

West Kirby Residential School

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

Assurance visit

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 5 to 19 years, and weekly and part-weekly residential boarding for residential pupils who are aged from 11 to 18 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 three pupils used the residential provision. The principal of the school oversees the residential provision.

Visit dates: 15 to 16 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 12 November 2019

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be good

Information about this visit

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).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

Children learn and socialise in a tolerant and cooperative community where positive and affectionate relationships help them to thrive. Children say that their progress at school is made possible because of the support from residential staff. Parents say that their children enjoy school, and really look forward to staying in the residence because they have fun, make friends and learn so much about living in society.

Children and their families enthusiastically work together with staff to understand and limit the impact of any barriers to their success. Staff use a cohesive, multi-disciplinary approach to supporting pupils. This builds a foundation of strong, child-centred intervention, education and guidance. This is a strength of the school.

Children benefit from staff being able to access information about all aspects of their lives because key workers have completed a thorough overhaul of their care plans. Children receive consistent support because residential, education and health staff work from a shared but appropriately differentiated care and education plan. This helps residential pupils to make good progress against the goals of their education, health and care plans.

Children experience high levels of pastoral care. Staff listen well to children's dreams and aspirations. Children fully participate in developing their care plans. One child spoke about how staff are helping him to achieve his wish to pursue photography at college. He talked animatedly about residential staff finding him interesting walks to go on. This gave him lots of ideas for his photographs. In school, he was making a stage set that imitated a scene from the community. This means that he can submit important coursework despite the current COVID-19 limitations to accessing the community.

Children learn about how to keep safe and healthy during the pandemic. One child is following a national scheme for living a healthier life. Together with his key worker, he is working on exercising and making healthier food choices. He is delighted that both he and his key worker are fitter than they were, and that much of his progress is achieved in partnership. He also talks to residential staff about the impact of national guidance and changing rules on social distancing measures. This helps him to manage the anxiety he feels about the risk of infection, so that he can enjoy being able to socialise after a long period of being isolated at home.

Children say that staff are great at helping them to plan for their lives after school. Children are looking forward to staying in a newly built independence unit, where they can further develop their skills to help them manage their adult lives, such as travelling independently, shopping and cooking. Staff can help them to explore how

to identify and meet their health needs more independently by identifying safe self-medication systems.

Children unable to attend school or residence get positive support. Staff are diligent in setting up appropriate contact arrangements, both in pastoral support and providing educational material. Weekly online assemblies are a source of joy and support to children and families. Many testimonies to the positive impact of this include parents who said this was a lifeline. Others said it helped their children to manage their anxiety, creating a more stable home environment.

Staff recognise, foster and facilitate each child's unique personality, skills and aspirations. Children better understand and appreciate diversity and difference because of detailed learning schemes and highly effective role modelling from staff.

The safety of children

Staff understand how to manage risk and keep children safe.

Staff understand that children's behaviour is affected by their emotional and physical well-being. They use detailed analysis of incidents to underpin and review carefully crafted support plans. Staff provide a range of activities tailored to children's interests and wishes, and they create structure and routines that help children to feel secure. Staff promote positive choice and emotional regulation, and respond effectively to any difficulties and setbacks.

The designated safeguarding lead and team of deputies are working hard to promote an open culture where children are not restrained. Positive behaviour support underpins the whole school approach to supporting children who have complex needs. When significant incidents do occur, a full review of site safety, staff actions and children's needs is undertaken. Independent scrutiny is welcomed. Significant investment in staff training supports continuous development. Any lessons learned from this thorough review are promptly used to minimise the risk of re-occurrence.

Staff are equipped to help children to learn about staying safe, and to recognise when children are at risk of harm. Highly effective safeguarding and child protection measures and systems mean that staff are alert to children's behaviour and conversation as an indicator that all is not well. This vigilance is carried through to contact with children who are not attending school. Staff act promptly and in line with local authority processes to report any concerns. This means children can get timely help from appropriate child protection professionals.

Leaders and managers

Capable, energetic and enthusiastic leaders are driving positive change and development of the residential provision.

Leaders have children's well-being and safety at the centre of all they do. They ensured that both residence and school remained open during the COVID-19 pandemic, although children only returned to residential stays from September 2020.

The principal is promoting a culture of compassion and nurture. She is identifying talent and driving professional development that fosters continuously improving outcomes for children. Governors actively support her thorough review of day-to-day operations. Staff describe her as child-centred, accessible, aspirational and inspirational. She supervises and supports residential care managers. This is creating a positive learning and living environment for staff and children. Staff say her leadership is building an open and cooperative culture where all are equally valued.

Governors have taken responsibility for ensuring that one of them visits the residence regularly. They discuss the reports of those visits during governance meetings. Now that children have returned to the residence, governors are overseeing improvements to the house and developments in the scope of the service provided. Leaders recruit governors and advisers with key specialisms such as safeguarding or residential care.

The deputy care manager regularly consults children and stakeholders and uses this to improve the care and experiences provided for children. For example, when the residential house was flooded, children and their families were quickly advised of the alternative accommodation arrangements. Leaders sought to identify and provide for each child what mattered most to them, such as an en-suite bathroom.

Leaders ensured that key workers kept in contact with children who were not attending school during the pandemic. A parent described one contribution that improved her child's emotional well-being during this time. She said, '[Staff] responded to [child's] anxiety by increasing contact, using video calls, and taking the trouble to set up the calls from the residence so that [child] could see the house was waiting for his return. This contact was so important for him, it helped him so much.'

Leaders have successfully addressed all the requirements and recommendations made at the last full inspection. All National Minimum Standards are met.

One recommendation is made following this visit.

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

Recommendations

- The care manager should regularly review residential pupils' ability to self-medicate and facilitate this where possible, to help young people to independently understand their health needs and how to stay well.

Residential special school details

Unique reference number: SC018958

Principal: Sian Thomas

Inspector

Denise Jolly, Social Care Inspector

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