

# Walworth School

Walworth School, Bluebell Way, NEWTON AYCLIFFE, County Durham, DL5 7LP

## Inspection dates

03/11/2015 to 05/11/2015

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

**Outstanding** **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is outstanding because

- Children love the residential experience. They participate fully in the life of the residential community and enjoy a range of activities which they find stimulating and rewarding. Living with other children helps them to develop better social skills and form friendships. The structure provided by residence has a direct and highly beneficial impact upon their ability to learn within the classroom. As a result of the excellent quality of care, children make outstanding progress in comparison to their starting points.
- Staff are qualified and very experienced. They are passionate about their work and have high aspirations for children. They take advantage of numerous learning opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills and so help children more effectively. They are highly attuned to the needs of each child and provide close support to them at all times. Children's plans are detailed and regularly reviewed, ensuring that staff act consistently in helping children to overcome their difficulties and make significant progress.
- Children are exceptionally safe in the residential setting, and all say that they feel secure here. The outstanding skills of staff in managing children's behaviour not only keep everyone safe but also help children to learn how to get along with others. It is commendable that staff are able to maintain an orderly, safe, and happy community with minimal need to use physical restraint.

- Leadership and management is outstanding. Residence is seen as an indispensable element in the overall success of the school in achieving good outcomes for children. The head of care is a hands-on, visible leader who is effective in supporting staff to deliver an exceptional service for children. Internal monitoring and external scrutiny is rigorous, enabling managers to identify shortfalls and make improvements.

### **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?

- Improve care plans by setting targets for children which have shorter timescales and are easier for children to understand and achieve.
- Make professional links with providers of similar services in order to further develop and share good practice.

## **Information about this inspection**

The school was given notice of the inspection three hours before it commenced. The inspector met with the headteacher, head of care, residential and support staff, and a number of residential pupils individually and in group activities. All children completed a questionnaire which was returned to the inspector. School policies and procedures, general records and individual case files were scrutinised. In addition, the inspector contacted two parents by telephone. He also observed routines at various times of the day, including breakfast, tea time, and early evening activities.

## **Inspection team**

Nick Murphy

Social care regulatory inspector

# **Full Report**

## **Information about this school**

Walworth School is a maintained residential special school for boys and girls of primary and junior school age, who have a statement of special educational needs or an education health and care plan, and emotional or behavioural difficulties. The school is located in a residential area on the outskirts of Newton Aycliffe. Acorn House, the residential provision, is located behind the main school. The number of children residing at the school each night may vary and they stay for two to four nights each week. The maximum number of children that may reside at the school is 10 and the maximum number of children receiving education is 81. The residential provision was last inspected in October 2014.

## Inspection Judgements

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

**Outstanding**

Residence provides children with a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Comments from children about their time here are consistently positive, for example, 'I like going in the hall to play football and stuff'; 'I love it here, the new beds are good'; 'It is amazing.' There is lots for them to do, ranging from arts and crafts, to playing in the gym, to visits to parks and playgrounds. They have access to devices such as tablets and games consoles but staff limit the time they can play on these, encouraging more creative activities. The school allotment is a new venture for this year, children taking great pleasure in sowing seeds and watching the growth of fruit and vegetables (including parsnips, beetroot, strawberries and salads). Most of the children's time is spent in groups of varying sizes, and it is in social interaction where they show the greatest improvements in behaviour and attitude. Staff encourage children to share with each other, take turns, and consider the needs of their peers. Records of weekly and monthly progress clearly demonstrate the development in children's ability to get on with other children. One said, 'I like to play with the other kids, I have a lot of friends here, also loads in the day school.' However, children also have opportunity to spend time alone, with discreet oversight by staff at all times.

Children also develop their self-care skills and ability to regulate sleeping patterns. Parents report that this improvement continues at home. One said of their child, 'He has a bedtime routine here which settles him. Staff have talked to us about this, we use it at home, and it works brilliantly.' Achieving greater stability is key to the significant progress that residential children make in the classroom. Analysis of attainment levels across the school, although not a straightforward exercise, demonstrates that children who stay over do better than their peers who attend from home. This is because of the predictability of routine and structure in the residential house which means that children start the school day alert and well-prepared to learn.

Relationships between staff and children are excellent. Children enjoy the attention of staff and many take pleasure and comfort in simply sitting next to a member of staff on the sofa. Boundaries within residence are clear, staff helping children to understand the limits placed on their behaviour in simple language. For example, staff require simply that children act with kindness towards each other, or allow another to take the first turn on a game. Some children find these expectations very difficult to adhere to, but even so they begin to develop understanding of what is required when living in a group.

The residential provision is well staffed, with sufficient adults to maintain oversight of all the young people and ensure that the house runs smoothly. Group activities are closely supervised to ensure that all children, no matter what their limitations, have the opportunity to enjoy them safely. One gym session involved around ten children and three staff. It was expertly led by a member of staff who made sure that all the children had their turn, with much laughter and excitement. The inevitable tantrums which occurred from time to time were managed without fuss by other staff. They had a quiet word with the individual who then returned to the game a few minutes later.

Children are able to make their voices heard. Regular meetings enable children to express their views about day-to-day issues in residence, for example, what activities they would like to try. The bedrooms have recently been refurbished, and children's input has been sought and listened to. Many children said they didn't like big wardrobes with doors (they found them frightening at night), so new units were custom-made without doors. The children love these, and appreciate the inclusion of a small lockable compartment.

Children are in excellent health. They benefit from additional services provided by health professionals such as occupational therapy (OT). Some staff have undertaken training in aspects of OT and also relaxation therapies. Using these techniques has proved extremely beneficial for children, helping them to become calmer and more receptive to learning. Staff work closely with children and adolescent mental health services, for example, in reviewing medication levels. Arrangements for medication have been completely overhauled since the last inspection, resulting in a system which is safe and preserves the dignity and privacy of children.

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

### **Outstanding**

Each child has a detailed care plan which is individually tailored to their needs. It is updated on a regular basis as the child develops or new needs are identified. Children are fully involved with their plans through regular individual discussions with their key workers. They are set targets to aim for, mostly in the area of social relationships, and their success in achieving these is linked to an incentive scheme. Some targets are too broad, and would be more effective if they were broken down into smaller, more attainable goals.

Staff are exceptionally caring, tolerant and patient, and build trusting relationships with children. This means that children are more likely to take heed of staff's advice and support in managing their day-to-day lives within residence and the wider school. Staff understand the value of getting children into routines and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own care. They know that this will have a positive spin-off into their progress in social and academic development. They help those children that need it with simple tasks like bathing, combing their hair, and dressing, but always with the aim of the children becoming self-sufficient. Because of their detailed knowledge of each child, staff are able to take account of their individual differences or disabilities. This ensures that each can participate fully in the life of the community. For example, staff have provided one child with autism a pictorial representation of his daily routine. This gives him reassurance and predictability and helps him to be less distracted and worried both in residence and in the classroom. Staff are also skilled in using 'social stories' to help children develop empathy and understanding. For example, acting out a scenario with a child's teddy bear to illustrate the impact of the child's behaviour that day on others.

Transition into and out of the residential provision is exceptionally well-planned. Staff are fully involved in gathering information from teachers, parents and carers. Introductions are phased over a period of time to get the child used to the idea of staying away from home. This attention to detail ensures that children are completely prepared for the experience. Staff have excellent links with the residential secondary schools which some children move on to. Again, planning for these transitions is thorough and centred around the needs of each child. Staff have very effective communication with parents, working with the school's parental support adviser to ensure that residence is a productive experience for children. Where families have particular difficulties, care staff are key members of regular meetings with other professionals to plan programmes of support for both parents and children.

Staff help children to develop awareness of wider society. Children contribute to fund-raising activities for charity, such as baking cakes for coffee mornings. Trips outside the school ensure that children do not become isolated, as sometimes is the case when they are at home. One parent said, 'It's good that staff take my child out on activities. It gives him the taste of being out in the open world and interacting with more people, which he doesn't often do at home.'

## How well children and young people are protected

## Outstanding

The school is outstandingly effective at protecting residential children from harm. The site is exceptionally safe. Its physical security and the oversight of staff reduces risk to children while ensuring that their liberty is not restricted unnecessarily. There has never been an incident of a child going missing from the school in recent history. Children are completely confident that they can tell anyone if they have any concerns. One child said, 'If I had a problem or a complaint I would talk to any of the staff'. This extends to people beyond the school staff, for example, the independent visitor and the independent listener. Both these people are regular visitors and well known to the children in residence. This adds an important additional safeguard should a child feel uncomfortable in speaking to their carers or teachers.

Each child has a risk assessment which is concise and clear, setting out measures to control particular risks for that individual. The key to the highly effective management of threats to children's safety is the attentiveness of staff. For example, bullying is extremely well controlled through staff's consistent oversight of the interaction between children. They are expert in foreseeing situations which may lead to friction and take proactive steps to avoid them. This may be as simple as asking a child to put a bit more space between him and another on the sofa, or moving quickly to put their physical presence between two children. If a child is becoming distressed or aggressive, staff distract or divert their attention, calming potential flashpoints. Staff are also constantly talking to children, reminding them of the right way to behave, to show others consideration and respect, and praising them for acts of kindness, however small. This constant positive attention from staff reassures children and makes them know they are well looked after. One said, 'I feel safe here all the time. Bullying? No, it's not a problem. If it happened I know staff would sort it.'

The children who stay in residence have some profound and long-established behavioural difficulties. Sound organisation of the residential community, and the exceptional skills of care staff in managing behaviour, are key to the success that children have in achieving good outcomes. It starts with thoughtful consideration given to the mix of children who attend each night, and which particular bedrooms they occupy. This ensures that children are compatible and that differences in age or ability do not lead to bullying. Good behaviour is rewarded via the incentive scheme, which is linked to individual care plan targets rather than general benchmarks. Children look forward to seeing how they have performed, and strive to achieve the rewards on offer. Because of the success of this positive approach to managing behaviour, sanctions are rarely needed. Even more rare is the need to use physical restraint to keep people or property safe.

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

The residential provision is exceptionally well organised and managed. The head of care promotes the child-centred ethos consistently and visibly, invariably working directly with children alongside the other staff. This reinforces the wraparound care which enables children to progress and keeps them safe. The staff team is experienced and highly skilled. They work in a culture which is transparent and open to new ideas. They reflect on their own practice and are comfortable in constructively challenging that of their colleagues (including the head of care). This ensures the highest standards of child care are maintained.

Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal. They are also supported by a comprehensive training programme which keeps their skills and knowledge up to date. Staff think creatively about fresh approaches and what additional training they might need or where they could use research to help particular children. For example, staff have worked to enhance their knowledge of autism. This has meant that they can help one child communicate more effectively and so enable their underlying learning disability to be more effectively addressed.

The headteacher regards the residential provision as an integral part of the school, with the head of care having equal status in the school's management team. All points for improvement made at the previous inspection have been fully addressed. Furthermore, the school volunteered earlier this year to undergo a pilot inspection as part of the introduction of the new inspection framework. Requirements and recommendations made at that inspection have also been fully embraced by the school, directly contributing to the outstanding quality of the service to children.

Leaders and managers use a variety of tools to monitor the performance and operation of the residential provision. They have development plans in place to systematically address areas where further improvements can be made. External monitoring is extremely robust. The independent visitor takes time to talk to children and staff on her visits, evaluating the quality of care and the effectiveness of safeguarding practice. In addition, the school has recently appointed a governor with substantial relevant experience to have particular responsibility for residence. This provides additional strong governance and independent oversight. Contact with other residential schools is centred on transition planning for individual children. It would be beneficial for the head of care to develop links with other,

similar providers. This would enable the school to be keep abreast of developments in the sector and share best practice.

## 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>	114341
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC040510
<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>	81
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	4 to11
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Peter Wallbanks
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	22/10/2014
<b>Telephone number</b>	01325 300194
<b>Email address</b>	walworth@durhamlearning.net

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