

Notton House Academy

28 Notton, Lacock, Near Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 2NF

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Notton House Academy is a residential special school.

The academy provides a 38-week per year educational provision for boys aged eight to 19 years who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties and/or speech, language and communication difficulties.

At the time of the inspection, there were 31 residential pupils. The residential accommodation is provided for pupils in eight distinct areas on the academy site.

Inspectors were aware during this inspection that serious child protection allegations were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the allegations were considered alongside other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspection of social care provisions on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 May 2021

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 **good**

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

Date of previous inspection: 2 March 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are happy staying at this school. They feel safe and have built strong, trusting and nurturing relationships with the staff who care for them. Children's day-to-day experiences are good and include them taking part in a wide range of fun and purposeful activities, which include pursuing their own interests as well as trying new ones. Due to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot of the activities have been on site. This has led to children and staff rediscovering the opportunities they have within the school grounds. Children love the gaming suite and enjoy online group tournaments which promote opportunities for shared play and cooperation.

Children are proud of their residential accommodation, which is warm, welcoming and furnished to a good standard. The accommodation is personalised, reflecting the individuals who live here. Children take ownership of their living space, evident by children from the two independence houses asking to come in during the holidays to tend to their garden. The dining area has been transformed into an American diner; this was the children's idea. This is now a space to relax and socialise in as well as for eating meals. Three sensory rooms at the school are all well equipped. The two in the residential accommodation are welcoming and inviting spaces. However, the sensory room in the school is in need of improvement due to the padded walls and doors.

Children receive care from staff who know them well. Care and safety plans are individualised and describe children's abilities, challenges and personalities. These are useful documents for staff, providing them with detailed guidance on how to recognise, respond to and support children on a day-to-day basis and during difficult times.

The well-being of children and staff is at the heart of the school's ethos. The well-being hub offers children a safe space to explore their feelings individually or as a group. It is available to children for informal support at break and lunchtimes. Staff describe how they help children to recognise their feelings and begin to manage them. The family support worker is a valuable asset to families working with children at school and at home and linking with other agencies when necessary. Therapists speak positively about the culture in the school and the willingness of care staff to work with them, and said that children tell them that they can trust and talk to the staff and feel cared for by them.

Thoughtful attention is given to introducing children to the school, some of whom will not have been away from home before. Children new to the school start on a Wednesday, so that they are initially only away from home for two nights. Some children benefit from spending part of the week at home while they are settling into the school and its routines. Children are kind to children joining the school and inspectors saw children helping a new pupil to settle in.

Developing children's independence is a strength of the school. Children make progress to manage money, to enjoy play and leisure, and with self-care and cooking. One young person has reached the highest level for his cooking skills and was preparing Jambalaya for dinner one evening and pulled pork on another evening.

Children benefit from good support in moving on to the next steps in their lives. Staff advocate effectively for appropriate post-16 placements. This means some children stay on at school if it is in their best interest and/or stay in residential while attending courses at other colleges.

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

Safeguarding processes are effective. Leaders and managers respond promptly to any identified concerns, reporting to safeguarding partners as necessary and reviewing with outside partners any significant concerns. Leaders and managers refer appropriately to children's services when they have concerns for children in their homes or in the wider community. In a small number of instances, leaders have not sufficiently formally escalated their concerns when local authorities have not accepted that a referral has met the threshold for social care to be become involved.

Behaviour is well managed. Staff enable children to develop an understanding of their behaviours, the impact these can have on others and how to manage their feelings. This work is supported by detailed plans with clear strategies which children have been involved in creating. The focus of this work is positive reinforcement and a restorative approach. This has led to a dramatic decrease in the level of damage to the school site as children are more invested in their school.

There has been a significant reduction in the incidents of restraint. When restraint is used, this is as a last resort and for as short a time as possible. Meaningful conversations are carried out with children and staff. Managers monitor restraint records and practice, addressing any concerns identified. Improvement is needed in the records of behaviour management. Currently, language used can be vague and emotive, which does not provide clarity on the event. Also, where an unexplained mark is identified, records need to reflect all actions taken.

Incidents of bullying are low. When they do happen, appropriate action is taken. Anti-bullying work is linked to the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. The PSHE curriculum is flexible so it can respond to events within the school and the wider community. The school is currently appointing anti-bullying ambassadors.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have a clear vision for the school. They are ambitious for the school, the team and especially the children. There are clear development plans in

place demonstrating leaders' and managers' understanding of the areas for improvement.

Staff are very positive about the school leadership team. The headteacher knows the children and staff well and is described by staff as the catalyst for the change in culture across the school. Some staff who have worked at the school for many years said that the headteacher has led the change from a punitive, regimented approach to children's behaviour to a child-centred, trauma-informed ethos in the school.

Staff feel supported and valued by managers, especially the support they have received during the pandemic. Staff told inspectors that they really appreciate the ongoing day-to-day support they receive and daily meetings they have with managers. Staff receive regular formal supervision that is reflective and aids their development. In addition, staff have regular well-being sessions which bring them together as a team for activities and team building.

Staffing levels are appropriate to meet the needs of the children. The staff are well trained for their roles and training provision is responsive to the needs of the children.

Managers have effective monitoring systems in place. This monitoring is enhanced by the peer reviews and feedback from the independent visitor and parents, and consultation with children. Information gained by monitoring is used effectively by leaders and managers to develop the school.

The compliments records echo the positive feedback inspectors received from parents. One parent said: 'You truly care about their [the child's] welfare and that your hard work has made a huge difference to our lives.' Another parent said that the staff 'have made my child feel normal and wanted for the first time ever. They have made him believe he is capable of becoming anything that he wants to be.'

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

Recommendations

- Review the use of padding on the walls of the sensory room in the school with a view to it replicating the more welcoming sensory rooms provided in the residential provision.
- Improve the escalation of safeguarding concerns when the local authority has not accepted that the concern meets the threshold.
- Improve the quality of records and monitoring of unknown marks.
- Eliminate the use of vague and/or emotive language in records to describe children's behaviours.

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: SC039112

Headteacher: Michelle Reysenn

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Inspectors

Wendy Anderson, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Janet Fraser, Senior Her Majesty's Inspector

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