



Summary of the 2022 Residential Special Schools minimum standards

by John Woodhouse, Director at dialogue.

A. Governance, Leadership & Management

Schools will need to work with families to review, update and promote (including placing on their website) their statement of purpose, and create a children's statement of purpose. The statement of purpose must now be child centred and focused on welfare. It still describes the model but must also describe the impact of the approach on the progress and experience of children. A host of requirements have been introduced to the statement of purpose to describe the residential accommodation, its purpose and arrangements, how it compliments the life of the school, staffing and supervision and line management arrangements.

Standard 2, formerly standard 13, on leadership and management has been substantially rewritten beginning with a named governor for the residential accommodation, a priority given to the monitoring arrangements through governors' meetings and regular visits by them to the accommodation at the school. Governors and leaders are required to have "effective skills and knowledge... and actively promote safeguarding and welfare of children", with managers having been suitably trained.

Standard 20 visits have been moved up to Standard 3 and are significantly bolstered, including commentary on the quality of provision, suitability of buildings, furnishings and environment. Visitors must have been suitably recruited and vetted and have the skills and authority to carry out their role. All visits are now unannounced with specificity about speaking to children, parents and professionals and specific records. The school must respond to the Standard 3 report and the reports are retained for inspection and shared (on request) with placing authorities and the host local authority.

B. Care & placement planning

New information has been added reflecting schools' duties in relation to EHC plans and that these are considered at review, including a residential report. Expectations rise that necessary documentation should be in place. Placement plans are given much attention in the new Standard 7, with more involvement from young people (possibly with an advocate), risk assessments, termly reviews. Young people must be properly prepared for adulthood.



C. Residential provision

The shift from suitable accommodation to good accommodation reflects a wider shift across the minimum standards and now includes appropriate internet access", hot water and toilets that are readily accessible. While young people can continue to share rooms, they should have some choice in who they share with, attention should be given to the factors that impact such as sex and age, and ongoing risk assessments should be undertaken.

Schools using biometric technology or CCTV will need to register with the ICO and have a specific policy. This will be of particular importance where electronic monitoring of children takes place.

D. Health & Wellbeing

The sense of health being the only aim has shifted so schools "proactively engage and support" young people to achieve a "healthy, happy and fulfilling lifestyle" through a range of activity "such as social activities, sport, arts, cooking and off-site visits". A new paragraph on nurture, rights and dignity has been added to improve relationships and identify health issues at an early stage.

Children should have access to "local medical, dental, optometric and other services or provision as necessary". Extra care must be taken when separate accommodation needs to be provided for children who are sick or injured, recognising the particular vulnerabilities at these times.

Accurate, rather than proper, records of administering medication must be kept. There are heightened requirements for administering medication and access to a clinician.

E. Safeguarding

This section is substantially new and emphasises, in line with KCSiE, that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. This includes at school, in the residential accommodation and online (with particular acknowledgement that children may bring in devices with harmful content preloaded). The guidance highlights the need for staff to be aware of the particular risks of child-on-child abuse in residential special schools with an emphasis on staff and children both understanding these risks and a tailored policy.

F. Health & Safety

In addition to ensuring staff are properly trained in respect of health & safety issues, and that attention is given to health and safety off the school site, the standards require there has been planning for dealing with a major incident or overnight evacuation.

Fire safety has greater emphasis, beginning with children and staff knowing what to do, ensuring there are effective evacuation procedures, a night time fire drill at least annually and additional drills for children on short breaks.



G. Children's rights, advocacy & complaints

Safeguarding features from the outset, that staff "know what to do if a young person approaches them with a concern". The role of the independent person is clarified and developed with a focus on individual support, while the Standard 3 visitor has a wider focus on the organisation. Children are not just informed but know who their independent person is, how to contact them and feel comfortable about doing so. Standard 17 requires this person is "easily accessible at reasonable times" and visits at least monthly. Interestingly the role can be shared between several people to provide a service tailored to the needs of the child.

Young people have a right to an advocate in line with the national advocacy standards. They should know who the services are and how to access this, together with Childline or the Children's Commissioner.

Standard 18 is substantially new with a focus on securing their views to improve the residential provision through encouragement and established systems. They must get feedback on their suggestions. Their views are recorded and have an impact on the home.

Standard 19 highlights the differences in process required between parental and children's complaints. The complaints log should be enhanced to include complaints made but subsequently withdrawn and look to identify patterns behind complaints.

H. Promoting positive behaviour and relationships

The behaviour policy guidance (standard 20) has been substantially redrafted to more of an action/impact focus rather than the process focus in the previous guidance.

Staff should have training on bullying and ways to de-escalate incidents between pupils to minimise the need for restraint. Reflective discussions where this does occur must now happen within 24 hours. The recording of any such incident, or in the event of major sanctions, should be "clear and unambiguous". Children may have access to their advocate to support getting their views heard.

Use of restraint should be monitored to take action where inappropriate restraint is used and to take action to reduce the use of restraint going forward.

Staff must also keep a record of missing and absence episodes.

Standard 21, preventing bullying, is new with a requirement for an anti-bullying strategy that recognises the difficulty in not being able to have their home as a safe place like children in mainstream schools. Schools must create a children's reporting mechanism and ensure prompt action is taken in respect of discriminatory bullying.



Standard 22 is also new: “Children are supported to develop good relationships with other pupils and staff, which are based on mutual trust and respect”. It reflects the requirements of relationships education and relationships & sex education to children in primary and secondary settings. Staff are confident in ensuring young people have healthy relationships, can talk to them about these, and take action when there are concerns about exploitation.

I. Children’s development

There is a new and ambitious requirement to creating stimulating environments in Standard 23 on activities and free time. In addition young people should achieve the independence skills they can in line with their needs and plans. All children should have the opportunity to participate in “developmentally appropriate peer activities”. They should be a degree of separation of areas for recreation and socialising.

J. Staffing

Standard 24 clarifies requirements around DBS checks. The requirement around no more than half of staff on duty are agency staff has been relaxed to be a target rather than a requirement. Agency staff cannot be in permanent overall charge of a child or children. Schools must have a recruitment and retention plan.

The boundary around staff accommodation has been tightened from ‘properly supervised’ to forbidden other than “in exceptional circumstances” in Standard 25.

Night time arrangements are addressed: “There is a suitable number of staff on duty to meet the needs of, and be responsible for, the children in each building where children sleep at night. Children should be able to easily contact members of staff in the night if necessary and should know how to do this”.

Staff will need to complete the Level 3 within 2 years, as they already do with Children’s Homes.

A new standard on educational guardians has been added (standard 27) to ensure they are safely recruited, monitoring and safeguarding.

