

Notton House School

Notton School House, 28 Notton, Lacock, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 2NF

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school provides education for boys aged 8 to 19 years with social, emotional and mental health difficulties and/or speech, language and communication difficulties. There are 39 residential spaces, and 29 of these are currently filled. The residential accommodation is on the school site.

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

Inspection dates: 19 to 21 January 2026

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 11 September 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make excellent progress from their individual starting points because staff have consistently high aspirations for them. As a result, children leave the school having developed the skills, confidence and qualifications they need to pursue successful and fulfilling futures. All the children who have left the school since the last inspection have continued into education, training or employment, which demonstrates the sustained impact of the support that they receive.

Staff know each child well and provide personalised care and support that help children to achieve their individual goals. Learning opportunities for children are expertly identified and seized. For example, older children are encouraged to act as positive role models for younger children, which promotes social learning, fosters ambition and strengthens peer relationships.

Children enjoy their time at the residential provision. They are supported to take part in a range of activities that help them to develop friendships, build social skills and broaden their interests and hobbies. Staff create personalised memory books for children that capture photos of shared experiences, such as pumpkin carving, den building and bowling. These keepsakes are used to celebrate children's achievements and help them to reflect positively on their time staying at the residential provision.

Children are supported to access high-quality internal and external support services, such as music therapy, speech and language therapy and occupational therapy. Children benefit from a tailored and well-coordinated package of support that meets their individual needs. Families recognise the positive difference this has made, reporting that family life has become more harmonious as a result. Families say their children are 'thriving' because of the 'fantastic' and 'amazing' support from staff, who 'go above and beyond' for their children.

Children are supported to share their views and wishes about the care they receive. Structured student council meetings help children to think about their contribution to their community and how their experiences can be made better. Children are empowered to effect change; their opinions matter and they are listened to.

Children have positive and trusting relationships with staff. Interactions are characterised by warmth, kindness and good humour, which help children to feel safe and valued. Children recognise and appreciate the nurturing care that staff provide. When talking to inspectors, some children used institutionalised language to describe their feelings. This language is widely used by staff and detracts from the otherwise nurturing environment.

When staying at the residential provision, children benefit from access to a wide range of communal spaces and facilities, including a cinema room, gym, music studio

and gaming suite. Children are supported to personalise their bedrooms, which helps to create a sense of belonging. Their cultural and religious preferences are respected and promoted, which helps to ensure that the environment reflects their values and identities.

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

Staff help children to stay safe, and risks are well managed. Children are supported to understand how they can keep themselves safe in the school setting, the wider community and the online world. There is a robust and effective response from leaders, managers and staff whenever there are concerns about children's safety. Multi-agency referral systems are used effectively, enabling a strong, coordinated safeguarding response that ensures children are protected from harm.

Staff are provided with the skills, knowledge and experience they need to keep children safe. Research-informed practice and guidance are shared with staff to ensure that they have a clear understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and the procedures in place to protect children. Staff are mindful of children's individual vulnerabilities and how their experiences shape how they perceive and respond to the world. Emotional health services provide children with meaningful, therapeutic support that helps them to make sense of their childhood experiences.

Staff support children to express themselves safely when they are upset or frustrated. They use a range of strategies to help de-escalate challenging situations. Restraint is used only as a last resort. The use of restraint is proportionate and necessary. Following the use of restraint, children and staff are supported to reflect on what happened and consider what could be done differently in the future to prevent similar outcomes.

Leaders and managers carefully monitor and track the use of restraint, which has reduced significantly in frequency over several years. A positive, nurturing culture is firmly embedded across the residential provision, with a clear focus on avoiding restraint whenever possible.

Suitable arrangements help children achieve a positive balance between the time they spend online and offline. Parental controls are used effectively to promote children's online safety, and staff support families to apply the same protective measures at home so that children's online activity remains safe wherever they are. Children receive age-appropriate advice and guidance to help them to develop the skills they need to stay safe online.

There has been a robust and comprehensive response to addressing the use of discriminatory language. Children have been supported to understand the impact of such language and the importance of challenging it. Leaders and managers have worked closely with specialist practitioners, external services and other schools to share learning and ensure that the support provided to children is effective. The

issue has been brought into the open, and a knowledge-based, community approach has been taken to challenge discriminatory language and promote a culture of inclusion and respect.

When concerns have been raised about staff practice, leaders and managers respond proactively to ensure that children are not put at risk. Concerns are shared with the relevant professionals, and action is taken to address and resolve shortfalls in practice. Staff are robustly challenged and supported to reflect on the impact of their actions and how they were feeling. Staff are helped to develop their skills and knowledge, which ensures that shortfalls are not repeated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Robust oversight from leaders and managers ensures that children receive excellent care from staff who have the skills and experience to meet their needs and keep them safe. Leaders and managers are receptive to feedback and take swift action to improve the care that is provided to children when areas for development are identified. The points for improvement that were identified at the last inspection have been met.

Children receive consistent care from staff, who they know well. Staff speak proudly about the personalised care and support they provide to each child. They understand children's needs and help them to make sustained progress. New staff benefit from a comprehensive induction to residential life, ensuring that they understand their roles and responsibilities and are well prepared to support children effectively.

Leaders, managers and staff are highly dedicated to the children they care for and act as positive role models. Staff enjoy their roles, feel well supported and are committed to continuous improvement. Regular staff supervision sessions and team meetings provide valuable opportunities for staff to reflect on children's needs and the quality of care they provide. These forums are used effectively in order to share important messages, strengthen practice and promote ongoing development.

Leaders and managers have a clear and accurate understanding of the residential provision's strengths and areas for development. They know which children they are best equipped to support, and they recognise when a child's needs sit outside of their skillset. This insight is complemented by robust admissions processes that enable leaders and managers to assess whether the residential provision can meet each child's needs and keep them safe.

Before children stay at the residential provision, they are supported to visit so that they can begin to imagine what it will be like for them to stay and learn there. Inductions to the school are child-led and consider children's previous educational experiences. This helps children to feel prepared, reassured and confident about their move.

There is strong oversight and monitoring of all complaints and concerns that are raised. All issues are taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately. Children, families and others can raise concerns through a variety of methods that reflect their individual communication preferences. Each issue is fully explored and understood before suitable action is taken to resolve it.

The oversight and monitoring provided by school governors and external visitors offer valuable insight into the effectiveness of the care and support provided to children. This enhances the already well-established and regular 'spot checks' that are carried out by managers, ensuring that a strong focus on improvement and making things better for children remains embedded in the culture of the residential provision.

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

Recommendation

- School leaders should review the care that is provided to children to ensure that institutionalised practices are avoided. Specifically, to address the wide use of institutional language which is not inline with the nurturing ethos of the school.

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/teacher in charge: Michelle Reysenn

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number:

Email address: mreysenn@nottonhouse.mnsp.org.uk

Inspectors

Martin Brown, Social Care Inspector

Joy Howick, Social Care Inspector

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