

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

This residential special school 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 some with autism spectrum disorder. Many children also have multi-sensory needs and/or communication needs. Children have education, health and care plans.

At the time of this inspection, 67 children and young people, aged from two to 19 years, were on the school roll. A total of 18 children access the residential provision, each for one night a week.

The head of care has been in post since 2012. She holds a suitable management qualification for this role.

Inspection dates: 30 April to 2 May 2024

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: 18 April 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children have trusting relationships with the adults who care for them and love staying over at the residential provision. They develop friendships and have new experiences with their peers. The trust that children have in staff gives them confidence to develop their independence skills through the programme of support residential care offers.

Parents and carers are happy with the experiences their children have during their residential stays. They recognise the positive impact that staying in residence has for their children. Parents and carers commented, '[Name of child] has developed confidence in himself,' 'My child is learning to be more independent,' and 'They have helped [name of child] with their peer relationships.'

Children and their families benefit from the input of a multi-disciplinary team and the family support worker, who is fully embedded in the school. They help children and their parents with direct support, giving advice about other agencies. This helps to extend the value of the residential provision beyond the children's overnight stays. One parent said, 'Nothing is a problem for [name of family support worker], they are invaluable.'

Support for children's emotional well-being is prioritised through the school's 'thrive approach'. Established lines of communication between different professionals in school ensures that help for children is responsive, targeted and effective. Children develop their resilience and the confidence to talk about their feelings. This helps to remove some of the barriers to accessing all parts of their school life.

Well-written health plans are delivered by an effective team of staff who really know the children. This ensures that all children, including those with more complex needs, consistently have their health needs met. Sessional work on healthy eating and fitness strengthens the staff's approach to health and develops the children's awareness about how to live a healthier lifestyle.

All children are supported daily to actively participate in life at the residential provision, using communication aids when needed. Children meet with staff each half term to give their views, and staff ensure that the children's opinions are fully considered. The children talk about menu options and their preferred activities. This helps children to learn that their voice is important, and they have a say in decisions that affect them.

The children thoroughly enjoy the activities they do and have fun when they stay over. They have social opportunities they would not experience if they were not part of the residential family at their 'sleepy school'. Children identify being with their peers and the staff as the best things about staying in residence.

The children's self-esteem flourishes from the learning they undertake through the 24-hour curriculum and the 'steps programme'. The skills they learn include making their own beds, learning about planting and growing vegetables, shopping and cooking meals to name just a few. As a result, children become more confident and independent.

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

Children feel safe in the company of staff. The staff are knowledgeable about the children and attuned to their needs. They communicate with parents and other professionals who work with the children to identify and understand risks to the children and how to reduce the likelihood of harm occurring. This enhances the children's sense of safety and well-being.

Staff implement effective boundaries and have high expectations of the children's behaviour. This helps all children to feel comfortable and safe. Children respond to what staff say to them because of the excellent relationships that exist between them. Staff help children to reflect on their actions and understand the importance of treating each other with kindness.

Staff help children to express their emotions to prevent their behaviour escalating and becoming unsafe. Staff are skilful in reading the children's cues and help them to manage their emotions in an enjoyable and playful way. As a result, children develop confidence and skills to talk about their feelings, knowing that staff will help them.

Children carry out work on being safe in the community. This involves practising different skills, such as walking safely on the roadside and using pedestrian crossings, until they have mastered their individual targets.

Learning how to stay safe online is delivered as part of the school day. The content of the presentations to children is relevant to the current risks children face with online safety. The information is aligned to the children's stages of development, which helps them to have a better understanding about what they should do to report an unsafe situation.

The designated safeguarding lead, who is also the headteacher, and the school's safeguarding team respond effectively to safeguarding concerns for the children. They quickly involve family and other professionals when they are concerned about children's well-being. Each person plays an important role in the safeguarding infrastructure of the school. Their multi-agency working underpins the school's effective safeguarding practice.

The integrated information system provides leaders and staff with a forum to share pertinent information about the safety and well-being of children. It demonstrates that children experience a coordinated response when there are concerns for their well-being; staff and school leaders uphold their safeguarding responsibilities

effectively. Furthermore, staff fully understand and are confident to use the school's whistle-blowing procedure. This helps to keep children safer.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The experienced head of care is highly committed to her role. There is visible support from the headteacher and other school leaders that strengthens the school's approach to providing children with the best possible care.

The head of care monitors the children's progress through the residential programme and the milestones and awards that children achieve. Well-written records that reflect the work staff do with the children enable the head of care to have this oversight. The head of care is fully immersed in the children's care experience, which strengthens her understanding of the progress that children make.

Staff are committed to caring for the children they look after. They know them well and use this knowledge to anticipate and meet their needs, which has a positive impact on the children's lives. Staff work well as a team. They understand each other's strengths and communicate openly and transparently. As a result, children experience consistency in their care.

Senior leaders recognise the importance of supporting staff's welfare and emotional well-being. Additional support for staff is available through the school nurse, which helps them to be better prepared and more effective in their roles. One member of staff said, 'It's the nicest team I have ever worked with.' This demonstrates the positive and caring culture that has been established at this school.

Staff receive the training and support that they need to perform well, including practice-related supervision from the head of care. However, staff have yet to benefit fully from the appraisal system, as it is not yet embedded.

External monitoring by the independent visitor and the reports that they produce have been strengthened. The visitor speaks with children, staff and parents to evidence their findings and ensure that standards of care do not slip for the children. The head of care and governors provide a written response to those reports and find them helpful in their own monitoring of the residential provision.

The head of care is an established member of the senior leadership team. The governors hold the provision of residential care in positive regard and as equal in importance to the rest of the school. Regular visits by the chair of governors to residential helps to assure them that the children are well cared for. However, it is not clear how residential is discussed or represented as a standing item at the full governor meetings. This is required by the national minimum standards.

The residential provision does not have an independent person, outside of the staff team and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who children can contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school.

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

Points for improvement

- The residential provision is a standing or regular item at the governing body meetings to ensure that children's experiences and the quality of provision are systematically kept under review. At least one governor should have responsibility for the oversight of residential provision but responsibility for the quality of provision lies with the governing body as a whole. At least one governor should also be expected to visit the residential provision on a regular basis. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 8, paragraph 2.2)
- The school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. This person may be known as the 'independent person'. Children know who this person is, know how to contact them and feel comfortable talking to them. The person is easily accessible at all reasonable times, visits regularly (at least monthly), and knows the children. The person should have the necessary skills to interact and communicate effectively with the children and be able to recognise good/poor care and safeguarding concerns. Children who cannot communicate verbally are given the means to request individual support. Schools may need to make a range of arrangements for independent support, which might be provided by more than one person, to ensure that the needs of each child are met. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 21, paragraph 17.2)

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/teacher in charge: Mark Phillips

Type of school: Residential special school

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