

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: 21 to 23 October 2025

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: 30 September 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Relationships between staff and children are warm and supportive. Staff demonstrate a strong understanding of each child's individual needs, despite the wide range of differences. They provide a consistent and reliable support network, particularly during times of difficulty. Children trust staff and feel confident to share their feelings. One child told the inspector, 'They help me keep calm; I am supported really well.'

Staff create fun and enriching experiences for children during their stay in residence. Children are offered choices about the activities they wish to take part in. Recent experiences have included trips to the theatre and visits to gaming shops for figure painting. Staff are proactive in sourcing new opportunities, and recently arranged for children to attend a comic book convention at the weekend, even though the residence was closed. As a result, children have enjoyed new experiences and created positive memories.

Leaders and staff work with families effectively. Parents and carers receive regular updates about how their children are getting on. Leaders share any concerns promptly, enabling families to provide additional support if needed. One parent told the inspector, 'Staff are amazing, friendly and supportive. They offer my child a wealth of activities and care when boarding. [Name of child] has flourished due to this school and the one-night boarding experience. Safeguarding is of a very high standard, as is the well-being and development of my child.'

Staff promote the development of children's independence skills. Each child has individual targets, which are monitored alongside their education, health and care plan objectives. Staff work closely with education colleagues to review the effectiveness of these targets. Children are encouraged to complete tasks in residence, such as cooking for each other and helping their peers. As a result, children are better equipped to manage tasks independently when they leave residence.

Leaders and staff ensure that children's voices are heard. Regular pupil voice meetings enable children to share their views about residence. Wilderness therapy has been introduced to help children reflect on their experiences and learn strategies for maintaining positive mental health. Mealtimes are inclusive and well managed. Children are offered choices about the food they would like during their stay, and alternatives are available if they prefer something different. Children told inspectors that this makes them feel listened to.

The environment has recently been redecorated in some areas. Communal spaces, including the lounge and dining area, have been repainted to create a fresher feel. Bathrooms have been improved to ensure they remain safe and suitable. With the

arrival of new children, additional picture displays are being implemented to enhance the welcoming atmosphere and create a more homely feel.

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

Leaders adopt a robust approach to safeguarding. The senior leadership team works collaboratively to ensure that clear systems are in place. This enables safeguarding concerns to be addressed promptly. As a result, many children told inspectors that they feel safe.

Staff have the skills and experience to identify safeguarding concerns effectively. For example, one staff member confidently raised concerns about a child with the safeguarding leadership team. This information was shared with the child's designated social worker, leading to swift action and improved outcomes for the child both at home and in residence.

The number of incidents in residence is low, and when they do occur, they are of a lower level. An experienced behavioural lead works closely with senior leaders to develop systems that promote improvement across the service. Staff follow children's behavioural management plans, which helps incidents to be de-escalated quickly and reduces the need for physical intervention. When physical intervention is necessary, it is the least restrictive option and used for the shortest possible time. Leaders ensure that children and staff have opportunities to reflect on incidents. This supports staff practice and helps maintain positive relationships between children and staff.

Most staff have regular reviews of their criminal record checks. However, for one staff member who is employed by the school but also carry out some duties within the regulated setting, the Disclosure and Barring Service check has not been reviewed for over six years. As a result, leaders existing systems limit their understanding of all staff continuing suitability to have contact with children.

Information about staff qualifications can sometimes be harder to track, however the staff individual files include details of qualifications, confirming staff are suitably qualified to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The head of care is an inspirational and dedicated leader, supported by an experienced senior leadership team. He remains suitably qualified to guide staff in delivering high-quality care for children.

Leaders maintain strong relationships with other professionals and families. Information about children's progress is routinely shared, and the head of care attends parents' evenings to provide further opportunities for feedback. One professional told the inspector, 'The residence staff are always very vigilant in

communicating information from the night into the day so that, as teachers, we are aware of how our pupils are feeling as they come into school.'

Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate training. Mandatory training is completed at the start of employment, and staff also complete bespoke training, such as on Prader-Willi syndrome. This equips staff with the skills needed to meet children's individual needs.

The provision benefits from regular scrutiny. An independent visitor carries out frequent visits and has developed positive relationships with children and staff. The visitor sets actions that are reviewed by the senior leadership team, ensuring that shortfalls are addressed promptly.

Staff enjoy working with children and feel well supported by leaders. They are enthusiastic about their roles and speak positively about helping children achieve good outcomes. Staff benefit from regular team and individual check-ins, which keep them informed of service developments and provide opportunities to discuss their own professional growth.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should be able to show how they have assured themselves that all staff are safe to work with children.

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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