

West Kirby Residential School

West Kirby Residential School, 107-119 Meols Drive, West Kirby, Wirral, Merseyside CH48 5DH

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is a non-maintained special school for up to 115 students with autistic spectrum disorder and complex and significant emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. It offers a day school for pupils aged from five to 19 years, and weekly and part-weekly residential boarding for residential pupils who are aged from 11 to 19 years. Extended days allow day pupils to join the residential group for the evening, returning home to sleep. Residential accommodation from September 2020 is in one community-based home. At the time of this visit, up to four pupils used the residential provision. The principal of the school oversees the residential provision.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

We last visited this setting on 15 and 16 October 2020 to carry out a monitoring visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 22 to 24 June 2021

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 12 – 14 November 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Residential children benefit from having their individual needs recognised. Plans, strategies and targets are shared between departments within the school, providing children with a consistency of care that links to their school day. Monitoring undertaken by the school clearly evidences the positive impact that residency has on pupils' lives, particularly with their behaviour, communication and social skills.

All children who experience the residential provision receive a good quality of care. An experienced, dedicated residential staff team cares for them well. The relationships created between staff, children and parents are strong, which promotes trust. One parent told the inspector, 'The staff are always available, and I can talk to them about any concerns that I may have or just for a general chat.' Another said about staff, 'They go that extra mile when supporting the children and their families.'

Children enjoy the residential experience and look forward to the time that they spend there. One pupil said that he had come a long way and was looking forward to his adult life. A parent said, 'What he has achieved over the last year was thought impossible a year ago.' Another child told the inspector, 'I am quite new to the residential home, but so far it has been brilliant.'

Residential staff contribute to multidisciplinary meetings and discussions about children. This means that children experience consistent support that meets their needs, as staff carefully assess their starting points, support their development and respond to any difficulties. Children recover well from any setbacks because staff take time to understand their changing needs. Internal communication levels around the school are high. For example, there are handover meetings that take place at different times of the day between night staff, residential staff and teachers.

Residential children along with day pupils have a strong voice within the school due to the excellent levels of communication and consultation that exists. For example, children participate in residential meetings, key-worker sessions and student council meetings. Children said that, through these processes, they could make suggestions or be involved in decisions about their lives. For example, one child said that he did not want to visit his new semi-independence home too often because he had a lot of transitions going on. The staff have respected this and continue to support the child in his decisions.

An outstanding feature is how the school remained in contact with children throughout the COVID-19 restrictions. For example, the school used a social media application to connect with children who were at home. This included celebrating achievements, letting them know what was going on in school and what they could still be involved in remotely. Also, some children helped to record the sessions, interviewed teachers and showed their work to the wider audience.

Residential children benefit from experiencing an environment in which individual needs, disabilities and identities are fully accepted. Placement plans along with other associated documents, such as assessments of risk, are individualised and of a good quality. They are reviewed and updated regularly, which keeps them current. There was an incident where a residential child brought his own pain relief into school without staff knowing. Staff took good action by alerting his parent and discussed the importance of keeping medication safe with the child. However, there needs to be a clear and concise plan in place for staff to follow when children bring unprescribed medication into the home. They also need to include this in the child's risk assessment.

Activities are well planned and designed to meet the children's needs. Full use of community facilities plays a prominent role in the activities taking place. Children talked excitedly with the inspectors about going on walks, having picnics, bike riding and eating in restaurants. Activities promote fitness and a healthy lifestyle as well as providing enjoyment. The development of social skills and social networks improve children's awareness of what local communities have to offer, as well as promoting greater independence. Activities for children is an area of strength.

There have been some recent changes in the overall residential accommodation for the children. Previously, there were three houses in the local community that offered overnight stays. However, two of these houses have been closed. The third home has undergone a complete refurbishment and a new semi-independence home has been built where an unused garage stood. This is of an exceptional standard and children will be able to use this from the summer. The accommodation provided for children is spacious, comfortable and well maintained. All bedrooms are single occupancy with en-suite bathroom facilities.

An outstanding area within the residential setting is how children are prepared for their independence. Targets are set and monitored, and these are adapted in accordance with the child's progress. Transition plans show how semi-independence places and colleges have been identified and the visits that have been completed. Children learn to travel independently, budget for food, pay bills and to have enough money to socialise. Parents say that they are fully included in the plans and that residential staff make a difference in helping children plan for their futures. For example, residential staff are an integral part of the child's transition into semi-independence, which ensures continuity of knowledge about the child.

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

Safety is prioritised and promoted well. The practices adopted by the school are underpinned by policies that have recently been reviewed and updated. This helps to ensure that practices do not become stale and outdated.

The experienced staff understand their responsibilities and have the capabilities and knowledge to keep vulnerable children safe. Any cause for concern is reported immediately to the school's designated safeguarding officer. She uses the

professional contacts that she has established with external agencies for advice and, when necessary, referral. Records are clear and kept up to date. As a result, children feel safe and valued.

Children stay in accommodation that is safe and welcoming. High staffing ratios mean that there is always someone on hand to promote the children's safety. The staff help the children to become safer as they develop independence. Staff use clear, multi-disciplinary risk assessments and support plans. They identify how a child's individual understanding, communication and behaviours will be best supported.

Staff balance risks with the need to allow children freedom to develop independence skills. For example, children who are preparing to move into semi-independence are now taking responsibility to administer their own medication.

The designated lead for safeguarding regularly reviews the safeguarding processes. A multidisciplinary team meets regularly to share information, review causes for concern, and address any emerging issues. The staff and managers have had refresher training in safeguarding. There have been no concerns raised about the residential provision. Parents say that they are confident that their children are safe and happy. Children show trust in staff.

All staff receive a comprehensive induction relating to safeguarding when they start work at the school. This is backed up with regular refresher training. Training has also taken place covering areas such as child sexual exploitation and extremism. The school keeps parents well informed and updated through a range of brochures and the school's newsletter.

Behaviour management is well managed and monitored throughout the school. Good behaviour support plans are individual to each child. They are reviewed regularly by residential staff during multi-disciplinary meetings. The plans work alongside school staff to help them understand the individual needs and requirements of children. This joint working promotes a greater consistency of care.

Children have not gone missing from residence. Staff are aware that there is a potential for this to happen. They have a clear understanding of the process to take, if an incident was to occur. Similarly, physical interventions and sanctions have not been used in the residential setting. Staff are skilled at identifying when children are upset. They initiate agreed strategies to support the children and to help reduce their anxieties. As a result, the children's behaviour is very good.

Recruitment procedures meet with statutory requirements and guidance, with all levels of staff being suitably cleared before they take up their post.

Security of the setting is very good. All visitors' identification is required before being allowed into the home and they are chaperoned while in the residential setting. Health and safety checks are routinely completed. As a result, young people live in a safe environment and are protected from strangers.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The principal of the school is also the head of care. There is a manager of the residential setting and a well-qualified, experienced and long-standing staff team. They work closely together so that there is a seamless transition between school and the residential provision. All parties demonstrated that the children were at the heart of the service.

The operation, purpose and function of the school are laid out clearly in a comprehensive statement of purpose. A school development plan is in place, which reflects the ambition of senior leaders for the school and the residential provision. The residential provision remains an integral part of the services provided by the school. The school is meeting the national standards laid out for residential special schools. To improve practice, the report contains three areas for further improvement.

The head of care is well respected by her colleagues, parents and professionals. Without exception, all comment positively on her knowledge and professionalism. She understands the children well and promotes close working partnerships to ensure that the whole school and families work together. This provides the best possible, all-round support for children to thrive.

Governors support new initiatives to improve children's lives. For example, they have improved the accommodation they offer to children. Two governors make termly visits to the residential provision and speak to the children. They prepare a report, and this is discussed at a board meeting. Governors review regular reports from the head of care about the residential service. However, not all governors have visited the residential setting and could not comment on the improvements made or the impact that the residential setting was having on the children.

The staff value the support that they get from managers and colleagues. Professional supervisions take place regularly. Staff are well trained, with all team leaders being trained to management level. While COVID-19 restrictions have been in place, some training has been delivered online. However, the staff's understanding/knowledge has not been assessed. Similarly, in discussion with the inspectors, staff said that they had read the children's plans. However, some staff could not draw on some significant information at this time. In contrast to this, some staff impressed the inspectors with knowledge about the children. All staff showed a commitment to ensure that children reach their maximum potential and improve their outcomes.

Leaders have successfully addressed the recommendation made at the last monitoring visit. All National Minimum Standards are met.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- 6.3 The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. In particular, have a clear and concise plan for staff to follow when children bring unprescribed medication into the residence. Further to this, ensure this is included in the child's risk assessment.

- 19.1 Staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children as they relate to the purpose of the setting. In particular, assess the staff's knowledge about the children's plans, risk assessments and training.

- 13.1 The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school. In particular, facilitate the governors to have a full working knowledge of the residential provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: SC018958

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Sian Thomas

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Inspectors

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