

Lonsdale School

Inspection report for residential special school

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Lonsdale School was opened in 1971, as a purpose built school for pupils with physical and neurological impairments. It is located in spacious, attractive grounds in the Pin Green area of Stevenage. Pupils at Lonsdale come from Hertfordshire and the surrounding counties following Statutory Assessment of the Special Educational Needs. In 1998, Hertfordshire County Council and the school agreed that it would be funded for 84 places with 26 residential places. The residential accommodation comprises of four self-contained units and can accommodate up to 26 pupils per night. The accommodation is shared by two groups of boarders each staying for two nights per week Monday to Thursday. There are four flats with a choice of single and double although a maximum of three can share a room. All of the living and learning areas are at ground floor level. Living accommodation is arranged around gender and peer groups with each unit having its own kitchenette and living area as well as bedrooms, bathrooms and toilets. All bedrooms are linked to a night monitoring system that alerts the waking night staff if a pupil is unable to sleep or having a seizure. The school provides special fittings and adaptations to meet the needs of pupils. One of the residential units has been fitted with automatic doors upon approach; all remaining unit doors have magnetic devices with hold back mechanisms. The school is led by Mrs. Maria White, Head Teacher and supported by Mrs Lesley Thompson who is the Head of Care. The school has achieved an Investors In People award.

Summary

This visit is a Key announced inspection of the service looking at standards identified by Ofsted as key areas of care. Additional standards with regard to catering, activities, staff training and premises were inspected. The overall judgment is based on the outcomes of the standards inspected.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The recent additions and alterations to the building have enabled the school to start offering placements to young people to prepare them for more independent living. This accommodation is well presented and well equipped to meet the needs of the young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The health and care files of the young people are very detailed. They contain clear information regarding the often complex health and physical needs of the young people at the school. The school provides 24-hour paediatric nursing support for the young people and comprehensive specialist input and contact including occupational and physiotherapy. Parents and young people are very pleased with the specialist health support provided at the school. The young people's comments include, 'the nurses are polite, fun, nice, respect my privacy and make me laugh'. The links with local doctors and specialist consultants greatly benefits the staff, young people and their families. The school accommodates some young people that have extremely high dependency levels and degenerative conditions. The staff comments and knowledge of different conditions of the young people in their care is impressive. They are well informed and professional in their work with the young people. All care staff receive training from the qualified

nurses on topics relating the special health care needs of the young people. Qualified senior care staff provide comprehensive manual handling training for all care staff on a regular basis. The manual handling plans, on individual young people, are detailed and reviewed when required with all involved, including the young people. The school has plenty of specialist equipment to meet the needs of the young people. Equipment is regularly checked. Feedback regarding the suitability of the equipment is sought from both the staff and the young people. The views, experience and expertise of the young people regarding their care needs is sought and effectively used. The school has a good medicine policy. The registered nurses administer all medicines and follow health trust medicine guidelines. They have excellent working relationships with the local doctors and specialist consultants. Care staff are trained and signed off as competent by the nursing team with regard to some specialist medications and procedures. The records for the administration and audit of medication are kept in excellent order as is the storage of medication and specialist equipment. There is a sound professional relationship between the nurses and the care staff and they work as an extended team ensuring that the health needs of the young people are well met. The menu reflects the dietary needs and choices of different young people accommodated. The meals provided are well presented, healthy in content and much enjoyed by the young people. Fresh fruit and vegetables are always available for the young people as well as snacks and drinks. The staff and young people link with the catering staff on a 'healthy eating' group to plan menus and work on improving health eating throughout the school. Any specialist dietary requirements are met by staff that have received appropriate training from health care professionals. Detailed eating plans are made available for the staff to ensure a consistent approach and provide information for reviews of the individual young people's abilities and needs. Mealtimes are sociable and relaxed. The young people are well supported by staff and encouraged to do as much for themselves as possible. Any assistance from staff is provided in a discreet, gentle and supportive manner.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The young people feel that their privacy is respected. They are able to make private telephone calls from the school. The staff are good at ensuring the privacy of young people when bathing or attending to their personal needs. They are very aware of the need to respect the young people's confidentiality and only discuss issues and arrangements with the young people or in private office areas. Information held about young people is stored securely and staff demonstrate a good awareness of the need to keep information confidential. The staff handbook contains policy documents and information regarding practices and procedures to ensure young people's privacy and confidentiality. The school has not received any complaints. The school complaints procedures is made available to parents and staff though it does not refer to Ofsted or reflect the boarding provision at the school. The staff induction programme does not contain any training with regard to managing and handling complaints. The young people say that they feel safe staying at the school and that they are able to talk to the Head, care staff and counsellor if they have a specific worry. The school has good procedures and policies in place with regard to bullying. The majority of young people said that they had not experienced any bullying whilst at the school. The young people feel able to talk to the Head and staff should an incident of bullying occur. They know that bullying is not acceptable and are clear that bullies are dealt with. The staff are aware of the need to work together to provide a safe and caring place for the young people. Comments and records by staff demonstrate a good understanding of child protection issues. The Head is the school's designated child protection officer and ensures that all staff receive child protection training. The child protection policies

and procedures link into the local authority process and are contained in the staff handbook. Staff recruitment procedures ensure that the young people are only cared for by staff who have had appropriate checks undertaken on their backgrounds. The school approach to behaviour management is very much focussed on encouraging the positive behaviours of the young people. Achievement targets for developing individual skills and managing behaviours are set with the young people and include their parents. The young people are very aware of their targets and strategies for achieving success. This approach is much appreciated by the young people and their parents. All sanctions are well recorded and monitored by the Head. The young people feel the rules and sanctions used in the school are fair. They like the emphasis on achieving rewards and privileges and know what is expected of them. The school policy and procedures, with regard to the use of physical interventions, complies with the local education authority policy. Appropriate processes and checks are in place to ensure that young people are cared for in a safe environment. A health and safety audit has been carried out by the provider and an action plan has been prepared by the school to address any shortfalls highlighted. There are comprehensive risk assessments in place with regard to the premises and activities available for the young people. Checks are undertaken of the fire alarms and regular fire evacuation drills are held with both staff and young people. Checks of the water temperatures are not currently being done. The home has sufficient parking and security systems in place to ensure the safety of the young people and visitors to the home. Good systems are in place in relation to keeping young people safe and promoting their general wellbeing.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The young people's files contain copies of their education plans and achievement records. Staff support the young people to achieve educationally. The care staff help the young people with homework and encourage them to do tasks set by their teachers. The link between the teaching and care staff is positive and focussed on achieving the best educational outcomes for the young people. There are good communication systems in place between the school, the boarding house and parents. Parents are pleased with the education that their children receive at the school. Their comments include, 'the achievement awards are good for the children'. 'The school boosts young people's confidence and skills.' 'The staff are supportive and caring and help my child do more.' There is an after school activity programme for the young people and activities are planned to ensure that all the young people can participate at their own level. Changes to the activity programme are made following discussion with the young people. Staff are supportive and encourage the young people to participate in different activities. There is a good balance between study and free time for the young people. The young people's comments about activities are very positive. They especially enjoy the opportunity to 'visit' their friends in the different boarding flats. From discussion and observation, it is clear that the staff have a good understanding of the needs and difficulties of the young people in their care. The care and support is consistent and reflects the young people's targets and information held within the majority of care plans. The approach to working with the young people is very individual and supportive, especially with regard to the physical and health care needs of the young people. The young people have access to an independent counsellor. Contact with the local community is limited as the young people only stay at the school for two nights. However, the school is looking at ways of developing community contact for the young people, especially for those moving into the independent living flat. The independent living flat is now ready for use following the alterations and refurbishments. The staff team developing independent living are committed and keen to ensure a positive and supportive experience for the young people.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The staff encourage the young people to have their say and respond well to their requests. Young people are elected by their peers to represent them on the school council. The school council meets regularly and was observed to be a good forum for young people to discuss issues and activities in the school. The young people are confident and very able to voice their opinions and concerns. Parents feel that the school actively supports and encourages their children to feel positive about themselves and to express themselves in a confident and positive manner. Individual education and social care information (where relevant) is appropriately and securely held in the school. Support plans are generally well written though some are not in formats suitable to help the young people understand them. For example, a plan had not been updated to reflect the change in feeding skills of one young person. Some young people use Makaton and their support plans did not contain sufficient information about the signs used to enable staff to communicate effectively with the young people concerned. The staff are aware of the individual needs and abilities of the young people, though the emotional needs and difficulties for some are not being addressed through their support planning. The link workers in each flat work with the young people to produce their achievement targets and support plans. The staff are good at encouraging the young people to work on their targets and achieve success. They are positive and supportive in their way of working and talking to the young people in their care. The staff are aware of the contact arrangements for the young people. The majority of the young people only stay at the school for two nights a week and so maintain regular contact with their families. Parents are made welcome when visiting the school and confirm that they are able to contact their children during their boarding stays.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The living areas are bright and homely. There are pieces of young people's art work and photographic evidence of activities and fun times displayed everywhere. Each flat has a kitchen that the young people are encouraged to use with staff support. The young people have access to school facilities including the hall, swimming pool and computer room. The premises are very well equipped to meet the needs of young people with physical disabilities. The school security systems ensure the safety of the young people and staff. The new independent living area is near completion and some young people will soon be offered a placement. This area is well equipped to meet the physical needs of the young people as well as support them in developing their independent living skills. The living areas are large, bright and well furnished.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a written Statement of Purpose and Function which sets out all required areas of information about this service. Young people are admitted to the school in accordance with the Statement of Purpose. The information about boarding at the school is not in a suitable format to enable the young people to have a good understanding. Comments from parents and the school counsellor are supportive of the school's approach to working with, supporting and encouraging the young people to achieve and fulfil their potential. The school has also produced an additional Statement of Purpose specifically to address the development of the residential independence programme which is soon to start admitting young people. The overall

school development plan for the academic year includes the development of the independence living programme and other areas that reflect the boarding provision at the school. The staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the young people. Two staff are allocated to each flat at the beginning of each academic year and form good relationships with the young people in their flat. The staff team are positive in their approach to working with the young people and each other. They are keen to achieve the best for the young people in their care. Staff are trained in the use of different communication skills such as Makaton, British Sign Language and picture symbols though some are not confident in using their skills. Parents are pleased with the care provided at the school. Their comments are positive and include, 'the residential staff are excellent'. 'I am very pleased with the care, my child loves being here'. 'It is a wonderful experience for my child. They help them build skills and confidence'. 'The staff are supportive, not patronising'. The induction training programme for new staff is good and covers most areas of their work with the exception of managing complaints. New staff are supported by a named mentor during their probationary period. The training available for the care staff covers many aspects of their work including child protection, manual handling, residential awards scheme and food hygiene. Each member of staff maintains their own training portfolio and feels well supported by the training provided at the school. Five members of staff have completed their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Child Care at level 3 or above. Three more members of the staff team are currently doing or soon to start the course with support from the Head of Care. The staff feel well supported by the Head of Care and other members of the senior staff team. All staff attend two performance management interviews as part of their appraisal. No formal or recorded supervision is provided, only informal support from senior staff. This level of staff supervision is not sufficient to ensure that all staff receive adequate support and guidance to enable them to look at practice issues as well as personal development. The Head has delegated areas of responsibility to members of her senior staff team. Regular senior staff team meetings ensure that all aspects of life in the school are discussed and monitored by the Head and school governors. The school development plan gives clear indicators for the management, monitoring and development of different aspects of school life over the next year.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that care plans reflect all of the assessed needs of the young people. National Minimum Standard 17
- ensure that care plans are in formats that young people can understand. National Minimum Standard 17

- ensure that the young people have access to information about boarding that is in a format that will enable a good understanding of the boarding facilities and expectations. National Minimum Standard 1
- ensure that staff receive one to one supervision from a senior member of staff each half term and that records are kept. National Minimum Standard 30
- ensure that staff receive training in the school's complaints procedure. National Minimum Standard 4
- carry out regular checks to ensure that water temperatures do not exceed 43 degrees C. National Minimum Standard 26
- ensure that the complaints procedure reflects the boarding provision and informs parents and children how they can make a complaint directly to Ofsted. National Minimum Standard 4

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.