

Wargrave House School

Wargrave House School, Wargrave Road, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside WA12 8RS
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is a non-maintained special school, established in 1971, for students who have autistic spectrum disorder. The school operates as a registered charity (charity number 1104715). It offers a day school, weekly and part-weekly residential boarding for up to 12 residential pupils at any one time. The pupils are aged from five to 19 years. Residential facilities are on-site, both in the main school building and in the post-16 department, Lakeside House. Some residential provision for further education students is provided. The service has been registered with the Care Quality Commission and does not fall within the jurisdiction of this inspection.

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 October 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **inadequate**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor.

Date of previous inspection: 16 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is inadequate because:

- There are serious safeguarding concerns regarding the environment and risk management, which are in need of urgent action.
- Due to a poor response to an incident involving a young person climbing a security fence, a repeat of this incident placed them at further risk of harm.
- Staff do not consistently use the school's own procedures for reporting serious concerns, leaving young people at risk of further harm.
- Managers do not ensure that electronic records related to incidents and restraints consistently provide the detail required to monitor how staff manage young people's behaviour. Furthermore, the staff are not identifying and addressing patterns and trends to create consistent strategies to minimise unsafe or unwanted behaviour.
- Young people's residences do not meet the minimum standard for accommodation. Some have no lounge and others have their lounge area damaged by day pupils. This prevents them from having a safe space in which to relax.
- The residential development plan does not reflect the shortfalls found in the quality of care planning, communication support, risk assessment or staff development. This impairs young people's progress and experiences because insufficient improvement is made in the overall care provided.
- There is no agreed job description for the new post of assistant care manager. This fails to provide staff with a clear understanding of their management roles and responsibilities.
- The designated safeguarding lead role had been allocated to a member of staff who was not sufficiently senior to undertake the responsibility. While this has not had an impact on the school's response to concerns and allegations, it does not meet the requirements of statutory guidance for keeping children safe in education.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- Young people enjoy warm and trusting relationships with staff who help them to be confident in trying new experiences.
- Parents and social workers value the approach of the school, which they say helps young people to make progress.
- Specialist professionals employed by the organisation provide assessments of young people's needs, and strategies to meet these needs.
- Highly effective nursing support enables young people to get the right healthcare to meet their everyday and emergency health 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 standards for residential special schools:

- 6.2 The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of children are ensured. This is specifically with regard to ensuring that objects that can be used to climb the fence are not placed adjacent to the fence.
- 6.3 The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up, and effective implementation of, a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. The policy should include the identification of risk within the environment and any behaviour from young people that poses a risk to themselves or others.
- 11.1 The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school by prompt and effective action to identify and minimise risks within the environment; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. In particular, ensure that the role of the designated lead for safeguarding is undertaken by a member of the senior management team.
- 13.7 The school follows and maintains the policies and documents described in Appendix 1. In particular, that any incident involving access to unauthorised areas is reported as a serious concern.
- 13.8 The records specified in Appendix 2 are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate. In particular, risk assessments for premises and grounds are monitored, and prompt action is taken to improve outcomes for young people.
- 5.5 Accommodation is suitably furnished for the needs of young people accommodated, including domestic-style dining facilities, and a lounge area for leisure and relaxation.
- 5.6 Children can, if they wish, personalise an area of their accommodation with suitable posters and personal items.
- 5.7 Residential accommodation is reserved for the use of those children designated to use it.
- 13.4 The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. This is in relation to drawing up and overseeing a detailed action plan for the development of the

residential service.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Safeguarding within the residential provision is inadequate. Staff failed to assess the risks posed to young people by the environment. Two serious incidents related to the environment were not managed effectively. Young people's welfare is not consistently promoted or safeguarded. This means that the overall experience and progress of young people is inadequate.

Young people make progress in their independence and social skills. Staff use warm and approving relationships to encourage and support young people to work through independence skills programmes. As a result, young people develop good habits and routines that make their lives better. Parents told inspectors about how proud they are of their children's achievements in increasing their level of independence skills, such as showering, dressing and making their beds. Young people have learned all of these things by staying in the residence. For those who live in Lakeside House, learning to cook and shop is part of everyday activity and this helps them to prepare for their adult lives. It is less clear how young people are developing their individual abilities across their life skills and this limits staff plans to help them improve even more.

Staff and young people know each other very well. Young people have trust and confidence in staff. This was demonstrated by the way young people who have autistic spectrum disorder were able to accept and tolerate new people, such as inspectors, in their home. An evening activity to a new outdoor centre was successful because staff reassured young people by interacting well with them. When necessary, young people took time away from the group. Staff's awareness and sensitivity in responding to each young person's individual needs ensured that the young people had a good time, engaging in a craft activity they were proud of. Young people had fun finding leaves, making clay plaques and exploring the textures and sights of autumn, as well as looking forward to having their tea out. One young person said, 'I am making good choices,' as he proudly completed one activity. He then asked to go for a walk before he moved on to his next activity. His smiles, enthusiasm and relaxed posture were infectious, making others around him smile.

Staff ensure that there are many activities that introduce young people to new experiences and settings. This increases their ability to adapt to new situations and their understanding of the world. Parents and social workers value this approach and say that young people are getting experiences they would not usually have. One parent said, 'My son is always well entertained when he is staying at school. The team has a wide variety of activities to keep him active and engaged. These also ensure a healthy lifestyle with exercise and good, balanced meals.' This enriches the quality of the young people's lives.

Staff are less confident in supporting young people with their individual

communication and sensory needs. They do not consistently use the speech, language and sensory assessments and strategies that are completed by the school's professionals in these areas. Young people's communication tools, such as schedules and symbol systems, are left unused. Placement-planning documents capture each aspect of young people's lives. They include information about young people's health, their preferences and the impact of autistic spectrum disorder on their lives. However, the whole-school approach is not sufficiently adapted to make it relevant to the residential experience. Inconsistent staff support limits the progress that young people can make and therefore their understanding of the world they live in.

The multi-disciplinary team meets regularly to talk about the progress that young people are making. Staff say that they share ideas and strategies to improve young people's happiness and confidence. This provides a good foundation for young people to learn. However, the residential records do not consistently demonstrate how the identified strategies are then used in order to support young people's social and personal development. The information provided for the placing authority's annual review does not consistently capture the positive impact upon young people of their residential experiences. Managers have recognised that this is an area for development.

Staff value the young people's opinions. They focus on young people's communication through their words, behaviour, facial expressions and gestures. Staff respond with kindness and concern that enable young people to move from one experience to another calmly and happily. Staff do not use well the formal structures that are in place to gather young people's views. For example, staff did not differentiate between communication levels for young people in the daily resident choices meetings. Choices about meals or activities were not consistently offered or negotiated. This means that it is difficult to understand whether young people are doing things because they have chosen to, or because they are being compliant. This does not empower young people to develop their skills in being assertive.

Young people have excellent support to maintain good health. The school nurse operates a detailed procedure for ensuring the safe administration of medication, so that young people get the medication they need. He also oversees an excellent system that identifies and classifies any medication error. He then ensures that appropriate action is taken to prevent further error. He provides clear protocols to support any emergency health needs, such as epilepsy, diabetes or asthma-related incidents. This gives staff the confidence to act appropriately to get the right medical help for young people. One parent commented, 'I am informed if (child) is ill or had a little accident and support is always provided if she needs to access medical help.'

Both houses for young people have serious problems with their environment and the way that it is used. Education is carried out in part of each property. At the last inspection, a recommendation was made to review the use of lounge space. Since then the situation has deteriorated. In Lakeside House, day pupils have access to the residential lounge area. Damage to the lounge and staircase has resulted. Maintenance and repair are slow. Resident young people cannot enjoy privacy or

homely and pleasant surroundings when they are living there. In one case, a day pupil entered a young person's bedroom, thereby compromising their privacy. In the main school accommodation, young people do not have access to any lounge and the dining room they use is a large, canteen-style room that day pupils use. This means that their only options for relaxation are in their bedroom or in a sensory room. Two bedrooms had bright fluorescent wall lights as the only source of light. This does not help with the unique sensory needs of young people who have autistic spectrum disorder. One bedroom was without the window film that ensures that they cannot be seen from outside. Their privacy was not protected. The main school accommodation is open for two nights per week. There is a detailed, financed action plan in place to improve the use of space in this building, including the development of a lounge area. This is subject to delay due to essential plumbing work having to take place first and the head of residential has not yet agreed to the improvement. No temporary measures have been taken to ensure that young people have a place to relax. These arrangements do not meet the minimum standard for where children live. During the inspection, managers agreed to address this as a priority.

A strength of the school is how staff help young people to move into and move on from school. Parents say that all departments work well together to focus on the needs of their child. Introductions and taster days are taken at their child's pace. Staff are keen to gather all information necessary to provide young people with the right support to cope with a stressful situation. This means that when a move takes place, young people are able to take this in their stride. Good communication means that any problems that emerge are dealt with quickly so that young people get the best possible experience.

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

Overall, there is a low level of restraint used within the residence. For some young people, incidents of restraint have reduced since the last inspection. When there is an increase in incidents, staff complete work with young people to try to understand why this is the case. New strategies are then considered and tried. All staff are trained in the model they are expected to use when managing challenging behaviour. Staff are skilled at de-escalating and defusing situations. When restraint is used, it is used in line with the legislative framework to prevent the risk of harm. Young people are debriefed following a restraint. Debrief systems are differentiated to reflect each young person's individual communication need when seeking their view, for example using specific symbols or gestures, such as a 'thumbs-up' sign. However, there is inconsistency in the monitoring of the records that set out staff responses to young people's behaviour. In addition, staff do not carefully record their actions to enable others to evaluate them. This makes it difficult for the management team to monitor and improve staff practice to help keep young people safe.

All staff have taken part in safeguarding training. In general, staff use safeguarding procedures well to keep young people safe. They report any safeguarding concerns to the local authority and keep detailed records of the referral and outcome. On one occasion, reporting of an allegation about staff was delayed by one day. Retraining

staff addressed this oversight effectively and incidents are now reported appropriately.

Staff understand the risks that use of the internet may pose for children. There are good internet safety mechanisms that take account of the age and understanding of each young person. In addition, a high level of staff supervision assists in protecting young people from harm. Staff have had training about the 'Prevent' duty and have been involved through working groups and training in developing the curriculum, which implements this for vulnerable learners. Staff encourage young people to adopt private routines, such as closing the toilet door. However, they do not offer direct work to help young people to understand why this is important. This limits their learning about important safety matters, such as managing their relationships and sexuality.

Staff ensure that fire drills are undertaken regularly. In one fire drill, shortfalls were identified. There was no recorded debrief after this fire drill and it was not tried again. Young people do not have detailed personal evacuation plans. Staff do not have strategies in place to identify or manage potential risks, such as an epileptic seizure or a young person running away from staff. One fire exit door is situated in a young person's bedroom. There is no written assessment of the impact on the young person's privacy. In addition, staff have not supported the young people who have autistic spectrum disorder to differentiate between when they should enter this room in an emergency as a means of escape and when they cannot. This lack of detailed planning around fire safety leaves young people at risk of harm.

The role and responsibilities of the designated safeguarding lead are not clear. Although this had not affected the school's response to concerns and allegations, the role had been allocated to a member of staff who was not sufficiently senior to undertake the responsibility. The management team acknowledged this during the inspection and agreed that it would take action to rectify this.

Safe recruitment processes prevent unsuitable people from working in the home. There have been no new staff commencing employment since the last inspection. However, agency staff are used from time to time. Agency staff's documents are subject to scrutiny by designated staff in the home before they start work. Furthermore, agency staff are required to sign an agreement about their roles and responsibilities when working in the home. This includes, for example, that agency staff are not to be involved in restraint. This helps ensure that young people are protected from unsafe practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

There have been significant changes to the leadership team over the last 18 months. Despite this, there is a vision in place that identifies the provision of holistic care and education. This is dependent upon good leadership and governance structures. The school is making planned changes at trustee and governor level, as well as in operational staff structures, to realise this vision. However, leaders are failing to

monitor these changes effectively. This inspection found shortfalls in the operational management of the residential service. Several shortfalls in meeting the national minimum standards had not been identified by senior leaders and consequently there are no plans in place to address them. This limits the progress being made to enhance the residential service provided to young people.

Staffing levels are sufficient to provide young people with the supervision they need. Residential staff take part in training that is available to the whole school, as well as having training plans that include a focus on their residential role. Managers have not evaluated the impact of training on staff practice. For example, managers were not aware of the limited individual communication support that staff give young people. This is despite staff having regular speech and language training. Staff expressed low morale due to feeling undervalued by senior managers and other departments. There is no evidence that this has affected their relationships with young people. Senior managers have been working to address the impact of the changes to the residential service, but this is a work in progress.

External professionals, such as social workers and child protection workers, and parents say that young people make progress during their time in the school. They commend the school for its open communication and a 'can-do approach' that supports young people's best interests. They value the multi-disciplinary team at school. Specialist roles and professionals in the school provide assessment of young people's needs, and strategies to meet them. The nurse, family liaison and special educational needs coordinator support families well. They ensure that young people get the help they need to stay well, and to take part in decisions about their lives.

Governors take turns in visiting the residences. They write reports about the interaction that they have with young people, and their conversations with staff. Governors report positively about the care young people receive and the range of activities that young people have access to. These independent reports are presented to oversight committees. However, the reports have failed to raise questions about day pupils using the residential environment, or the lack of relaxation space in the main school. This has contributed to a lack actions to improve the shortfalls found in this inspection.

Recent changes to staffing structures have resulted in four new assistant care manager posts being created. These posts replace four team leaders and a deputy care manager. The assistant care managers do not have a job description for their role, as this is being developed. They have all achieved a level 5 diploma in management. However, they have not yet had a chance to develop their practice and build confidence in carrying out their new role so that they have the necessary skills to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of care practice. This means that young people do not always receive consistent care from staff. Inspectors asked to see the supervision records for the assistant care manager, but these were not made available. It is therefore not possible to judge how well the assistant care managers are being supported in their professional development.

The management response to risk management and serious incidents is poor. Residential improvement plans are not coordinated effectively or promptly. The annual plan was not evaluated from the end of one year to the next and no progress has been made. Targets are either very broad so that they are impossible to measure or the timelines set for completion are unrealistic. Identified areas for development, such as improving young people's participation in their care planning, are rarely written down. Therefore, they cannot be monitored to ensure that progress is made. As a result, there is drift that prevents the service from making the improvements it needs to best support young people.

Inspectors found shortfalls in the quality of care planning. There is a lack of integration of specialist strategies to support young people's communication and sensory needs. The residential environment does not meet the minimum standard for residential schools. Managers have not consistently promoted basic rights for young people, such as privacy, safety and comfort. These, and other shortfalls identified through this report, do not uphold the organisation's residential statement of purpose that aims to put young people first.

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: SC022446

Responsible Person: Mr Simon Davies

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Ms Gennie Hyde

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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