

Wargrave House School

Wargrave Road, Newton-Le-Willows, Merseyside WA12 8RS

Inspection dates	16/01/2017 to 18/01/2017	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The quality and consistency of care that residential pupils receive is outstanding. Their physical, emotional, social and educational needs are clearly documented in high-quality planning documents and assessments of risk. Plans and strategies are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that the information is up to date and ensures a consistent implementation of the 24-hour curriculum.
- Pupils make continual progress in all areas of their lives. For example, they progress academically and personally, in areas such as communication, behaviour and social interaction. Progress is monitored and measured, evidencing the benefits that pupils get from their experience of residency.
- A recent revision of safeguarding policies, strong links established with external agencies, coupled with recent training for the whole staff team, ensures that the school's safeguarding practice keeps pupils safe.
- Very positive feedback was received from parents and other professionals external to the school regarding the working partnerships developed, along with the benefits that pupils gain from their experience of residency.
- The excellent communication levels between pupils and staff promote high levels of consultation in which pupils have a voice and contribute regularly to certain aspects of the residential provision. Making choices is well established in daily working practices.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Consider creating a designated lounge area in the main house where students and staff can relax and socialise together.
- Develop a system which clearly evidences that social workers and any other relevant person have been informed following an incident of physical intervention.
- Revise and update the statement of purpose.

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out at two and half hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice over two evenings; informal meetings with residential pupils; and meetings with the director of services, senior care manager, head of education & designated safeguarding lead, family liaison officer, head of therapy services, school nurse, estates manager, finance and HR officer, chair of trustees, chair of governors, two parent governors, a parent and a number of residential staff. Before the inspection, feedback was obtained from the local safeguarding authority. The boarding accommodation in both the main school building and Lakeside House were visited, and there was scrutiny of a wide range of policies and records. Responses on Parent View, and student and staff responses to Ofsted's surveys were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Graham Robinson

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

This is a non-maintained special school, established in 1971, for students with 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 13 residential pupils at any one time who are aged from 5 to 19 years. Residential facilities are on-site both in the main school building and in the post-16 department, Lakeside House. The school was last inspected in March 2016. In September 2012, following approval from the Department for Education, a specialist college catering for students aged 19 to 25 opened. As some residential provision is provided, the service has been registered with the Care Quality Commission. This new provision does not fall within the jurisdiction of this inspection and therefore forms no part of this report.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Children and young people benefit from having their individual needs recognised. Plans, strategies and targets are shared between departments within the school, providing residential pupils with a consistency of care that links into the 24-hour curriculum. Monitoring undertaken by the school clearly evidences the positive impact that residency has on pupils' lives, particularly with their behaviour, communication and social skills.

Pupils enjoy the residential experience and look forward to the time that they spend there. One pupil wrote in their survey, 'The staff at Wargrave House go above and beyond what is expected of them. I always feel safe, cared for and loved. We consistently take part in activities on and off site that are age appropriate, fulfilling and fun. I consider my place at Wargrave House my other home and look forward to each stay. I want to thank staff for being a loving, happy force in my life, they are the best.' Another pupil told the inspector, 'It's good being here. I like the staff.'

Communication with every child and young person is given high priority. Residential pupils along with day pupils have a strong voice within the school due to the excellent levels of communication and consultation that exists. For example, forums such as the pupils' personal contribution towards their EHC plans, annual reviews, residential meetings and student council meetings all provide pupils with a voice.

Activities are pre-planned and designed to meet need. A wide range of activities that are community based along with those taking place on the school campus develop confidence, self-esteem, independence and introduce pupils to new social networks. Social events arranged at times like Halloween and Christmas bring families into the school, giving opportunities for social occasions which are enjoyed and shared by all parties.

Safety is prioritised and promoted well. The school recently reviewed its own policies and procedures to ensure that they are fully up to date. Staff demonstrate an understanding around their own role and responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Any concerns are immediately shared with the appropriate agencies. As a result, pupils feel safe and valued.

The school has experienced difficulties regarding referrals for residency due to placing authorities' reluctance to commit to extra finances. However, the residential provision remains an integral part of the services provided by the school. The school is meeting the national standards laid out for residential special schools. To improve practice, the report contains three areas for further improvement.

All pupils who experience the residential provision receive an outstanding quality of care. An experienced, dedicated residential staff team understands the needs of the young people in its care and has the skills and commitment to address those needs in a positive way. The relationships created between staff, pupils and parents are strong, which promotes trust. One parent told the inspector, 'The staff understand what the issues are. At last someone finally gets my boy.' Another said about staff, 'They go that extra mile when supporting the children and their families.'

Internal communication levels around the school are high. For example, there are handover meetings that take place at different times of the day between night staff, residential staff and teachers. Parents confirm that communication levels between themselves and the school are high and that they are kept well informed. Pupils are involved in planning activities and this promotes their choice. Proposed plans and routines for evenings and mornings are clearly communicated to pupils so that they remain comfortable in knowing what they are going to do.

Residential pupils benefit from experiencing an environment in which individual needs, disabilities and identities are fully accepted. Placement plans along with other associated documents, such as health plans and assessments of risk, are individualised and of high quality. They are reviewed and updated regularly, which keeps them current. The 24-hour curriculum adopted by the school means that staff, such as residential, night, therapy and teachers, share responsibilities for the care and education of all pupils. Safeguards to ensure continuity of care are built into working practices.

For example, at agreed set times, joint target planning meetings take place between members of the residential staff and teachers. The purpose of the meeting is to share notes on an individual pupil, looking at the targets set in both residency and education to ensure continuity. This is deemed to be excellent practice through which comparisons can be made regarding progress and targets set. These meetings, which take place at regular intervals, ensure that the continuity of care experienced by pupils remains in place.

Pupils' health needs are supported positively. Health plans and health passports are up to date, and any concern around a pupil's health is well documented. This includes input from parents. A full-time, dedicated school nurse oversees pupils' health needs. Following some minor medication issues, the nurse and senior staff have stepped up the monitoring of medication and training for staff. There are well-established procedures in place that allow for medication to be transported both into and out of school.

Pupils benefit from the school employing its own therapeutic team covering areas such as speech and language, occupational therapy and music therapy. Observation of a session held one evening showed how much pupils enjoyed the experience which helped in practical ways to develop attention spans, spontaneity, and improve communication skills and decision-making. Having resources such these adds to the quality of care received by pupils.

Evening, weekend and holiday activities are well planned and designed to meet need.

Full use of community facilities play a prominent role in the activities taking place. One pupil due to go out to a trampoline centre told the inspector, 'I like going on activities, I like it here.' Activities promote fitness and a healthy lifestyle as well as providing enjoyment. The development of social skills and social networks improve pupils' awareness of what local communities have to offer, as well as promoting greater independence. For example, on one evening a number of pupils went out for a meal to a local restaurant. Activities for pupils is an area of strength.

The accommodation provided for pupils is comfortable and generally well maintained. The house used for older pupils provides a warm, homely environment. Accommodation for younger pupils is in the main building above the school. All bedrooms are single occupancy, with some in the main building providing pupils with their own toilet and bathing facilities. Discussion took place with senior staff regarding the lack of a designated lounge area in the main house where students and staff can relax and socialise together.

Pupils enjoy the food provided and are given choices at mealtimes. The quality of food is good and all dietary needs are catered for. For example, the parent of one pupil is delighted with the diet that her child has started. She is becoming fitter, having lost some weight. Individual likes and dislikes are well known to staff. Eating with pupils and staff in the main dining area was observed to be a pleasant, sociable occasion. Older pupils are well supported and encouraged to plan, shop and prepare their own meals.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

The arrangements to protect and keep pupils safe are good. The practices adopted by the school are underpinned by policies that have recently been reviewed and updated. This helps to ensure that practices do not become stale and outdated.

An experienced staff group understand their responsibilities and have the capabilities and knowledge to keep vulnerable pupils safe. Any cause for concern is reported immediately to the school's designated safeguarding officer. She uses the professional contacts that she has established with external agencies for advice and, when necessary, referral. Records are clear and kept up to date.

All staff receive comprehensive induction relating to safeguarding when they start work at the school. This is backed up with regular refresher training. For example, all staff received updated safeguarding training in September 2016. Training has also taken place covering areas such as sexual exploitation and extremism. Checks covering the use of the internet take place regularly. The school keeps parents well informed and updated through a range of brochures and the school's newsletter.

Behaviour management is well managed and monitored throughout the school. Comprehensive behaviour support plans are individual to each pupil. They are reviewed regularly by staff during multi-disciplinary meetings with the school's therapists. They work alongside other staff to help them understand the individual needs and requirements of pupils. This joint working promotes a greater consistency of care.

Behavioural incidents are recorded using electronic software, which helps in the monitoring of incidents. For example, this enables staff to look for any trends and progress in a pupil's behaviour pattern. However, current use of the system fails to record the details regarding communication with a pupil's social worker following an incident of physical intervention. This is an area to be developed further.

All pupils are provided with a safe environment. Routine checks take place to ensure that safety around the campus is maintained. Service agreements for a range of equipment are in place. Fire drills are timed to ensure that all residential pupils experience a fire drill out of school time. Risk assessments for hazards around the campus and for activity in the community are in place. Currently a process is ongoing to revise, update and upload older paper risk assessments onto the electronic system.

Recruitment and clearance procedures meet with statutory requirements and guidance, with all levels of staff being suitably cleared before they take up their post. A comprehensive recruitment checklist, which is signed off by a member of the senior leadership team, shows that references are verified. The school is also implementing its policy of re-checking longer-serving staff every three years, which is deemed to be good practice.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

Since the previous inspection, a new director of services has been appointed, taking up post in September 2016. He is being well supported in his new role by senior staff, many of whom have been at the school for some years. Overall the organisation and management of the whole school, including the residential provision, is good.

The residential provision has been hindered recently through a lack of referrals, which makes planning for the immediate future difficult. This has caused concern among some residential staff. Allied to this, long-term sickness, particularly affecting more senior staff has required other staff to step up and fill in for them, something that they have done well. Although at times staff have been stretched, it is to their credit that there is no evidence to suggest any deterioration to the quality of care being provided. Parents who are aware of this situation confirm this, and one said, 'I have not had a day's worry. I feel my child is in safe hands.'

The culture, ethos and working practices developed over the years in the residential provision have remained intact. This is reflected in the high expectations and aspirations that staff share with parents for all pupils. The numbers of staff meet the current demand being made on residency. Supervision, appraisals and weekly meetings provide staff with levels of support and forums to air worries and concerns. Staff are well trained, with all team leaders being trained to management level. The whole residential team impresses with its commitment to ensure that pupils reach their maximum potential and improve their outcomes.

Rather than having one single prospectus, the school prefers to have available a whole range of brochures that cover a variety of areas in some detail. For example, safeguarding, complaints and compliments, the prevent duty, how to become a governor, plus many others. The operation, purpose and function of the school is laid out clearly in a comprehensive statement of purpose, although some areas, such as staffing lists, require updating. Despite the current difficulties in planning for the immediate future, a school development plan is in place, which reflects the ambition of senior leaders for the school.

Senior leaders, governors and trustees all have responsibility for monitoring which includes the care afforded to pupils, safeguarding, key records, policies and procedures. Written reports are robust and comprehensive. The roles of the senior leadership team, governors and trustees have recently been assessed following an exercise carried out by an external consultancy. The brief was to look at their roles within the school. Consideration of the action plan produced is currently taking place. This is one of a number of examples in which the school has been prepared to review its own practice with a view to making continued improvements.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	134888
Social care unique reference number	SC022446
DfE registration number	342/7009

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	12
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	5 to 19
Director of Services	Simon Davies
Date of previous boarding inspection	15/03/2016
Telephone number	01925 224 899
Email address	enquiries@wargravehouse.com

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