

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 some 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. 17 children currently 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: 18 to 20 April 2023

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 last inspection: 1 November 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children enjoy staying in residency and refer to this as their 'sleepy school'. One parent commented, 'My child likes the routine. They are always really excited to come.' The staff know the children exceptionally well. They have a nurturing and caring approach, which helps them to build excellent relationships with the children. They use their knowledge of each child to make sure the children enjoy their time there and have fun while they learn.

In residency, the children gain a wide range of skills that prepare them well for when they leave the school. Through the 24-hour curriculum, the children complete the 'steps programme' and work towards recognised awards. From this learning, children become more independent and self-confident. The skills they learn include making their own beds, washing, dressing, shopping and cooking.

Children enjoy a range of experiences that teach them how to stay healthy. They learn the importance of a healthy diet and physical exercise. As part of staying healthy, the children are enjoying growing their own food for healthy snacks in the residential garden. To promote an active lifestyle, the staff help children to participate in activities such as walking, cycling and football.

Children's emotional well-being is well supported through the school's 'thrive approach'. Children access bespoke one-to-one and group sessions to improve their emotional well-being. Having this resource on site is very beneficial. It means that children can access immediate emotional support when this is needed, as they already have trusting relationships with staff. This supports children to develop emotional resilience.

The staff help the children to use a range of communication systems to make sure that their voice is heard. The communication aids they use include signs, symbols and pictures. The children's views are at the centre of everything that happens in residency. The staff value the children's opinions and act on them where they can. For example, the children have recently chosen the new carpets for the whole of the residency. This level of involvement helps the children to feel a sense of pride and belonging.

The children's social skills and social opportunities improve because of the range of experiences and activities they access. For some children, this is one of the only opportunities they have to socialise with others and make friends. Activities they like on site include using the new adventure park and outdoor yurts. Away from the school, the children enjoy trips to the beach and to local gardens.

The children learn the importance of friendship and kindness. They are actively involved in supporting charities both in the local community and wider area. This

work helps them to understand the importance of helping others. The work they complete includes visits to local care homes and collecting clothes for others in need.

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

The designated safeguarding lead acts quickly when safeguarding issues arise. He works closely with other professionals to help keep the children safe. The professionals he works with include the local authority designated officer and children's social workers. These good working relationships make sure information is shared effectively to enable informed decisions to be made in the best interests of the children.

Where needed, children have individual risk assessments, and these are updated after significant events. The information in these assessments helps the staff to have a good understanding of the risks for each child. These documents also set out clear expectations for staff about how to support children so that risks are managed and reduced.

Staff know the children well. This enables them to recognise signs when children are becoming upset. The staff work with the children to support them to identify and articulate how they are feeling. They use visual strategies so the children can say how they feel. The staff support the children to find their own strategies to help them to stay calm. Working this way helps children to manage their emotions positively, enabling them to be more independent. As a result of this approach, there is no use of physical restraint in residency.

Children learn how to keep safe. They learn skills such as how to cross the road and the importance of leaving the building when the fire alarms sound. The children learn about other risks that may affect them, such as bullying. 'Kind hands' and the 'tree of kindness' are visual aids that help the children to understand about being kind to others and the importance of speaking out about bullying.

The staff know how to keep the children safe. They complete a range of training that helps them to identify risks to the children. The staff complete training around keeping children safe online, radicalisation and reporting safeguarding concerns.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The head of care is very experienced and has worked in the residency for 26 years. She has been in her role as the head of care since 2012. She knows each child very well and balances her management duties with spending quality time with the children. She is ambitious for the children to achieve and is continually looking for ways to develop the service.

The staff all feel well supported by the head of care. They are motivated and enjoy their work. They have regular formal supervision sessions that help them to reflect

on the children's needs and their care practice. However, annual appraisals for staff are not in place, which is a missed opportunity to further develop staff skills.

The governing body has a good understanding and oversight of the residential provision. The chair of governors visits the residential setting regularly. She then writes a report that evaluates the children's progress as a result of the time they spent in residency. The head of care helps to keep the governing body up to date on service developments when she submits her report to governing body meetings.

A new independent visitor is in place. The reports from the visitor are not yet fully supporting the head of care and senior leaders to monitor and improve the service. These reports lack an analysis of the quality of the environment. Although the reports provide some information about safeguarding, they do not provide an evaluation as to whether the children are effectively safeguarded. The reports are shared with the headteacher and governors. The governing body is not currently recording a formal response to each written report.

The head of care has effective monitoring systems in place. The monitoring systems allow her to track the children's progress and the development of the service. The systems allow her to make sure that the staff team is well equipped to support the children. The head of care tracks staff training to make sure that the staff keep up to date with mandatory learning. She also includes additional training to make sure they understand how to meet the children's complex needs.

The head of care works closely with a range of professionals. The professionals she works with include the speech and language therapist, school nurse, school family support worker, teachers and social care professionals. These close working relationships help to make sure that children and their families have access to all the help they need.

The leaders promote a culture of inclusivity. Children thrive in an environment where differences are understood and celebrated. As a result, children feel valued, and many achieve for the first time. One parent commented, 'My child was withdrawn before, and now they are part of everything here. They are a different child now; they are confident and chatty.'

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 standards for residential special schools:

- Leaders should ensure that monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. These should include: conversations with children, the senior management team and staff; conversations with social workers where relevant; conversations with parents or carers where relevant; checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, bullying, restraint (including restrictive interventions), risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children, including in relation to residential provision; evaluation of the quality of the provision and effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded; and assessment of the suitability and physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the residential provision and the external environment. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 9, paragraph 3.2)
- Leaders should ensure that written reports of all monitoring visits are provided to the headteacher (or school equivalent) and, where applicable, the governing body, trust or proprietor. Reports should also be provided to each member of that body (or the appropriate committee of that body) within two weeks and as written by the visitor without amendment or summary. The governing body, trustees or proprietor of the school should record a formal response to each written report. Monitoring reports and formal responses should be retained by the school, made available during an inspection and, on request, shared with any placing authorities and with the local authority where the school is located. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 9, paragraph 3.3)
- Leaders should ensure that all staff have access to relevant support and advice for their role. They should also have at least termly supervision and a formal annual appraisal of their performance. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 32, paragraph 26.6)

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

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Inspector

Jamie Richardson, Social Care Inspector

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