

Walworth School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Steve Pearson
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Setting address	Walworth School, Bluebell Way, NEWTON AYCLIFFE, County Durham, DL5 7LP
Telephone number	01325 300194
Email	
Registered person	Durham County Council
Head/ Principal	Peter Wallbanks
Nominated person	David Ford
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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

Walworth School provides education and residential care for children of primary and junior school age, who have a statement of special educational needs. The school is located in a residential area on the outskirts of Newton Aycliffe and is easily accessed by road. Acorn House, the school's residential building, is located behind the main school and comprises four residential units, each having its own living and sleeping areas. The number of residential pupils residing at the school may vary during the school week and they stay for two to four nights per week. The school does not provide residential care at weekends or during school holidays. The maximum number of children that may reside at the school is 18.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Overall the quality of care is sound. The staff are effective at promoting the health of children; they enable children to have a full say in the running of the school, and the premises are clean, well maintained and homely. The arrangements in place to enable children to enjoy and achieve in life are excellent. The residential staff work with children during the school time and during their time in the residential units. This enables good levels of consistency. Additionally, children have access to a wide range of activities, and staffing arrangements provide for excellent one-to-one support for each child.

There are 12 recommendations to address following this inspection. There are weaknesses in the assessment of hazards that may affect children, and the assessment of bullying is not comprehensive. Children's emotional needs are not always sought or recorded on admission. This is important information because it relates to the primary needs of children at this school.

Additionally, internal and external monitoring is not robust. Consequently, shortfalls in quality of care are less likely to be identified and addressed in a timely manner.

Nevertheless, children and parents expressed high levels of satisfaction and there are several areas of good or outstanding practice. In particular, the headteacher and staff have a strong ethos of promoting the individuality of each child and they fully support children to be considerate, courteous and mindful of the needs of others.

Improvements since the last inspection

This was an announced, full inspection and so all the key national minimum standards were assessed. The inspection also assessed whether the school had met the two recommendations made at the previous inspection on 28 September 2010.

These were about the policies concerning the administration of medication and the school's child protection procedures.

The arrangements for administration of medication are more robust because the school's written policy now includes the administration of non-prescription medication.

Arrangements for child protection remain less robust because, despite a recommendation at the previous inspection, the child protection policy does not cover the issues recommended by the national minimum standard. Consequently the recommendation has been repeated.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The staff are effective at promoting and supporting children's health.

All residential staff are qualified in the administration of first aid, some to a specialist level. The staff have also received training in the administration of medication. The recording of administration of medication is clear. However, the staff are only recording the administration of controlled drugs in children's case files. They are not also recording the information in a bound controlled drug book. Consequently there is weakened accountability for the administration of significant medication.

Children are well informed about health matters; they take part in many activities which involve exercise, their health needs are described in their residential placement plans and the staff regularly monitor their weight and height. The school has achieved an award for health promotion known as Healthy School status.

The school provides children with ample quantities of varied food and the menus have been approved by a nutritionist. Children said: 'We get plenty of good food and we get a choice. Breakfasts are gorgeous.' Mealtimes are sociable occasions at which children behave well. Children have a say in the design of menus and make suggestions at regular meetings of the school council. The catering staff also adhere to any cultural implications on diet.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The arrangements in place to promote children's safety are sound.

Children have the privacy they need as and when necessary. They can make and receive phone calls in private, they can lock their belongings in their bedroom drawers and the staff promote a culture of rights, responsibilities and consideration for others.

There is a formal complaints procedure but most issues are dealt with quickly and informally by the staff or headteacher. The staff receive regular training in child protection, some to an advanced level. They know and understand how to respond appropriately to any allegations, suspicions or evidence of harm. However, child protection arrangements are not fully robust. Despite a recommendation made at the previous inspection, a significant amount of important information is not mentioned in the school's child protection policy. Consequently the recommendation is repeated at this inspection.

Overall, bullying is not an issue of concern. Some children and staff said there was bullying but it was predominantly name-calling. However, there are some weaknesses in the night-time supervision which mean that not all children feel adequately protected. The structure of the risk assessments means it is also difficult to distinguish between the risk of children being bullied and of bullying others, and the counter-bullying risk assessments are not adequately comprehensive because the seriousness of the effects and strategies to follow are unclear.

Children rarely go absent from the school although appropriate policies and procedures are in place should this happen.

The procedures in place to promote good behaviour are effective. The staff reward children for good behaviour and occasionally give sanctions when behaviour is unacceptable. One young person summed this up by saying: 'Sanctions are fair. If we are very naughty we have to go home. We get rewards for good behaviour and the staff only restrain us for our own safety. If we are naughty the staff give us a second chance.'

The recording and monitoring of sanctions and restraints are effective and regular. However, the effectiveness and consequences of individual sanctions are not being recorded and so there is less assurance that the staff are using sanctions that are appropriate. The staff receive annual training about how to respond to challenging behaviour. This focuses on how to de-escalate challenging behaviour and includes guidance on how to restrain children safely.

The premises are maintained in a safe condition. Professional technicians regularly service the electrical equipment, gas appliances and equipment for preventing, detecting and extinguishing fires. The staff also conduct regular fire drills with the children. However, risk assessments for individual children are not fully robust because the seriousness of hazards is not being estimated and recorded. In addition, the strategies for how to respond to individual hazards are not always clear.

Appropriate arrangements are in place to ensure that staff recruited to work with young people are suitable and safe. Those staff who are involved in recruitment have received relevant training for this role.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The arrangements in place to enable young people to enjoy and achieve are excellent. Residential staff spend some time within classrooms to support children's learning. This allows them to gain insight into the children's levels of ability and see them in a different setting. The residential staff also liaise with teachers at the end of every day before they pick up the children for residence and this brings about continuity of care.

Staff also support children's learning in residence by help with homework, and children have ready access to computers in the evening. There is also a wide variety of books, toys, drawing and colouring materials and the staff often read stories to children at night time. Children are fully involved in programmes to help them develop self-awareness and to consider the needs of others. Such programmes also develop their emotional awareness skills.

The staff excel at meeting the individual needs of children. Each child has a key worker who only works on that child's residential unit. Each key worker is also present in the unit on each night when the child resides there. This means they get to know each child very well. A member of staff has a designated role as a parent support adviser. This helps to ensure very effective communication and understanding of children's needs among the staff team. Each key worker writes up a summary of progress every week and month so that all those relevant people are kept fully informed about children's needs and progress. Children also receive regular support from external agencies such as the child and adolescent mental health service and the speech therapy service. The staff implement the advice of these agencies, which consolidates positive outcomes.

The quality of relationships and support was summed up by what children said. For example, one child said: 'The staff spend one-to-one time with us and we have a key worker but we can go to any member of staff for help.' Another child, who was one of many fully satisfied with the quality of care, said: 'The best thing here is that we are treated like we are part of a family.' Thirteen out of 14 children who completed a survey said they 'strongly agreed' with the statement, 'the boarding staff care about how I am doing'. The other child said they 'agreed' with this. Children's self-worth is boosted because the staff and other children always celebrate the birthday of any child who is in residence on or near the day.

Residential staff make home visits to gain background information about the children. They also take children to various appointments if a parent fails to do so. The school has also identified independent listeners for children's support and there are numerous posters around school indicating the appropriate places where the child can seek help. One parent said: 'As a family we know we need this break and it's great that he loves it in the residential unit. He does lots of fabulous things and he (and we) receive a fabulous service.'

Children have access to a wide variety of leisure activities. Several children who were fully satisfied with the quality of care said this was one of the best aspects of residential care.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The staff are effective in enabling children to have a say in the running of the school and of the residential units, and to have a full say in the content of their own care plans.

For example, one child said: 'We have house meetings and we also have a school council meeting of children so if we have a problem we can mention it to our person and he will bring it up at the meeting. We can also fill in a form to say how we feel and these do work.' Additionally each child has a key worker who regularly spends one-to-one time with them.

Effective arrangements are in place to enable the staff to have the relevant information about a child before they come to the school and the residential unit. However, children's emotional health needs are not always recorded at the time of admission. This means the staff are less informed about this important information. Children and parents or carers are invited to look around the school before the child is admitted. They also receive useful information in a school brochure and children's guide.

Each child in residence has a residential placement plan which describes their needs and how the staff should meet these needs on a day-to-day basis. However, these plans do not routinely describe the racial, religious or cultural needs of each child which means the assessment of needs is not comprehensive. Each child's key worker keeps this plan up-to-date and completes a weekly and monthly review report as well as a report for each child's annual statutory review.

The staff are very effective at promoting contact between children and their families. For example, children are encouraged to phone home each evening and this helps to make children feel settled. In addition, one of the school staff is a parent support adviser and they maintain regular contact with parents. This helps to ensure good continuity of information and is a very helpful role.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The premises of the school and residential units are well maintained and the furnishings and fittings are of a good quality. The premises are clean, the décor is cheerful and the atmosphere is homely. Children have access to useful information on their notice boards. They are involved in personalising the residential units and their bedroom. The staff are effective in enabling children to keep their environment

clean and tidy and there is minimal damage.

The staff use an auditory monitoring system in the residential units to maintain an awareness of any inappropriate behaviour by children when they are expected to be asleep. However, there is not full accountability for the use of this system. Although its use is mentioned in the school's Statement of Purpose, its use is not recorded in children's residential placement plans or specifically approved by the child's placing authority or parent.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The school has a Statement of Purpose which sets out details about the functions of the school and how it operates. Parents are given a brochure about the school and children are also given their own guide. However, the school is not fully informing parents about important information, as the brochure does not provide the telephone numbers of the local authority or Ofsted. This means parents are not being fully supported to contact such agencies in relation to child protection concerns or other matters.

The staffing levels are appropriate and children receive consistent care because the staff work every night that children are in residence. Male and female staff are always on duty together and any shortfalls caused by sickness are covered by other members of school staff. One young person summed up the quality of staffing arrangements by saying: 'There are always plenty of staff on duty and we know them well.'

The residential staff receive regular, recorded one-to-one supervision from a senior member of staff. Suitable supervision arrangements are also in place for the head of care and headteacher. All the staff also receive an annual appraisal of performance and development. The staffing rotas are designed appropriately to enable the staff to conduct handovers, one-to-one time with children, training and recording of information.

There are weaknesses in the internal monitoring of day-to-day care. For example, although someone regularly monitors major incident reports, there is no structure in place to ensure that a senior member(s) of staff signs and records the relevant issues recommended by the national minimum standard every half term or term. The headteacher conducts termly reports for the board of governors about how the school and residential units are operating. However, he does not complete an annual report covering the issues recommended by the national minimum standard.

Similarly there are weaknesses in the monitoring of care by the external person. For example, although they visit the school at least once every half term to monitor other issues as recommended by the standard, they do not always monitor the use of sanctions or complaints that may have arisen. Consequently formal complaints have not been addressed in a timely manner. Additionally, it is unclear when

recommendations made as a result of such visits have been met because a record of when they have been addressed is not being made. While these weaknesses in internal and external monitoring remain, there is less likelihood that improvements in quality of care will take place in a timely manner.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The number and deployment of staff promote consistency of care; each child has a key worker who regularly spends one-to-one time with them, children have regular opportunities to say what they think about how the residential unit and school should be run and they are enabled to say what they feel about their own care plans. The headteacher promotes a culture of consideration for the needs of others and children are rewarded for behaviour where they display good manners and thoughtfulness of others. Children meet every week to consider issues relating to rights, responsibilities and respect for others.

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...

- follow the recommendations of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society regarding the recording of administration of controlled drugs (NMS 14.20)
- ensure the school's procedures for responding to allegations or suspicions of abuse to a child include all the requirements set out at Appendix 1 of the national minimum standards (NMS 5.4)
- ensure that the effectiveness and consequences of sanctions are recorded in the bound book of sanctions (NMS 10.9)
- include a measure of severity when assessing the risks of hazards to young people (NMS 26.3)
- ensure that each child's risk assessment for bullying separately assesses the risk of them being bullied and the risk of them bullying others and take necessary action to reduce or counteract the risk of bullying in the residential units (NMS 6.5)
- ensure that auditory and visual monitoring systems are not used inside the school unless the relevant conditions regarding approval or placement plans are in place (NMS 23.7)
- ensure reasonable efforts are made to obtain all necessary information about a child prior to admission. In particular this relates to information about emotional health needs and issues which may make the child particularly vulnerable or a danger to others (NMS 11.3)
- record children's cultural, religious, language and racial needs in their residential placement plans (NMS 17.5)
- ensure that the headteacher conducts an annual review of the operation and

resourcing of the school's welfare provision for boarding pupils, covering the issues recommended by the national minimum standard (NMS 32.4)

- ensure that the school brochure for parents provides the contact telephone numbers and addresses of the local authority should parents wish to make direct contact in relation to child protection, and of Ofsted for other issues (NMS 31.10)
- ensure that the headteacher, or senior members of staff, monitor and sign the relevant records every half term or every term (as applicable) to identify any concerns and take any actions necessary (NMS 32.2)
- ensure that the external visitor always monitors complaints and the use of sanctions and makes a record when any recommendations or actions arising from the visits are completed. (NMS 33)