

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

West Kirby Residential School is a non-maintained special educational needs school for young people who may have autism spectrum disorder and/or complex and significant emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. Many of the young people also have additional learning difficulties and/or disabilities.

The school provides residential accommodation for five young people in two houses situated away from the main site.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 November 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
How well children and young people are helped and protected	requires improvement to be good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of previous inspection: 4 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Young people are happy at school and make confident progress in their communication skills, social skills and understanding of the world. This is because they are supported well by residential staff who care about them. The staff build positive relationships with them and help them to feel safe. The young people's views are well represented in the control that they have over their lives. They help to plan their targets and think about their futures.

Managers do not consistently or systematically monitor young people's outcomes to ensure that the residential service is as good as it could be. This results in errors in records and occasional misunderstandings between departments about young people's needs. It is unclear whether young people are reaching their fullest potential, although all are doing well.

The staff have a good understanding of how young people are affected by autism spectrum disorders. The school uses a national accredited approach to work with young people with autism spectrum disorders more effectively. This was evident from observation of the evening activities and time spent with young people. Young people enthusiastically described the progress that they have made because of their residential experience. Progress includes eating a wider range of food and learning to be responsible for their personal care. One young person has an interest in future employment in graphic design. He proudly showed the inspector his camera and the photographs that he takes during evening activities to use in his academic coursework.

Care staff understand young people's communication, behaviours and expressions. This knowledge enhances their understanding of how young people need support and helps to ensure that their wishes are attended to well. Parents said that their children have improved their independence, well-being and sociability. They say that staff keep in touch regularly and that this open approach gives them confidence and trust in the staff to keep their children safe and happy.

Young people live in residential accommodation that is being improved. They have been able to contribute to the refurbishment and redecoration of their houses, and now enjoy space which is suited to their sensory needs.

Young people enjoy friendships in the residence, because staff help them to appreciate the wishes and feelings of others. Young people use community-based activity to improve their understanding and experience of the world. They have fun and develop new skills that enhance their quality of life. Young people have regular sessions with their key workers that help them to learn about a wide range of topics, from how to stay safe online to talking about their feelings. Young people make progress, because staff help them to overcome barriers to success through clear

goals and targets based on young people's education, health and care plans. On occasion, staff do not review their approach to make sure that there is the right balance of support and challenge for young people so that they continuously improve.

Staff sensitively help young people to manage change. Young people are involved in decisions about their futures. They have lots of opportunities to develop independence skills, and this is something that they value. For example, they shop and cook, follow domestic routines and increase their confidence in the local community, including independent travel from the residence to school.

Staff are sensitive to any ups and downs that young people experience. By seeking and offering the right help, staff promote young people's choices, well-being and confidence as they develop into young adults. Young people say that staff listen to them well and that they would talk to any of the residential staff if they were unhappy.

Young people's residential care plans include a new target-setting system that reflects their education, health and care plan targets that are based on a functional assessment. This system has yet to be evaluated for effectiveness. The multidisciplinary team works well to address elements of the care that young people receive, but this is not integrated well into the residential plan. This means that some essential information may be missing or misleading. For example, staff were unsure about the details of one young person's identified mental health needs and were confused about whether another young person had a diagnosed illness or not. To avoid future errors, a new school nurse is reviewing how health information is recorded and circulated.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Care staff know the young people well and can keep them safe. Staff work with them to develop the skills that they need when they go out into the community to the shops and other facilities.

Since the last inspection, managers have developed a new computer system for creating and maintaining risk assessments, safeguarding plans and positive behaviour plans. Risk assessments are a combination of risk assessments and risk management plans. They are vague and, on occasion, make little sense, including the lack of an accurate diagnosis of one child. There is limited evidence of effective evaluation. They do not set out clearly what steps staff should take to safeguard young people.

Residential risk assessments do not always capture the detail of the main risk assessment, and this could affect the consistency of approach to young people. Staff know the small number of residential young people well. The poor records do not impede their ability to safeguard young people.

Although young people rarely go missing, effective action is taken when this happens. The school has identified and responded appropriately to a range of concerns about young people. Designated safeguarding managers have strong links with other agencies and external safeguarding professionals. They work effectively with parents when concerns are raised.

All young people have positive-handling plans. Staff have received appropriate training in behaviour support. The support plans are vague and lack clarity. They do not set out clearly what staff should do when young people's behaviour is deteriorating. There is limited use of sanctions and restraint. Staff know young people well and can recognise when to intervene, but use effective strategies that are not contained within the plans. This means that young people experience inconsistent staff responses. There is no formal effective system in place to review the use of restraint to ensure that it was necessary or that the restraint could have been prevented.

The system in place for the recruitment and selection of staff is appropriate, and senior staff have undertaken safer recruitment training.

Independent monitoring visits to the residential provision are not carried out regularly. Directors and governors do not monitor whether any actions arising from the visits are promptly addressed. They do not regularly monitor whether young people are safe and happy where they stay. The new principal has taken steps to address this shortfall.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The senior leadership team, including the board of directors and governors, has undergone significant change this year. A new principal started in September 2019. The last principal, who was also the head of care, left in April 2019. Governors assigned temporary replacements from existing department heads without effective reflection and planning. Monitoring and oversight of the residential service are weak, leading to shortfalls in the national minimum standards.

The new principal is taking immediate action to improve matters. She is revising the residential development plan to improve the conduct of the residential provision. The actions include a decision to limit the residential service to those young people who are already accessing the service. This measure ensures that young people continue to receive appropriate care while the future of the residential provision is planned.

Young people are the focus of staff activity and attention. Annual reviews of young people's progress demonstrate that they are doing well in their academic and social development. An area of strength is how young people are supported to understand and manage the impact of autism spectrum disorders on their emotional, social and learning capacity.

Leaders addressed the previous failure to meet the national minimum standards. Staff are better equipped to support young people who are exploring their sexuality and gender. The new principal is driving a better understanding of equality and protected characteristics through staff training and practice. Further shortfalls have been found at this inspection. These do not directly affect young people's safety or welfare. Directors and governors have a weak understanding of the residential provision and this limits any opportunity for constructive challenge and development within the residential service.

Senior leaders and managers have failed to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the residential development action plan. They have not ensured that young people's residential experiences are overseen regularly by an independent visitor. Directors and governors have not ensured that they receive reports by the independent visitor promptly. Young people's written risk assessments and care plans remain disjointed due to lack of management oversight and quality assurance.

Care staff continue to provide good-quality care to young people. They are supported within a clear team structure. They are appropriately qualified. New staff enrol promptly for a residential care qualification and have a structured induction that includes autism-specific training. They have regular staff meetings and supervision that takes account of the specialist roles that they take on, for example an autism-accreditation champion or equality and diversity champion. Care staff have regular and productive liaison with other school departments. These arrangements underpin young people's progress.

Staff take full advantage of training that focuses on enhancing the young people's lived experience. For example, staff have learned how energy levels can affect an individual's capacity to take on challenges and manage anxiety. They have used this knowledge to support young people to identify when they need relaxation time and how this helps them to be ready for activity.

During the absence of the principal, directors and governors did not ensure that the residential manager had regular and good quality supervision. His supervision of residential managers was mixed up with appraisal. This does not provide senior care staff with opportunities to reflect on their role and the resulting development of the residential service was reactive rather than proactive or planned.

The school has effective and productive relationships with a range of professionals who support young people, both internally and externally. This means that young people have effective plans in place to help them to move on to their next placements. These include college and supported living. The school uses each young person's annual review to make relevant and necessary changes to young people's education, health and care plans.

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(s) for residential special schools:

- 13.1 The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school and takes appropriate action where necessary.
- 13.8 The records specified in appendix 2 are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate, specifically the information in residential care plans, risk assessment and behaviour support plans, and health needs.
- 20.1 The governing body or trustees responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number to visit the school six times, spread evenly over the course of the school year, and complete a written report on the conduct of the school.
- 21.1 The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis.

Specifically, that the information in residential care plans and risk assessment and behaviour support plans and health needs is accurate.

Recommendations

- 19.6 All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance.
In particular, that residential care managers have supervision from a suitably experienced person.
- 20.3 Written reports of all monitoring visits are provided to the head teacher (or school equivalent) and where applicable the governing body, organisation, or partnership. Reports are also 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.

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: S Thomas

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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