

Walworth School

Walworth School, Bluebell Way, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham DL5 7LP

Inspection dates

13/09/2016 to 15/09/2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good **2**

The quality of care and support

Good 2

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good 2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- Children enjoy their residential experience. They have good relationships with staff and with each other. The residential unit is furnished and decorated to a high standard. Staff have added child-friendly pictures and furnishings to give the unit a homely feel. Children are consulted and listened to and they are encouraged to make everyday choices. Activities are varied and enhance children's experiences.
- Children are learning and progressing as a result of their residential care. Their school attendance has improved very much and their academic achievements are growing. Staff teach children independence skills, which include practical tasks and how to empathise and socialise with their peers. Children are safe, and staff manage their behaviour positively.
- Staff work closely with school colleagues and other professionals, which provides children with good, holistic support. Parents feel that they are included and valued in their children's care. Regular inter-school meetings and open channels of communication with external agencies provide children with stability and consistency.
- Leadership and management are strong. There is a strong ethos that children come first. Staff receive the training that they need and they feel very well supported. Monitoring is robust and drives improvement.

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 children's care plans, including behaviour management and healthcare plans, to fully describe all the children's known needs. Additionally, staff should include information about the children's successes and progress. Staff should support children who wish to have access to their files.

Information about this inspection

The inspector advised the school of the inspection three hours before the visit commenced. Discussions took place with the headteacher, head of care, residential and support staff and a number of residential pupils. Pupils were observed, and the inspector joined them for meals. School policies and procedures, general records and individual case files were reviewed. In addition, the inspector contacted parents by telephone.

Inspection team

Debbie White

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Walworth School is a maintained residential special school, which provides education and residential care for boys and girls of primary and junior school age. The children have statements of special educational needs and emotional or behavioural difficulties. The school is located in a residential area on the outskirts of Newton Aycliffe. 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 school does not provide residential care at weekends or during school holidays. The maximum number of children that may reside at the school is 10 and the maximum number of children receiving education is 72. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2015.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Children speak highly of their residential experience. They enjoy spending time with their friends and joining in activities. Children think that the staff are caring and that they treat children fairly and equally. A recent school survey shows that 100% of children enjoy their residential stays and 94% of parents say that the residential experience is a good experience for their child.

A child said about his residential stays, 'It's great. It's the best. I love it here.' A parent said, 'It's absolutely brilliant. They have really helped my child. I would give them 100%. They are all fantastic.'

Staff endeavour to engage children to initiate and develop meaningful, trusting relationships. Their nurturing approach encourages children to relax and feel settled during their residential stays. Consistent, fair boundaries help children to feel emotionally secure and familiar routines offer children a sense of stability. This builds children's self-confidence and self-esteem.

A parent said, 'Residential is the best thing since sliced bread. The change in my child is amazing. He is so much more confident and gets on much better with other children.'

Staff are very good role models and teach children socially acceptable behaviours. They show children how to communicate effectively and how to self-regulate their behaviours, which is sometimes challenging. This important aspect of learning and self-development is having a positive impact. Children are developing good peer friendships and are gaining a good understanding of communal living. These experiences enhance children's social skills, both now and in the future, as they grow into adulthood.

Spending time at the residential unit supports children to progress in school. This is starting to show positive results. Parents report that their children are better engaged in school since starting the residential experience. For some children, behaviours at home are also improving. The stability of boarding and individual support in behaviours are helping children to feel calmer and happier within themselves.

A parent said, 'Before [Name] came here, I couldn't get him to do anything. He used to totally ignore me. He is so much better now, and that's down to the staff.'

Children are consulted, and their views are important. Staff know the children's likes and dislikes, interests, and aspirations. Children are encouraged to make day-to-day choices, which takes their wishes into account. This promotes their rights and equality. Children contribute their ideas about how the residential unit should work. They have children's meetings and one-to-one key-worker sessions. This open dialogue teaches children that their thoughts and ideas are important.

Children are safe and they stay in this environment. Staff observe and supervise children and they manage risks well. For example, children have the freedom to take age-appropriate risks, such as exploring the environment and playing on the outside play equipment. This allows children to participate in everyday childhood experiences. Leadership and management are strong. This means that children have their residential stays in a stable, well-organised environment.

A parent said, 'My child is very safe. He loves climbing, playing outside and going to the park. He can be clumsy. I know staff keep a close eye on him.'

The quality of care and support

Good

There are a number of good examples of children receiving good, individualised care and support. Staff focus on good outcomes and know the children very well. Written care plans include an overview of children's general needs, histories and contact information. However, the plans lack some details. For example, some plans do not fully explain children's healthcare needs, and a mediocre approach to evaluating care plans has resulted in a lack of acknowledgement of children's progress and achievements. Children know that they have files and that staff write things about them, but they do not have an opportunity to see their information. During a group discussion, all the children said that they would like to see what staff write about them.

Children's pastoral guidance and support are very good. Experienced staff know the importance of forming meaningful relationships with children. They endeavour to form trusting bonds that help children to open up and talk about how they are feeling. Some children have experienced early trauma, and having a trusted adult to talk to is vital to their emotional well-being. All the children spoken to said that they can talk to staff about their worries and that they feel the staff care about them. Children have access to a range of caring, trusting adults in the school. There is a drop-in facility where children can talk to a staff member in private. An independent visitor calls into the residential unit at regular intervals. These proactive measures provide good emotional support.

A child said, 'The staff are good, and I would talk to them if I was worried.'

Children also form bonds and friendships with their peers. For some children, who have no friends outside school, this is a very positive outcome.

A parent said, '[Name] is doing really well. He loves staying and has made new friends. This is really good for him.'

Children stay in high-quality accommodation. The unit is furnished and decorated to a good standard and is warm, relaxed and homely. Each child has their own bedroom that they can personalise. Children are clearly settled and comfortable during their residential stays and treat the unit as a family home. There are extensive grounds where children enjoy free play, and there is ample outdoor play equipment and a football pitch. Children particularly enjoy outside activities in which they can run freely and join in imaginative play.

A child said, 'We can play at the park, and there are bikes and go-carts. The park is my favourite.'

Meals are varied and nutritional. Children share their food likes and dislikes and are consulted about menus. Mealtimes are relaxed and social occasions. Special dietary needs are catered for.

A child said, 'The dinners are good, and we get plenty to eat. They ask what we like. I like everything.'

Children have access to the healthcare services that they need. School staff work closely with external agencies to support children who need additional input. Regular, multi-disciplinary care meetings ensure that staff are aware of any situations that may impact on a child's emotional state or their behaviour, for example, if a child is receiving counselling or psychological support. This wrap-around care nurtures children. Children's primary healthcare needs and well-being are very well catered for. There are facilities available for children who are unwell, and staff are trained to safely administer medication.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Children are safe during their residential stays. All staff receive regular safeguarding training and know what to do if they are worried or concerned about a child's safety or well-being. There are robust procedures to record and share concerns with appropriate agencies. Designated safeguarding leaders ensure that children's safety is paramount. Good health and safety measures and regular safety checks ensure that the environment is safe and secure. This meaningful, vigilant approach protects children from harm. Children know how to complain and feel that they can talk to staff. Staff regularly ask them whether they are worried about anything and encourage children to share their views. There have been no incidents of children going missing and no reports of bullying behaviour. Children know about e-safety, and no children are at risk from exploitation.

A parent said, 'I have no worries. I know my child is safe. Staff treat the children like their own. I trust them completely.'

Staff are very skilled at managing behaviour. Knowing the children well, they can see when possible conflicts may arise and they act to divert potential challenges. Staff talk to the children about acceptable behaviours and how their behaviours impact on those around them. The head of care is very aware of any potentially disruptive interpersonal relationships forming and gently steers children away from harmful situations.

Positive behaviour is moulded by giving children lots of positive feedback, praise and rewards. Children respond well to this way of managing behaviour, and they feel valued. Their self-esteem grows, and this builds up their confidence. All staff are trained to hold children safely. Restraints rarely occur and, when they do, they are carried out for the right reasons. Detailed records are available for scrutiny. This ensures that leaders and managers have a good oversight of all physical interventions. Children have written behaviour management plans, but these are vague in places and lack important details. For example, specific techniques to avoid restraining individual children and their preferred restraint are not set out clearly.

Robust recruitment procedures and safety checks ensure that trusted adults care for the children. All visitors to the school have their identification checked and vetted and, when appropriate, staff accompany them around the school. Staff teach children about the danger of strangers and that they should not take unnecessary risks with their safety. These actions promote children's well-being.

Leaders and managers are skilled and put the children and their outcomes at the heart of their practice. The residential unit is very well organised and efficient. Leaders and managers throughout the school work very well together as a united team. There is open communication and there are regular management meetings. This provides children with good, consistent care and support. The residential staff team members work very well together and focus on children's needs. They consistently strive to ensure that children enjoy their residential time so that they develop and progress. All the residential staff and the head of care have the right qualifications and experience that they need to carry out their roles effectively.

A staff member said, 'I love working here and I wouldn't want to work anywhere else. It's all about the children, making sure they are happy and that they have a good time.'

Staff receive both formal and informal supervision regularly. Yearly staff appraisals celebrate staff's achievements and evaluate areas for their professional development. Staff have access to a range of training and they keep themselves professionally updated. This provides children with a skilled workforce. New starters undergo an induction period and are supported and mentored during this process. The head of care is very supportive to new staff. She regularly monitors their competencies to ensure that they feel ready to work unsupervised.

A new staff member said, 'The support is very good, and all the staff are kind and helpful.'

Communication with parents is very good. Staff support parents and families and work closely with a designated member of school staff whose role is to act as a family support worker. This partnership working is highly effective and enhances the lives of children and their families. Professional relationships are also very good. This enables a good understanding of children's needs and of how these will be met.

A parent said, 'I can talk to the staff about anything. They are very supportive. They ring me to keep me updated, and all the staff are lovely.'

Comprehensive policies and procedures that staff are familiar with underpin good childcare practice. Staff further improve their knowledge by seeking additional guidance that relates to child development and residential care in schools. This proactive attitude shows that staff are constantly improving their knowledge and understanding. This translates into improved care and support.

A staff member said, 'We all have additional responsibilities, and it's important we keep up to date. I really enjoy learning new things and new skills. It all benefits the children.'

There are thorough systems in place to monitor the performance of the residential unit and outcomes for children. This drives improvement. The head of care actively seeks to develop services for children, to further enrich their lives. External audits of the residential unit also add to improving outcomes for children.

A governor with added responsibility for the residential unit said, 'I have had regular contact with residential for a long time and have seen many changes over the years. The head of care is always amenable to suggestions, and there is evidence to support the view that children are developing.'

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 exceed the standard of good and result 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's 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 that children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Social care unique reference number SC040510

DfE registration number

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.

Type of school	Residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	72
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	Four to11
Headteacher	Mr Peter Wellbanks
Date of previous boarding inspection	15/11/2015
Telephone number	01325 300194
Email address	walworth@durhamlearning.net

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