

Fred Nicholson School

Westfield Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1JB

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Fred Nicholson School is a day and maintained residential special school for children aged between seven and 16. The school currently has 174 children on roll, 18 of whom stay for between one and four nights each week. The residential provision is situated in the main school building and provides separate accommodation for boys and girls. The school caters for children with moderate learning difficulties, such as speech and language disorders and autism spectrum disorders.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

The residential manager has a leadership qualification and has been in post since April 2021.

The residential provision was last inspected in June 2021.

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 May 2022

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 requires improvement to be good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 29 June 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy and benefit from boarding at the school. They build positive relationships with enthusiastic and motivating staff and like spending time in their company. However, this inspection identified several issues with the leadership and management of the residential provision. While these issues have not negatively affected the children or the quality of the direct care that they receive, unchecked, they have the potential to do so.

The experience of staying in residential contributes to children making progress. Children make particular progress with their independence and social skills. Some parents said that the support their children receive has led to significant changes in their children's abilities.

Staff recognise and praise children for their achievements. The reward scheme celebrates children's accomplishments, motivates children and raises their self-esteem.

There are good links between the residential staff and the day school staff. This means that staff can ensure that children's residential targets are mapped to their education, health and care plans. Managers capture and review the progress that children make. As a result, they have a good understanding of the improvements children are making against their identified targets.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities that they would not otherwise experience. Staff are creative in arranging different activities for children at the school. These include activities that support children's learning and development.

An independent visitor attends the residential provision regularly. The linked governor also frequently visits. Children know these people well and are excited to see and speak with them. This provides children with additional, familiar routes to express opinions or share concerns.

Feedback from families is consistently positive. Most parents report good communication with the residential staff. They value the provision and feel that the staff know their children well.

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

Children feel safe and well cared for. Staff have a good understanding of risks to children and their individual needs. Staff are clear about the process of raising safeguarding concerns and know when to do so. The staff work with children to help them understand different risks and support them to understand how to stay safe.

Children say that bullying is not an issue in residential. Relationships between children are well managed. When children make inappropriate comments, staff challenge them. When there are disagreements or relatively low-level conflict between children, staff support them to overcome these in ways that help the children consider each other's feelings.

The behaviour of children in the residential provision is good. Staff respond to children in calm and nurturing ways in line with their individual needs. Staff provide children with clear and consistent boundaries. This helps ensure that incidents end quickly and do not become more serious.

The safeguarding lead communicates well with external professionals. She takes an active role in attending multi-agency meetings and contributes effectively to these. Weekly internal safeguarding meetings take place. When a concern arose about a child not having an allocated social worker, the safeguarding lead clearly challenged the placing local authority. Good challenge to external professionals helps to ensure that children are provided with the services that they are entitled to.

There has been one allegation made against a staff member working in the day school. This was referred to the local authority designated officer. However, this was only referred after senior managers had spoken to the staff member involved in the allegation. Although managers had a rationale for doing so, this is not in line with the local authority's safeguarding procedures and meant that the process could have been compromised.

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

The residential manager has not accessed important reports that are shared via the online recording system. This is despite being a safeguarding lead and the reports relating to children in the residential provision. During the inspection, senior managers made changes to the process and took immediate action to ensure that this is unlikely to occur again. However, while the manager attends weekly safeguarding team meetings, not accessing the records increases the potential for important information to be missed.

Children's placement plans are of poor quality. Plans lack clarity and are confusing, misleading and ambiguous. Some information that should be included is not. Management monitoring and review had not identified these issues. Consequently, plans do not provide staff with a clear and accurate picture of children's needs and how to meet these.

Although monitoring reports have improved, leaders and managers were not aware of issues found during this inspection. Consequently, they were unable to take effective action to address the shortfalls. In addition, management monitoring had not identified issues with the window restrictors on the residential landings. This was addressed during the inspection but should have been picked up sooner.

The leadership team has a strong emphasis on the well-being of staff. Staff feel well supported by managers. Records of the regular supervisions demonstrate a good level of discussion and reflection. This supports staff's development by considering how they can best respond to children's needs in different situations.

Managers provide staff with a comprehensive induction programme and appropriate probation. This ensures that new staff are given the support needed to learn the different aspects of their roles.

Managers ensure that staff access a broad range of training, including training that is specific to children's needs. When managers identify new or emerging risks, they provide new learning and development opportunities. This helps to ensure that staff are supported to gain the knowledge that they require to meet the differing needs of the children.

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:

- The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and takes appropriate action where necessary. (NMS 13.1)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (NMS 13.4)
- The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere, such as in the child's statement of special educational needs or education, health and care plan. 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. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan, there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable, the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible, children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans, and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans. (NMS 21.1)

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that when allegations arise, contact with the local authority designated officer is made before any contact is made either with the person subject to the allegation or the child and parent or carer.

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: SC038284

Headteacher: Jane Hayman

Type of school: Residential special school

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