

West Kirby School and College

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 students with autism and complex and significant emotional, behavioural and social difficulties.

It provides a day school for pupils aged from five to 19 and weekly and part-weekly residential boarding for pupils aged from seven to 19. Extended days allow day pupils to join the residential group for the evening, returning home to sleep.

Residential accommodation is in a community-based home, with an attached semi-independent self-contained flat. At the time of the inspection, up to two pupils were using the residential provision and three pupils were using the extended day provision.

The principal of the school oversees the residential provision, alongside a residential manager.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 November 2023

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected outstanding

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 last inspection: 6 February 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The residential provision has a profound impact on the lives of children and their families. It is homely and welcoming and provides children with a nurturing environment to stay. Children feel valued and speak very positively about their residential experiences. They make friends with their peers and have trusting relationships with the staff. The staff speak enthusiastically about the progress the children make and are sensitive to their needs.

Parents are extremely complimentary about the residential provision and refer to the support provided as a 'lifeline'. They say that children make excellent progress because of the actions of the staff who work with them and their experiences while staying there. One parent said that the provision gives their child a chance to experience a different aspect of life, to develop their social skills and make friends. Children's life opportunities are enhanced because of their extended day and overnight stays at the house.

Highly effective planning for children coming to the residential provision manages and minimises risks for children and reduces the impact on their emotional well-being. An exceptional piece of work was done with one child to help them build their confidence to experience overnight stays at the house. Children's transitions to the residential provision are individualised, taken at the child's pace and planned seamlessly with parents and placing authorities. When children no longer require access to the residential provision, the staff team provides extended support to children and their parents in the next stage of children's lives.

Staff are confident and competent in supporting children to lead healthy lifestyles. They have an excellent understanding of children's individual health needs and work closely with internal and external medical professionals to meet these. Children also receive support from an in-house clinical psychologist to promote positive mental health and emotional well-being.

Children's views and feelings are a priority. They are threaded through their care and support plans. Children attend weekly house meetings and complete surveys to make suggestions to improve their experiences while staying at the residential provision. The independent listener is a familiar face for children and provides them with an additional opportunity to speak to someone independent from the school.

The opportunities for children to develop their independence skills are worthy of wider dissemination. This specifically relates to children having access to the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) qualification that all children are supported to undertake during their stay. This focuses on areas such as their ability to care for themselves, caring for the environment and developing positive relationships. As part of promoting their independence, the staff team

supports children to take safe risks to develop their resilience and to prepare them for adulthood.

All children have formative assessments that assess their abilities and identify any additional help that they require. The school and residential staff work together effectively to ensure that they communicate regularly and set targets that relate to children's education, health and care plans, and independence planning.

Provision of activities on and off the school site is excellent. There are lots of opportunities for children to take part in, including fundraising and charity work. Activities are child-led and in line with their interests and hobbies. An effective monitoring system, overseen by the senior leadership team, ensures that children engage in a variety of recreational activities to develop their skills, confidence and self-esteem.

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

Safeguarding is of paramount importance in this school. The safety and well-being of children is a central ethos of the residential provision. Children confirm they feel safe and have a strong sense of security. This is because the staff help children to understand risks and teach them how to keep themselves safe. One parent said that the best thing the residential provision offers to children is how it helps them feel safe, secure and understood.

Designated safeguarding leads have an excellent understanding of multi-agency safeguarding practice. They have up-to-date training and provide consistent safeguarding support to the residential provision. Safeguarding knowledge is clearly articulated and disseminated to the staff team, meaning staff have up-to-date knowledge of managing a wide range of complex safeguarding issues. Designated safeguarding leads work proactively with other schools to share practice and agree protocols in relation to safeguarding children.

Residential staff have excellent knowledge about individual children. They benefit from comprehensive safeguarding training and training that is specific to certain areas of safeguarding, such as internet safety and guidance found in 'Keeping Children Safe in Education'. In addition to this, all children have clear risk management plans in place, which provide strategies to minimise potential risks and include children's views about what helps them to emotionally regulate themselves. This enables staff to identify and respond effectively to children's changing developmental needs.

The management of children's behaviour is exceptional. Staff are skilled in their use of de-escalation strategies and systems. Physical interventions are used as a last resort by staff. Staff recognise triggers when children's behaviour is escalating and implement reassurance and coping strategies to help children to manage their

emotions. Children do not go missing from the residential provision. This is because they are settled and happy to attend.

Children enjoy a harmonious experience at the provision. Staff teach them to develop strategies to manage any low-level conflicts. There have been no complaints from children or their parents. This is largely because of the strong relationships that the staff team has developed with children and their parents.

A board of trustees ensures that safeguarding practice is monitored, reviewed and updated. All trustees undertake a range of safeguarding training. Trustees and independent visitors routinely visit the residential provision and confirm robust safeguarding practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers work together and have a shared ambitious vision for changing children's lives. Team leaders have an exceptional understanding of the children and their needs. They have high aspirations for the children and are focused on children's progress, supporting them into adulthood. They are innovative and are positive role models for the children. The residential development plan drives improvements in children's experiences and promotes children's and staff's involvement in the development of the provision.

Leaders and managers have a good understanding of children's plans. They meet weekly to discuss the residential provision and each child's progress. They can demonstrate progression for children over a sustained period. Leaders and managers drive achievements, goals and permanence for children's futures. They work in a transparent way and recognise the residential provision's strengths and the areas to be developed.

There is a stable and experienced staff team in place. Staff regularly receive support to develop their practice and skills. They are knowledgeable and motivated in their roles. Staff feel very well supported by leaders and managers and recognise the high expectations of staff to improve the lives of children.

Staff are trained in a variety of issues that are specific to children's needs. They have undertaken training in areas such as epilepsy, attachment and anxiety. However, staff have not yet accessed training in attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and sexualised behaviour. Leaders and managers are taking the necessary steps to ensure that staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of all the children who live there.

Research and training are brought to the team meetings by individual staff, the senior leadership team and internal professionals. Staff also have direct access to The National College, which provides them with webinars and courses on subjects such as adverse childhood experiences, trauma-informed practice and understanding

depression in children. This demonstrates a creative approach to staff learning and development. It also makes an exceptional difference to children's experiences.

Leaders and managers do not routinely ensure that children and staff are given an opportunity to discuss incidents of restraint with someone who was not directly involved in the incident. Additionally, some staff debriefs could not be evidenced. These issues have not had any identified impact on the safety of the children. However, there is no clear oversight by a designated person from the senior leadership team to ensure that records of restraint are reviewed effectively and that trends are identified to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice.

The trustee arrangements hold the school to account to ensure that the highest standards of care are provided. The residential provision is now a standing agenda item at each meeting of the board of trustees. In addition, the independent visitor's report is provided to all trustees to review. Visits to the residential provision by trustees and independent visitors provide an extra layer of oversight and scrutiny to ensure that children are provided with a high level of care and support.

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

Points for improvement

- All children and staff should be given an opportunity to discuss with a relevant adult (who was not directly involved), any incidents of restraint they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by, when possible within 24 hours.
- The head of residential provision or their equivalent should regularly review any instances of the use of any type of restraint and examine trends or issues to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice and minimise the use of restraint.
- Staff should be equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children resident in the school.

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

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Cheryl Field, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Aislinn Cooper, Social Care Inspector

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