

# Walworth School

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

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Walworth School is a maintained residential special school that provides education and residential care for boys and girls of primary and junior school age who have social and/or emotional and/or mental health difficulties. The school is located in a residential area on the outskirts of Newton Aycliffe. 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 last residential provision inspection took place in September 2016.

**Inspection dates:** 23 to 25 January 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 13 September 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- The children receive excellent individualised support that meets their needs. They are all making progress as a direct result of their residential experiences. Relationships between the children and the staff are nurturing and meaningful.
- The children have access to a wide range of enjoyable, purposeful activities. The staff regularly consult the children and include them in decisions about how their residential unit operates. The children are achieving their potential at school, and they have access to a range of services to meet their health needs.
- The children are significantly benefiting from the school increasing their in-house provision of qualified staff who provide professional, bespoke therapeutic care and support. Transitions into, and from, the school are extremely well planned.
- Behaviour management is outstanding. The school's ethos to manage behaviour positively intertwines through all aspects of the children's care and education. The children are safe and risk management is effective.
- Leaders and managers focus on delivering high-quality care that consistently leads to improved outcomes for the children. The staff team is committed, and staff strive to improve the children's experiences and opportunities. Support for parents and families is very good.
- The school has progressed by meeting a previous area for improvement. Monitoring is thorough and leads to future positive developments. Meaningful consultation with the children is a high priority.
- All the staff, throughout the school, highly respect the children and maintain their rights and their dignity. As a result, the children's equality and diversity are paramount.

There are no areas for development identified at this inspection.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

The children receive consistent, highly individualised care and support that meet their needs. The staff know the children extremely well, and they understand and respect each child's individuality. Relationships between the children and the staff are extremely nurturing, which enables them to form positive bonds and attachments. As a result, the children feel valued, wanted and cared about. This increases their confidence, their self-esteem and their overall feelings of positive well-being.

A child said: 'I like it here and I like the staff and I like coming to the residential. I like my bedroom and I think [Name of the residential unit] is the best place to stay.'  
A parent said: 'My son would not be where he is today without the residential. His independence skills are massively improved and he is doing things that he could not do before. The staff know what they are doing and they have given me some very useful tips.'

All the children are thriving and they are making exceedingly good progress, both socially and educationally. The staff are excellent role models, and their calm demeanour creates a soothing environment that has a settling effect on the children. The staff maintain appropriate boundaries that teach the children good social skills. The evening routines echo those of a family home, and the children respond enthusiastically to their plans for each evening. For the children who struggle with routines, this way of working teaches them empathy skills and how to think about being considerate to others. A child said: 'We are always busy here. I like suppertime because we all get to sit together and watch a movie while we eat our toast. We are like a family.'

The staff have introduced individualised child-friendly residential plans, written with the involvement of the children. They are in a format that the children can understand and have a section where the children can keep photographs of their residential experiences. The children have ownership of their plans, which they keep in their bedrooms. During a group discussion with the children, they all said that they are very proud of their files and their photographs.

All the children rate activities as 'one of the best things about residential'. The staff use innovative and creative ideas to engage the children in a wide range of varied activities that are both enjoyable and educational. The staff encourage the children's natural curiosity to explore and think about a variety of important topics through play. As a result, the children are learning and socially developing in a very positive way.

Examples of outstanding activities include a 'wilderness expedition' when the children learned about teamwork and carried out complex tasks such as raft building. Activities also include cooking, using produce that they have grown themselves,

educational evenings when they learn about mental health and e-safety and taking part in fund-raising events for their nominated charity. A member of staff said: 'We have a nominated charity who support children and young people with mental health issues. The children know about the charity and they are proud to raise money for them. We had an education evening so that the children know what the charity is about. We are really proud of them and their efforts.'

The school has made extraordinary progress to support children who have emotional, behavioural and/or psychological needs. A financial investment to buy in services from a range of qualified professionals to form a school-based multi-disciplinary team gives the children, and their parents, direct access to specialist support. The staff involved include a qualified registered psychiatric nurse, a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist and an educational psychologist. All these professionals register with their relevant professional bodies, and their specialist input is underpinned by evidence and research-based practice. Although this initiative is a relatively new addition, early feedback has highlighted exceedingly positive outcomes for the children.

A further enhancement to the therapeutic support for the children is providing additional training for the head of care to be involved in a new initiative called 'connecting with children'. This involves the head of care having one-to-one sessions with the children, in which the children can communicate through play. The educational psychologist oversees this therapy and supervises all the staff involved. He also monitors the children's progress by using a range of assessments that measure the impact of the sessions. This is outstanding, individualised support.

The staff throughout the school are extremely skilled and experienced in positively managing the children's behaviour. The children's general conduct is excellent as a direct result of the staff's caring and consistent behaviour management style. The whole school environment is extremely child friendly. There are children's art projects and numerous photographs of smiling children who have experienced significant progress displayed throughout the school and the residential unit. This actively celebrates the children's progress.

The school also focuses strongly on rewards and incentives. To positively demonstrate the children's success, there are numerous photographs of the children who have gained awards, such as pupil of the week. This positive theme carries over to the residential unit. There are various awards that the children can 'win'. The children were very proud to show off their 'star charts' that are filled with numerous stars and 'smiley stickers'. This positively signals to children their very good achievements.

The staff provide very good support to the children starting school, who will be having residential stays, and those children who are leaving school. The staff plan all transitions in accordance with the children's individual needs, and parents are fully involved in the process. For children new to the residential unit, the staff plan introductory visits at each child's pace. This supports the children and their parents

during what can be an anxious time in their lives, and good individualised care ensures a smooth transition.

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

The staff throughout the school prioritise the safety and the well-being of the children. There are four designated officers who take responsibility for any safeguarding concerns. The school's child protection policy fully sets out how to respond to any suspicions of abuse. All the staff receive regular child protection training and they know what to do if they have any concerns about a child's welfare. No child protection referrals have been made since the last inspection.

There are currently no children at risk of exploitation, extremism or radicalisation. There have been no instances of children going missing, and there have been no complaints from the children or their parents. A visiting governor said: 'I visit the residential unit at least ten times a year and I always speak to the children. This is a very good unit, and the children are safe.'

The children are cared for in a safe environment. Nominated, suitably qualified staff carry out all the health and safety and fire safety checks in line with regulation and good practice guidance. The local authority undertakes an annual health and safety audit and a fire safety risk assessment. This gives the school an independent oversight of the measures in place to keep the children, the staff and visitors safe. All the health and safety risk assessments clearly set out potential risks and ways in which the staff can reduce potential hazards. The health and safety manager reviews all the risk assessments at least annually.

The staff have improved the children's individual risk assessments, which is good progress. Good staffing levels ensure that the children are safely supervised and observed at all times. The staff have also introduced bespoke risk assessments for all the children that need or potentially need physical interventions to manage behaviour. This is very good progress and further safeguards the children's safety and their well-being.

The staff rarely use physical intervention and only do so as a last resort. The staff keep detailed records, and the head of care regularly checks and monitors all such interventions. She also carries out de-briefing discussions with the staff and the children to satisfy herself that the actions taken were necessary. This thorough oversight protects the children's welfare.

The staff have improved the children's behaviour management plans. They are now consistent with all other behaviour management plans, for example, plans that are written by teachers and the education staff. This enhances positive consistency and continuity.

The school carries out regular employment safety checks on all the staff, and the

reception staff check and vet all visitors to the school. These measures protect the children from unsuitable adults.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The headteacher is an experienced leader whose positivity and enthusiasm are shared by the staff throughout the school. He consistently has high aspirations of what the children can achieve, and his drive to ensure that the children's equality and diversity are respected is very good.

The school has progressed since the last inspection, by meeting an area for improvement. The staff have improved the children's residential plans and they have supported the children to be more involved in any planning or decisions made about their residential stays. Behaviour management plans and healthcare plans are also improved.

The school has also improved and progressed in other areas, in particular, by investing in improving the school's resources to support children who have emotional and/or psychological needs. The school has also invested in converting an area of the school into a child-friendly therapeutic environment and a fully equipped sensory room has recently been set up. This particularly meets the needs of the children who have autism and whose anxieties can be significantly reduced by having access to sensory equipment.

The headteacher and the head of care have increased the availability of residential stays for children by carrying out a review of how the unit operates. By careful planning and being creative with the budgets for residential services, the school can now offer more placements without incurring additional costs. This impacts positively on those children who will benefit from having overnight stays.

The headteacher identified that one of the school's strengths is that it is a 'happy place'. This view was validated throughout this inspection. The children are visibly happy and all the staff feedback was very positive. The staff's comments included, 'I would not want to work anywhere else', and 'I love working here.'

The school staff have very good relationships with parents and other professionals. All parents are fully involved in their children's support and their education. The staff work with a range of other professionals, who actively contribute towards the children's progress and their development. A visiting professional was very positive in their feedback about the school.

The head of care is a respected leader and she is very supportive of her residential staff team. All the staff feel valued, supported and listened to. The staff receive regular supervision, an annual appraisal and the training they need to carry out their roles effectively. These measures ensure that the children are supported by staff who can meet their needs.

Consulting with the children is a key part of the ethos of the school and the residential unit. The staff continually look at new ways to involve the children to ascertain their views and wishes. They hold regular children's meetings and talk to the children on a one-to-one basis. The latest initiative in the residential unit is a 'post-it corner' where the children can write what they think on post-it notes and affix these to a display board. A child was very proud to show the inspectors the display board, saying: 'This is where we write things down for the staff and we stick our ideas up. I think this is really good, and it is fun to do.'

The statement of purpose sets out what the residential facility proposes to provide for the children and their parents. The school's website displays the statement so that parents can easily access a copy. Monitoring at the school is effective, and the board of governors review, all the monitoring reports, including the independent visitor's monitoring report. This open and transparent way of working ensures that the school is operating effectively.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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:** SC040510

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Wallbanks

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector(s)**

Debbie White, social care inspector (lead)  
Jan Edwards, social care inspector



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