

WESC Foundation

Topsham Road, Countess Wear, Exeter EX2 6HA

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

WESC Foundation is a visual impairment service for the education and care of children, young people and adults, aged five to 25, based in the South West. The boarding facility supports children from across the country to access care and education.

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 November 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: 4 July 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school requires improvement to be good because:

- Not all national minimum standards have been met. This includes two shortfalls identified at the last inspection.
- Some of the children are not making good progress. This is particularly apparent in their education.
- Some of the strategies to care for one child do not fully consider their best interests and do not take account of human rights. Care reviews are not always timely.
- Children's wishes and feelings are not always sought following incidents.
- The arrangements to ensure that children are safeguarded and protected from harm are not robust.
- One serious concern raised in respect of a staff member has not been managed well.
- Action is not always taken quickly enough when concerns that could impact on the safety of children are identified.
- Not enough is being done to ensure that children are safe when they access the internet.
- The arrangements to ensure that recruitment is safe are not rigorous.
- The head of care does not receive regular and meaningful supervision.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- The trustees recognised the need to change the leadership of the provision. A strong and dedicated team now leads this service.
- Leaders and managers understand their provision well and are working to improve the service.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate some good oversight of practice.
- Children have trusting and secure relationships with the caring and nurturing staff who look after them.
- Children can identify staff whom they can turn to if they have any worries or concerns.
- Staff demonstrate that they are skilled and use their expertise in respect of visual impairment to help children.
- Children benefit from a well-established therapy team.
- Children enjoy access to a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities, including activities in the local community.

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 standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 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.
- 7.1 The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- 11.1 The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 12.5 All children and staff are given an opportunity to discuss with a relevant adult (who was not directly involved) within 24 hours incidents of restraint, including reasonable force, they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by.
- 13.4 The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met.
- 14.1 Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 17.2 Active steps are taken to enable all children to make their views known, to make everyday choices and to maximise their opportunities to develop independence. The school should not assume that any child is unable to communicate their views and should support children to participate in important decisions about their lives using means appropriate to the child's level of understanding.
- 19.6 All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all staff have the relevant training so that they can care for children effectively and safely.

Inspection judgements

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

Some of the children are not making progress across all aspects of their lives. This is apparent in respect of their education. Not all education staff fully consider children's specific needs and communication styles. This obstructs children from reaching their full potential.

Some of the strategies used to care for one child fail to fully consider their best interests and their human rights. The care strategies used are not reviewed in a timely manner. Inspectors noted that restrictive practice for one child had not been fully considered within a multi-agency arena and that there was no signed consent from the child's parent.

Children build trusting and secure relationships with the nurturing staff who look after them. Staff know the children well, listen to them and are passionate about helping them to make progress and be happy. They use their expertise in understanding visual impairment to support children effectively.

Children benefit from a well-established therapy team. This team works collaboratively with care staff. If its members recognise that they do not hold the skills required, they access specific specialist help for children. As a result, children get the help and support that they need when they need it.

Children receive good support to access a range of social, educational and recreational opportunities, including activities in the local community. One child is involved in a drama group and is looking forward to taking part in a public performance.

Parents reported to inspectors that they felt supported and included in decisions about their children's lives. One parent told the inspector that they know that they can pick up the telephone, day or night, and get much-appreciated support from staff.

Care planning documents for children are good. These clearly describe the expectations on staff to ensure consistency of care for children. The detail within the plans ensures that communication from non-verbal children is fully understood and underpins day-to-day interactions with the care staff.

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

Inspectors noted several shortfalls in respect of the safety and welfare of children. There is no evidence that these shortfalls have had a direct impact on children.

Not enough is being done to ensure that children and young people are protected when they access the internet and use social media. An absence of appropriate boundaries means that the use of mobile phone and tablets is not monitored or managed. The over-optimistic and naive approach to this area of safety is a cause for concern.

Insufficient action has been taken to ensure that the accommodation that children live in is safe. There has been a failure to repair of the defective fire doors in a timely manner. Senior staff have been aware of the fault for several months yet have failed to react.

There has been one significant concern involving a member of staff since the last inspection. This was not progressed to the designated officer until a request was received from another agency. Some of the key concerns stemming from the internal investigation were identified, but there was a failure to act to reduce the risk of further harm. A referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service had not been made. Leaders and managers rectified this shortfall during this inspection.

The arrangements to ensure that recruitment is safe are not effective. Too many omissions were identified in the recording systems, and safer recruitment processes were not fully adhered to. The single central record was not up to date. These shortfalls are compounded by a cumbersome electronic system that makes it difficult to retrieve information quickly. Current leaders' commitment is illustrated by the way these shortfalls were addressed during the inspection.

The concerns identified that are specifically in respect of children have been escalated in a timely way. There is good evidence of management analysis and oversight of these concerns that have resulted in children being given help and protection when they most need them.

Children can identify staff whom they can turn to if they have any worries or concerns. There are systems in place for children to raise concerns. However, these systems lack creativity, as they do not enable children to raise concerns without deferring to staff for assistance.

The use of physical intervention has been reduced. The staff show patience and care when children are emotionally distressed. This approach means that the few interventions that have taken place have not been intrusive and were necessary to keep children safe.

The arrangements to ensure that medication is stored and administered effectively are good. Staff demonstrate that they fully understand the medication for children and how it supports each child's good health and well-being.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be

good

Leaders and managers have not ensured that the shortfalls identified at the last inspection have been addressed. This relates to safer recruitment and ensuring that all the national minimum standards are met.

Some members of staff do not receive regular and meaningful supervision. This includes a key member of the management team. In addition, the systems to ensure that training is up to date and relevant are not effective. Some members of staff do not have the training required to fully support children.

At times, practice shortfalls are not formally addressed. Appropriate support is not always available for staff to reduce the risk of further concern. In one case, not enough action was taken by managers to assure themselves that a member of staff was suitable to continue to work.

There have been some changes to the safeguarding management team since the last inspection. Inspectors are not confident that all members of the safeguarding team fully understand the key risks for children.

Management oversight is not consistent. Some very good examples were seen, yet there were areas of practice that lacked good oversight. For example, children do not always benefit from authentic debriefings following physical interventions. They are not always given the opportunity to speak to an adult who was not involved. This prevents children from raising with an independent person any concerns or worries that they may have. It obstructs learning from incidents in order to reduce their occurrence.

The trustees have recognised the need to change the leadership of the provision. A strong and dedicated team now leads this service. This newly established team has a shared and clear vision for the future. It has the children's interests at the heart of its practice. Staff speak positively about these changes.

Managers are open to feedback, and have taken prompt action when shortfalls have been identified during the inspection.

Leaders and managers understand their provision well and have an action plan that they are working through. Their self-assessment drew many parallels with the shortfalls identified during this inspection. Leaders have started to improve and develop the quality of service.

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 difference 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: SC022223

Chief Executive Officer: Jane Bell

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Inspector(s)

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