invested in the development of the school and its residential provision.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- The school's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 2.4)
- The accommodation is well lit, heated and ventilated, cleaned and maintained. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 9.4)

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that they are continually reviewing the restrictions put in place to protect children and others to ensure they remain necessary and proportionate.
- School leaders should ensure that they are supporting children to work towards reducing their risks and the levels of restriction put in place to protect them.
- School leaders should ensure that children's risk assessments specify what risks apply to the residential setting and how staff should respond to them.

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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