

Barndale House Special School

Barndale House, Howling Lane, Alnwick, Northumberland NE66 1DQ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Barndale House School is a residential special school that is maintained by a local authority. The school is in the heart of the town of Alnwick. The residential provision is in the main school building.

All children have complex needs, including those with autism spectrum disorder. Many children also have multi-sensory needs and/or communication needs. Children have education, health and care plans.

There are 70 children on the school roll, aged from two to 19 years. There is capacity for up to 20 children to stay in the residential provision each week. Children usually stay one or two nights per week, and up to six children stay each night.

The head of care has been in post for several years. She has a level 4 management qualification.

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

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 November 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 8 December 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children thoroughly enjoy their stays in the residential provision, which they refer to as 'sleepy school'. They are proud to be part of the residential provision and feel a strong ownership of this aspect of their school. Some children attend for many years. The residential provision becomes a significant part of their lives and the lives of their families.

Children develop strong relationships with staff, whom they come to know very well. They are confident in the ability of the staff to care for them. This helps children to relax and enjoy their stays. Staff use their knowledge of children to provide individualised, warm and nurturing care that meets their needs well.

Staff help children to develop positive social relationships. Staff ensure that pastimes meet the needs of individual children as well as the needs of the group. Children with a wide variety of needs come together in shared activities. This means that children develop an acceptance of each other. Children enjoy each other's company and learn to spend time together harmoniously.

Children's physical, developmental and emotional needs are met. Staff monitor children's health and share any concerns with families and professionals. Therapeutic practitioners talk to residential staff about how to support children's development. In addition, a newly appointed family worker provides advice to families. All aspects of children's needs are addressed through the support that they receive during their residential stays.

The head of care tells staff about any new information from medical professionals. For example, when medication changes, staff update children's plans immediately. Some records are misleading about who can administer emergency medication. Staff undertake the required training and speak confidently about such arrangements. However, the current guidance could be confusing for staff and lead to a shortfall in practice.

Children's educational progress is enhanced due to their residential stays. The 24-hour curriculum has been developed. Children's experiences in the residential provision now link more closely to their learning in school. For example, children work towards preparation for adulthood during lessons. They also practise their skills during residential time. Children recognise their achievements and are proud of themselves. The 24-hour curriculum helps to consolidate children's learning across the school.

Children provide their wishes and feelings about all aspects of their residential stays. Visual communication aids are present throughout the residential provision. These enhance the ability of children and staff to communicate with each other. Staff encourage children to use these aids to contribute to their care planning meetings.

This makes children's targets more meaningful. This approach also significantly increases children's ability to influence their world.

Children enjoy a variety of activities and charitable events. Many activities involve children engaging with people outside of the school. This helps to raise the profile of children with special educational needs and disabilities in the community. Children are building positive memories of their residential experiences. These opportunities help children to expand their understanding of the world around them.

Children and their parents are consulted before children come into the residential provision. A great deal of information is gathered. This is used as the basis for effective care planning. This means that staff have the required information to understand each child's needs and preferences. This helps to promote consistent care of children from their earliest residential stays.

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

Staff encourage positive behaviour in children. Individualised support plans help staff to recognise and respond effectively to children's emotional distress. Routines and expectations are clear, so that children understand what will happen and when. Staff are consistently calm and competent. This reassures children, who are confident about the abilities of staff. As a result, children have very few crisis incidents. For some children, this is an indication of significant progress.

Staff are meticulous about safeguarding children. They share all concerns with senior leaders, who are tenacious in reporting and following up any issues. Leaders hold other professionals to account if they fail to protect children. Written safeguarding records are clear and well ordered. This means that the safety and welfare of children are firmly at the centre of the wider professional network.

Children are safe online when they are in school. Staff supervise children closely, and a school-wide system blocks harmful content. Staff talk to children about potential risks and how they can be safe when using the internet. In addition, staff give advice to families. This improves children's safety when they are away from the security of the school. As a result, children and their families develop their skills to use technology safely.

The recruitment of new staff is safe and complies with statutory guidance. An improved strategy for verifying references has been in place since the last inspection. This means that leaders can be confident about the staff that they are employing.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The residential provision is led by a head of care who is passionate about children. She has high aspirations and leads by example. Staff share her commitment to providing high-quality care for children. There is a unified approach to ensuring that children have the best experiences possible when they stay in 'sleepy school'.

Staff feel supported by the head of care. They can talk to her about any issues that concern them, as she takes their views seriously. Staff also feel able to share relevant information about their personal lives. They know that they will receive support when it is needed. This helps them to feel valued and to enjoy their work.

The head of care listens to the views of children. She acts on their wishes whenever possible. For example, several parts of the residential provision have been decorated and now look more homely. Children took an active role in choosing the decor and soft furnishings. The residential provision looks clean and modern. It provides children with a space in which they feel invested.

The staff team provides consistency for children. It is large enough that temporary staff are not required. Absences through leave or sickness can be covered by other staff who are well known to children. This means that children always know the staff who are caring for them.

Longstanding staff value the ideas and experiences of newer members of staff. Recently employed staff appreciate the support that they receive from their experienced colleagues. The cohesion of the staff team is a strength of the service. The staff team continues to develop while also providing children with familiarity and consistency.

Staff receive the structured support that they need to perform well. All staff, including night staff, take part in regular training. Staff receive supervision of their practice. This encourages them to reflect on children's needs as well as their own development. New staff have a detailed induction programme. This means that staff develop the skills that they need for their roles throughout their employment.

The school is supported by a dedicated governing body, which is committed to the ongoing development of the school. Governors carry out a skills audit to ensure that the right people are in place. This means that governors can provide both support and challenge to senior leaders. Governors visit the residential provision. They recognise the considerable value it offers to children and families.

The school has not had regular visits from an independent visitor. Although efforts have been made to recruit someone for this role, they have not yet been successful. Children cannot routinely talk to someone independent of the school. This means that a child with a concern about the residential provision might be unable to share their worries. This is a particular issue for children with complex communication needs.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard for residential special schools:

- Leaders should ensure that the governing body, trustees, or proprietor of the school appoint a representative who is independent of the leadership and management of the school to visit the residential provision six times, spread evenly, over the course of a school year and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 8, paragraph 3.1)

Point for improvement

- Leaders should ensure that children's health plans set out clearly which staff are authorised to administer emergency medication. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 18, paragraph 12.10)

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: SC041487

Headteacher: Mr Mark Phillips

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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