

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 an all-age school for children and young people aged between two and 19 years who have an education, health and care plan to meet their needs. All the children and young people have a learning and/or a physical disability.

The school is located within the local community, giving easy access to all local amenities. It provides spacious accommodation and access to outdoor play areas and a sensory garden.

The school offers residential accommodation for girls and boys who stay a minimum of one night per week, excluding weekends and school holidays. There are two head of care managers who have shared responsibility for the oversight and management of the residential provision.

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 March 2018

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: 20 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school requires improvement to be good because:

- The school has not fully met all of the previous requirements and recommendations.
- Not all of the staff have received training in how to protect the children and young people from exploitation. In addition, the school has not fully embraced all of the child protection training opportunities that are accessible from the Local Authority Children's Safeguarding Board (LSCB).
- The children's and young people's written residential plans, and information about their residential stays, are not always presented in a way that is easily understood by them. In addition, the residential plans do not set out the children's and young people's measurable outcomes.
- The staff do not receive a range of training opportunities that include some face-to-face training and more interactive learning.
- The current monitoring arrangements do not, specifically, provide for consultation with the children, young people or their parents.
- Document management and storage is disorganised and haphazard.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- The children and young people enjoy their residential stays and the staff are nurturing and caring. The children and young people have good relationships with the staff and with each other. Feedback from parents is very positive.
- The children and young people are making progress and their overall outcomes are good. The staff consult with the children and young people about their day-to-day arrangements, and they are encouraged to make choices about how they would like to spend their residential activity time.
- The children and young people are achieving academically and their healthcare needs are met. They receive additional support from a range of therapeutic and healthcare professionals. The children and young people are safe, and behaviour management is good.
- The two head of care managers have made good progress in meeting elements of the previous requirements and recommendations. Having had their individual roles established, the residential unit is running more efficiently. Feedback from the staff about leadership in the residential provision is extremely positive.
- Improved joint working between the school and the residential staff is having a very positive impact on improving consistency for the children and young people.

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

Recommendations

- Improve links with local safeguarding agencies to utilise training opportunities and learn from good practice by accessing local dedicated resources, such as newsletters and the local authority training and development website. In addition, ensure that all the staff have relevant safeguarding training, including training in child sexual exploitation.
- Continue to explore ways to fully include the children and young people in their residential planning by extending the range of information available to them, taking into account their age and their level of understanding.
- Further develop ways to monitor the children's and young people's progress and how the school has a positive impact on their development. In addition, introduce clear, measurable outcomes that are set out in a way that is understandable to the children, young people and their parents.
- Revisit the staff's training and development plans to introduce a range of learning opportunities that include some face-to-face training.
- Strengthen the monitoring of the residential provision to ensure that the children, young people and their parents are consulted about the care provided and how the residential provision operates.
- Improve document management and storage so that important information is readily available, for example health, safety, and fire safety information and risk assessments. In addition, ensure that information files, including case files, are not overfilled with unnecessary and out-of-date paperwork.

Inspection judgements

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

This outcome area is judged requires improvement because not all of the requirements and the areas for improvement from the previous inspection are fully met.

The school has not fully met a previous requirement to improve the children's and young people's residential care plans. For example, this related to the need to present the children's and young people's residential plans in a more child-friendly format so that they can participate in, and understand how they can contribute to, their planning and their outcomes.

In addition, there is a new area for improvement to ensure that the residential plans set out how the children and young people are progressing, using measurable outcomes, and how their residential experiences have a positive impact on their progress and development.

There have, however, been a number of positive changes that are beginning to improve how the staff establish the children's and young people's views and their wishes. This is good progress.

The introduction of child-friendly diaries has increased the children's and young people's active participation in celebrating what they are achieving during their residential stays. The children and young people have individual key-worker time to help them to write their thoughts and wishes in their diaries, which is having a very positive impact on increasing the children's and young people's confidence and their self-esteem.

The staff and the children and young people have very positive, nurturing relationships, which make their residential stays a very enjoyable experience. The children and young people are very happy arriving at the unit, where the staff warmly greet them. They settle in quickly, choosing which room they would like to sleep in, before they prepare for their evening activities. These established routines give the children and young people a sense of stability and consistency.

Comments from parents include: 'This place is brilliant for my son,' and, 'I do not know what I would do without the residential; my children love it there.'

The children and young people are making good progress in school and their health and well-being needs are met. Improved joint working between the residential and the school staff, alongside direct work with other professionals, is showing very positive results. For example, the residential staff work with an occupational therapist, a speech and language therapist and the school nurse to better inform their knowledge, skills and their day-to-day practice.

The staff promote good equality and diversity that respects the children's and young people's rights and supports positive outcomes for them. The children and young people are treated with dignity and respect, and they are supported to take part in a wide range of community-based activities. This enhances their inclusion, and acceptance, within their local community.

A young person said: 'It is good here. I like to stay and to see my friends and the staff.' Another child commented: 'I am happy and I like it here. I like to go shopping, and I like to go out with the staff on the bus.'

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

There are no immediate child protection concerns and there have been no child protection referrals since the last inspection. All of the staff have received basic child protection training, and they understand the importance of properly reporting any safeguarding concerns.

No children or young people are at risk of exploitation, radicalisation or extremism. There have been no instances of bullying, and no children or young people have gone missing.

However, not all of the staff have received child exploitation training, and the school has not fully accessed additional safeguarding training and useful resources that the LSCB offers to all the local authority maintained schools. This oversight and lack of engagement with the local safeguarding agencies is reducing the staff's access to additional safeguarding knowledge, skills and experience that enhances practice.

Overall, risk management is effective and good staffing levels, along with good supervision of the children and young people, reduce known risk factors. The responsible head of care has improved the monitoring and reviewing of the children's and young people's risks and potential hazards, which increases their safety during their residential stays. Behaviour management is positive, and there have been no restraints or sanctions used since the last inspection.

All visitors to the school are checked and vetted, and there are systems in place to ensure that staff safety checks are regularly updated in line with the school's safer recruitment policy. This protects the children and young people from having access to unsuitable adults.

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

The headteacher is an experienced leader whose positive ethos to improve the lives of the children and young people is evident throughout the school and the residential provision. He has the right skills, knowledge and experience to carry out his role. The two heads of care are committed managers who strive to meet the needs of the children and young people, and to enable them to have a positive residential experience.

The school has made progress since the last inspection. However, it has not fully met all the previous requirements and areas for improvement. These failures to comply with all the previous shortfalls have resulted in the outcome for leadership and management being judged as requires improvement.

The school has not fully complied with a previous requirement to improve the monitoring of the residential setting. Due to a change in the board of governors, there has not been a specific governor allocated to monitor the outcomes and progress of the residential provision. Consequently, the governor's independent visits have not taken place as set out in the National Minimum Standards (NMS).

The headteacher has, however, commissioned the services of two experienced childcare auditors whom the local authority use to independently monitor their children's homes. This additional, focused monitoring is having a very positive effect and is systematically driving positive improvements. The visitors have a range of transferrable skills that they have adapted to support the residential heads of care to make improvements in meeting the NMS and the social care common inspection framework for residential special schools. The visitors are not, however, commissioned to undertake consultation with the children, young people or parents. Therefore, a new area for improvement is raised in this report to ensure that regular consultation takes place.

There is progress in meeting an area for improvement relating to staff training and development. The head of care responsible for this area of management has completed a review of the staff's training and development and she has strengthened staff supervision and annual appraisals. However, there continue to be some shortfalls in training. All the staff consulted said that they would prefer a range of training opportunities other than online training. A new area for improvement is raised in this report to ensure that all the staff's training needs are met.

There is a new area for improvement to better manage the handling and storage of documentation. A number of files inspected, that include the school's health, safety and fire safety file and the children's and young people's residential files, were extremely difficult to navigate to locate important information. This is because the responsible member of staff has overfilled the files with unnecessary and out-of-date documents, some dating as far back as 2008. This way of working impedes the staff's access to relevant, current information that they need to ensure safety at the school and to keep up to date with any changes to the children's and young people's needs and planning arrangements.

The school has improved by meeting two previous requirements and three areas for improvement.

All the children and young people now have an identified key worker, and the responsible head of care is better reviewing, and evaluating, the children's and young people's risk assessments. The headteacher has reviewed the roles of the two heads of care and they now have identified key responsibilities. Both heads of care have visited other schools to share good practice, and they have established positive links with other residential managers to continue to share information and to access positive peer support. These improvements have improved outcomes for the children and young people and the operation of the residential provision.

Positive partnership working with parents continues to be a strength. All the parents consulted during this inspection were overwhelmingly positive about the services that their children receive. They all talked about very positive transitions for their children, and said that communication with the staff is 'excellent'. A parent said: 'My son loves soft play and he first started having tea at the residential to do soft-play activities. This gradual introduction helped my son to settle in beautifully.'

Other areas of improvement include the headteacher commissioning external professional services to improve the support and the quality of care to the children and young people. A new board of governors, including a new chair and vice chair of governors, is having a direct impact on improving the overall performance of the school and the residential provision. The school and residential staff are working much more in partnership, which has increased positive inter-school relationships. These areas of progress are enhancing positive changes that are leading to improved outcomes for the children and young people.

There are six new areas for improvement arising from this inspection.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: Mr Colin Bradshaw

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01665 602 541

Email address: admin@barndalehouse.northumberland.sch.uk

Inspector(s)

Debbie White, social care inspector (lead)
Lisa Summers, HMI social care inspector



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Store Street
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