

Saxon Hill

Saxon Hill Special School, Kings Hill Road, LICHFIELD, Staffordshire WS14 9DE

Inspection dates

07/03/2017 to 09/03/2017

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 their residential experience and make exceptional progress from their starting points.
- Children's self-esteem and social development benefit enormously from their social interaction and involvement in a wide range of stimulating and fun activities.
- Dedicated staff provide exceptional child-focused care, which enables parents to feel confident when their child has overnight stays.
- Highly skilled and committed staff enable children to communicate in their own individual way and to confidently express their views, wishes and feelings.
- Staff support children to exceed expectations, and all achievements, no matter how small, are enthusiastically celebrated.
- Highly trained staff ensure that children are safe, and that their often highly complex health needs are always met.
- Governors, staff and managers constantly work together to drive up standards, and to improve the residential experience and positive outcomes for children.
- There are three areas for improvement. The positive impact of the residential experience on children's educational progress is not sufficiently highlighted in the six-monthly residential reviews. References are not sought for governors when they are appointed. Written references that are received for job applicants are not verified.

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?

- Ensure that the impact of the residential provision on children's progress in education is reported in the six-monthly residential review.
- Ensure that references are sought when appointing governors.
- Ensure that all written references for job applicants are verified by telephone.

Information about this inspection

The inspection of residential and welfare arrangements took place following the appropriate notice period for this type of visit. Two inspectors carried out the visit and reviewed the policies, documentation, residential provision and organisation over a period of three days. The inspectors spoke to governors, senior leaders, managers, key support staff, residential staff and children. Two evenings were spent in the residential accommodation observing staff and children's interactions and activities. Inspectors also joined children at breakfast time, lunchtime and for an evening meal. In addition, the inspectors sought feedback from parents and professionals.

Inspection team

Louise Whittle	Lead social care inspector
Jo Stephenson	Social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Saxon Hill is an academy. The school is for children who have a wide range of physical, complex medical, associated sensory, communication and learning difficulties. Children are mostly from south Staffordshire. The school is located in a suburban area, approximately one mile from Lichfield city centre. The school is part of the council's physical disability support service that offers support to people outside the school via in-house and outreach work. The school has a 14-bed unit called 'the sleepover club' that offers individually-based overnight care to children of the school who are aged between 2 and 19 years. There is a dedicated team of care staff that operates independently of, but in close liaison with, the teaching staff and other staff. The sleeping accommodation comprises of six twin bedrooms and two single rooms. There are currently 93 children on roll, of which 40 currently access overnight residential provision one night per week.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Children love their residential experience in the sleepover club, which has an immensely positive impact on their social and educational development. Their progress is quantifiable and measurable, and children significantly improve their communication, motor skills, confidence and self-esteem. The highly creative and committed staff and head of care constantly think 'outside the box'. For example, they use research-based practice to offer dance massage to possibly stimulate residual hearing and teach children the process of learning to anticipate, listen and respond. This makes an outstanding contribution to every area of children's development and activities.

There is a 'can do' ethos of enabling every child to engage in activities, such as making and decorating paper boxes to put cookies in. No child is excluded, and the highly skilled staff enable every child to achieve, in-keeping with their ability. The least physically able children can put paint on their hands to decorate the boxes and more physically able children enjoy folding and sticking the paper.

Communication is key to supporting children to express their views, wishes and feelings, and has been a focus for staff development since the last inspection. Based on recent research, staff have been given time to undertake observations of individual children, which has led to even better understanding of how each child communicates. Children are very confident to express themselves, and staff provide them with highly skilled assistance using a wide range of communication tools, which are specific to the children's needs. Children feel that staff listen to them and respond positively to questions and requests.

One parent commented, 'I have two children that attend Saxon Hill and it is a brilliant school. Our children have come on physically and mentally, way beyond our expectations as parents, communication is brilliant between class and parents, and you're made to feel very welcome when popping into school unexpectedly. We cannot praise the staff and leadership enough they do a fantastic job and I would highly recommend Saxon Hill Academy (as we have already done) to any of our friends.'

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The sleepover club is a welcoming, stimulating and well-maintained homely environment, where children can relax before and after school. Extensive fundraising by the school has led to the décor being recently updated, and staff ensured that children were actively involved in the decisions over how changes should be made to the decor.

Staff consistently treat children with dignity and respect in all areas of their care. Staff have nurturing relationships with children, who engage with staff exceptionally well. Children's views are listened to and incorporated into every aspect of their stay. Staff know the children very well and demonstrate a strong awareness of their needs. Staff demonstrate the ability to communicate these needs to other staff in a way that is seamless, fluid and child-focused.

Dedicated staff enable children to express their views wishes and feelings in creative and highly effective ways. The KISS (**K**eep / **I**mprove / **S**top / **S**tart) audit engages children in consultation and feedback on the service they receive. Staff undertake individual sessions for all children, based on their communication needs. For example, children are consulted in a 'happiness audit', which evidences the positive impact of the service on achieving the desired outcomes for children.

Partnership working between staff, parents, and school and health professionals is excellent, providing consistent and integrated care. Staff undertake sensitive and thorough planning for each individual child, enabling them to experience a smooth transition in and out of the residential service. This reduces anxieties for children and their parents and ensures that they get the most they can from sleepover club.

Staff fully understand the need for parents to feel assured that their highly vulnerable children will receive the best care and attention. The overarching theme from consultation with parents is the great importance of communication between them and the staff. Excellent communication with parents and families, and detailed, accurate internal care planning and transition documents ensure that admission and transition out is supportive for children and their families.

Enthusiastic staff provide children with a wide range of stimulating activities that are safe, but proportionally so, allowing the children to explore new experiences and have fun. Evening meal times are a focus for children to enjoy social interactions. They all sit together at the large table with staff, and there is a lively atmosphere with a lot of chatting, listening to music, singing and clapping. Music is clearly very important and one child confidently sign sang her favourite song from 'Frozen' at the school assembly, accompanied by staff and other children. A parent governor stated, 'I have never seen an unhappy child here.'

A staff member skilfully supported one child with a communication book to say how much she enjoys the sleepover club. She especially likes the food, sitting together at mealtimes, and having fun with the staff. She was keen to say that she loves the bedrooms and always feels safe here.

Children's health is a priority and the focus of staff's interventions with them at all times. Staff are trained to recognise, understand and support the complex healthcare needs of each child, in close collaboration with healthcare professionals. Staff are aware of the discomfort experienced by many of the children on a daily basis, and work hard to make them as comfortable as possible during their time in residence.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Vigilant staff are focused on safety at all times. Staff listen carefully to children which is key to keeping them safe. There is a strong culture of effective communication, which includes the residential staff and school staff, the cook and transport drivers, managers, nurses, education staff, social workers and families. Safeguarding is strongly supported by this ongoing communication, which provides staff with daily updates on any issues that might affect the children's safety. It helps ensure that any potential safeguarding issues are identified, communicated and acted upon quickly. Staff are trained in all areas

of child protection, safeguarding and individual care needs.

Highly trained staff undertake thorough and detailed risk assessments including initial assessments, which include significant input from parents and families. Risk assessments for sharing bedrooms and for activities are reviewed and updated regularly and as necessary. The administration and storage of medication is monitored robustly, ensuring that children receive their prescribed medication safely.

The management group maintains a safeguarding chronology, which is an excellent management tool for monitoring the well-being of children and ensuring that any issues are recognised early and responded to quickly. Any patterns of concerns of safeguarding issues are identified in regular managerial reviews, and appropriate multi-agency action is taken, for example, to support families.

Parent feedback about the safety of their children is exceptionally positive. Parents say that their children are safe and well protected, and this gives parents confidence in the service. Children are kept safe and say that they feel very safe. Staff work with the children to help them understand bullying and health and safety around the home. The children are very clear about what to do in a fire and each has a good personal evacuation plan. Staff present children with scenarios, such as a fire starting, and talk them through how to react. Children enjoy taking part, and in turn this ensures that they are fully prepared if they need to evacuate the sleepover club. The environment is spacious and safe, and accidents are minor and tend to relate to children being independent and, for example, banging an arm when going through doors or running over someone's feet with a wheelchair.

Strong communication supports safe staff recruitment, with new staff often already being known to the school. Managers have recently completed refresher training in safe recruitment. Statutory checks are undertaken and references, both written and telephone, are obtained for all prospective employees. However, the recruitment processes does not currently include the verification of written references by telephone.

Staff are highly trained in all areas of child protection, safeguarding and individual care needs. They are fully aware of the increased vulnerability of children who have complex needs, and are alert to the risks of child sexual exploitation, radicalisation and cyber-bullying.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The head of care is experienced, highly committed and inspirational. She motivates staff to give their best, and continually looks to improve the service through effective monitoring and evaluation. The residential service is well managed and the head of care has a detailed knowledge of the service and of each of the children and families who use it.

Staff are very experienced and skilled. They are clear about their roles and work to the high standards that are expected of them by the managers. They understand the ethos and aims of the residential provision, and are enthusiastic and passionate about the service. Staff continually demonstrate their commitment to the child-focused nature

of the service, and it is embedded in their practice. Staff have an excellent knowledge of children's individual needs and how best to meet them. Staff have an aspirational attitude towards the children and celebrate all of their successes.

Staff supervision and training are relevant, ongoing and effective. They work in partnership with a wide range of professionals, including speech and language therapists, social workers, education and health professionals, to provide children with care that addresses all aspects of their needs. The information held on case files for children is up to date and focused, and ensures that children receive the bespoke care that they need.

The senior leadership team values the quality assurance provided by independent scrutiny from the independent visitor, governors and peer reviews. The information provided is used to inform the development of the service to drive up standards even further. In addition, feedback from children, staff, and parents provides valuable information about all aspects of the sleepover club and its impact on outcomes for children. Children's records evidence the positive impact that accessing the sleepover club has on children's educational development and attainment. However, the management team does not highlight this in the six-monthly residential reviews. This hinders the management team in identifying areas for further development.

Ongoing improvements in the service include the continued development of the 'happiness audit' in order to assess the happiness of children who have additional learning and support needs. This involves staff undertaking very detailed observation sessions of children who have the most complex needs.

Professionals constantly praise the service and the positive impact that it has on children's development, growth and achievements. The social worker for a number of children who attend the sleepover club says that parents trust the staff and the sleepover club, and speak very highly of the head of care. She comments that all of the children she works with who attend the sleepover club make good progress. She feels that the staff have an excellent understanding of the children's needs. She considers that the service is very child-focused, and cannot think of anything that could be improved on.

All minimum standards are met, and there are three areas for improvement identified as a result of this inspection.

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

Unique reference number	142094
Social care unique reference number	SC038728
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	93
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	2 to 19
Headteacher	Jon Thickett
Date of previous boarding inspection	01/03/2016
Telephone number	01543 414 892
Email address	headteacher@saxonhill.staffs.sch.uk

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