# Holly House School

Holly House School, Church Street North, Old Whittington, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S41 9QR

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Holly House School is a maintained residential community special school for children with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school provides education for 43 children aged 7 to 14 years.

The residential provision is located in an annex to the main school and provides accommodation for up to 8 children. Children can overnight from Monday to Thursday during term time.

A qualified and experienced head of care leads the residential provision.

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

**Inspection dates: 28 and 29 September 2026**

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|---|---|
| **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:** 17 March 2026

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

# Summary of findings

Children continue to make exceptional progress in line with their age and stage of development. The leadership and management of this school, although relatively new, are becoming well established. Together with the staff team, leaders and managers are excellent advocates for the children. They clearly want the very best for children and nothing less. The staff team is consistent, and morale is high. There is a very positive energy in the staff group that benefits the children.

Working with families and carers remains a great strength. Some families see the support and guidance they receive as a lifeline. Family, school and the residential provision align seamlessly. Communication between all the professional agencies is highly effective.

Children look forward to their stays in the residential provision. They know that they will be safe and will settle well. Staff are extremely attuned to the individual needs of children. They naturally adapt and change activities and plans to ensure that all children have a successful and enjoyable residential stay.

# Inspection judgements

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children are kind and considerate towards others. They participate in activities with peers who they may not usually spend time with. This helps children to develop positive relationships and make new friends. Children develop empathy and tolerance towards others at this school, and this leads to a harmonious atmosphere. The staff work hard to model positive behaviour. This helps children to understand what constitutes good and acceptable behaviour.

The school has a strong therapeutic ethos embedded into all aspects of the care planning for children. As a result, children's emotional wellbeing remains a priority. This helps children to better understand the emotions and feelings they experience when they are upset, angry or sad. This leads to children regulating their feelings better and managing their emotions. Overall, children are far more settled, and their behaviour has improved as a result.

There continues to be a greater focus on tracking specific outcomes for children. This enables leaders and managers to identify pivotal moments for children where they have made considerable progress. The caring approach of staff is reflected in the records they maintain. Staff offer praise, show empathy and demonstrate positive regard for children. This is reflected in all aspects of the care and support that children receive.

Children are encouraged to be a part of their school community. They have been fully involved in school-based charity events. Children regularly access the local

community to take part in activities that are both fun and provide opportunities to gain experience of being involved in the community. Children have been on holiday together to the seaside, and they are in the process of choosing their next holiday destination.

When needed, school staff provide additional help and support to children's families, especially during school holidays. Staff are aware of families' circumstances and ensure that many of the activities at school can be replicated at home. This enables children to continue engaging in important activities during school holidays and benefits the children and their families.

School leaders and staff ensure that children's moves into and out of the school's residential provision are managed sensitively and carefully. When children leave, they and their families can be confident that they have had every opportunity to develop their skills and independence as they move on to the next stage of their education. Similarly, when children begin their journey to residence, leaders and managers work in partnership with children, families and school staff to ensure that transitions take place at the right pace and at the right time for each child.

Staff prioritise children's education, and school attendance is excellent. Staff and education colleagues work collaboratively, and they all agree on targets for the children. When targets are achieved, these are celebrated. This reinforces to the children that they have worked hard to achieve success and that their efforts are recognised.

Great effort has been made to ensure that children live in an environment that is welcoming and feels like a family home. Children have made decisions about how their home is decorated, and they take pride in keeping it presented to a very high standard. When areas for improvement are identified, leaders and managers take action to ensure that these are addressed quickly.

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

Staff know the children extremely well. As a result, they can identify early signs of distress and help children at an early stage to self-regulate. This leads to improved behaviour and children who have very good insight into their own emotions and feelings.

There is a whole-school approach to the safeguarding of children. Staff are equipped with the knowledge, and gain subsequent competence, to identify any concerns about children's wellbeing. Staff know what they must do to keep children safe. When necessary, safeguarding matters are referred to relevant external safeguarding agencies. Leaders and managers have excellent oversight of this process. This helps children to be safe and protected.

Staff continually build on their knowledge of children and the most appropriate way to support and keep them safe. All children have detailed risk assessments and behaviour support plans. These documents provide staff with the necessary guidance on how to meet children's needs on a day-to-day basis and ensure that they remain safe.

Staff are appropriately trained in physical intervention should this be required. The school also has a designated behaviour support lead. Staff use positive relationships and holistic interventions to reduce the need for physical intervention. They understand that all other behaviour support strategies should be used first and that physical intervention is the absolute last resort to keep children safe.

Children have formed strong and trusting relationships with staff. The bonds between children and staff reinforce children's sense of safety. Staff do not shy away from difficult conversations with children if their safety is jeopardised. Instead, staff take a proactive approach and explore any issues in an open and honest manner. This also allows children to feel safe and approach staff when they have their own worries.

Children's needs are such that they require close supervision. As a result, they do not go missing. However, staff remain alert to this possibility. Staff also work in partnership with families to ensure that risks are understood and that there is a shared approach to monitoring and reducing these risks.

There is a clear medication process in place. Staff receive training before taking responsibility for administering medication. Where appropriate, children are supported to develop an understanding of their health needs and medication.

**The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The head of care is aspirational for all children. Her primary focus is on ensuring that children are provided with a loving residential stay where they have every opportunity to thrive. She is highly proactive in her role and works alongside the deputy head of care. Together, they make a strong leadership team. As a leadership team, they are clear about their vision for the school's residential provision.

Staff feel supported by leaders and managers and enjoy working at the school. There is a strong ethos of teamwork. The head of care is fully embedded within the team and works alongside staff to meet children's needs on a day-to-day basis. Staff report feeling well supported and say they can access support from managers when needed. Staff morale is high, and there is a positive and energetic approach.

Staff are dynamic and highly adaptable to change. When required, they adapt activities to meet children's presenting needs. This is always achieved with little or no fuss and with minimal or no negative effect on children. This is a great strength of this school and this team.

Leaders and managers recognise the importance of maintaining relationships with significant people in children's lives, including family members and carers. Children are supported to speak to those important to them when needed. Staff have a high level of contact with families throughout children's stays. Working alongside families is one of several strengths of this school.

The staff team receives a very high level of care and consideration from leaders and managers. Staff receive supervision in line with their support needs. Regular team meetings are inclusive. This provides children with responsive and considered care. The wider school offers both formal and informal opportunities to help staff be the best they can for the children they care for.

The leadership team continually reviews processes across the school to ensure that tasks are undertaken in the most effective and efficient manner. They have developed systems that meticulously capture pertinent details about children. External scrutiny provides additional reassurance and, where necessary, challenge to the leaders and managers, helping to drive continuous improvement.

All national minimum standards are met. No recommendations for improvement have been identified at this inspection.

## 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:** SC056234

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Marc Hughes

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01246 450530

**Email address:** info@hollyhouse.derbyshire.sch.uk

## Inspectors

Simon Hunter, Social Care Inspector
Chloe Harvey, Social Care Inspector

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