

Lonsdale School

Inspection report for residential special school

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| Inspector | Kay Mehrtens |
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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

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| 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. Another flat is aimed at supporting young people to develop more independent living skills. The school is led by the Head Teacher and supported by the Head of Care. The school has achieved an Investors In People award.

Summary

This visit is a key inspection of the service looking at standards identified by Ofsted as key areas of care. Judgements have been made under Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Positive Contribution, Economic Well-being and Organisation and the overall quality rating confirms that this service provides good outcomes for young people.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Five of the seven recommendations from the last inspection have been addressed. Regular staff supervision sessions now takes place. Regular checks on the water temperature systems are recorded. Information regarding the boarding facilities is also available in different formats that enable a better understanding for young people. Care plans reflect identified assessed needs. The complaints procedure contains information, for parents and boarders, about Ofsted's contact details.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people's individual health needs are identified at an early stage and arrangements are planned to ensure that requirements are met. Information is gathered from parents and health care professionals involved in the often complex health needs of many of the young people accommodated at the school. Health care plans are comprehensive and provide clear written strategies and interventions that ensure the health care needs of the young people are well met. Annual medical reviews take place with input from all the health care professionals and carers involved with individual young people. The school has developed close liaison with other

professionals including the community Paediatrician who visits weekly; outreach Paediatric Nurses; Physiotherapists; Occupational Therapists and Speech and Language Therapists. The school provides 24 hour paediatric nursing support for the young people and comprehensive specialist input including occupational therapist, speech and language therapists and physiotherapy. Staff receive support and training from the qualified nurses on topics relating the health care needs of the young people. The records for the administration, storage and audit of medication are kept in excellent order. There are clear systems and procedures in place with regard to the use of emergency medicines with consent sought from parents and appropriate training provided for care staff by the nursing team. All care staff receive first aid training. Young people say care staff and nursing staff are sensitive to their emotional and physical needs and provide support as required and as agreed in their care plans. The school has a health education programme that is promoted throughout the school. All staff are focussed and committed to ensuring a high quality provision of healthcare for young people living at this school. The school provides a very healthy, well-balanced diet for the young people. It has achieved a 'Healthy schools award' as well as a five star rating following a recent environmental health office inspection. Young people's comments include, 'they put healthy food on the menu and advise us as to what healthy eating is'. The menus are produced in formats that enable all young people to have a good understanding of the meals available with clear choices that reflect different dietary and cultural needs. Detailed eating plans are produced ensuring that the individual needs of the young people are met. Any specialist dietary requirements are met by staff that have received appropriate training from health care professionals. Mealtimes are relaxed and sociable times for the staff and young people. Any assistance for young people is provided in a caring, discreet manner. Young people enjoy healthy, nutritious meals.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people say that their privacy is respected. Staff were observed to be discreet when meeting the personal and medical care needs of the young people. All records are kept confidentially. Young people issues are not discussed openly as the staff are very aware of the need to respect confidentiality of information. The school has a clear complaints procedures. Staff do not receive training in complaints procedures as part of their induction programme. Information about how to complain is made available to the young people in different formats to enable them to have a good understanding of the process. They are also encouraged and supported to talk about any concerns or issues through the school council and with a counsellor provided by the school. Young people's comments include, 'you can go to a member of staff and talk about a problem' and 'there are loads of people who can help you'. The school has not received any formal complaints. The Head has a positive attitude and approach to working effectively with parents that ensures any issues are discussed and addressed so ensuring positive outcomes for all concerned. Staff are concerned about keeping young people safe and are competent in their knowledge of protecting them. They receive training on safeguarding young people as part of their induction and through ongoing refresher training. The Head is the school's designated child protection officer and has developed positive links with the local safeguarding authority. Young people are protected by staff who are aware of how to respond to allegations and disclosures. The school has a written procedure for action when young people are absent without authority. There are no incidents of absconding from the school. Risk assessments and behaviour management plans are completed in response to any concerns that may arise for individual young people. Safety checks are completed and staff only commence employment when they have a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure and

references. Young people are protected by robust recruitment procedures. The school has good procedures and policies with regard to bullying. Young people say that they have been told about bullying issues on the internet and feel supported by staff and safe in the school. Their comments include, 'bullying happens rarely but staff normally deal with this very well by stopping it immediately' and 'bullying is not allowed'. Staff have a good level of understanding of the needs of the young people and know when they are upset or are trying to express their views. Young people are provided with the ability to communicate their needs, thoughts and feelings through a variety of communication aids which staff are expert in using. Young people are protected from bullying. Staff view young people positively and there is a good atmosphere in the school. The use of any form of physical intervention is used as a last resort and incidents are few. However, the staff have not received training in the use of acceptable forms of intervention linked to the school's policy. Records of restraints and sanctions are detailed, monitored by the school and include comments from the young people concerned. Young people say that the schools rules are fair. They have individual behaviour management plans that are well written, communicated to the staff team and kept under regular review. Staff effectively manage challenging behaviour in a calm and professional manner. The school's approach to working with the young people continues to emphasise their positive achievements and behaviours. The rewards system is much appreciated by the young people. They work hard to achieve their targets and are pleased to receive the awards that recognise their achievements. The school has developed the awards system to link the school and residential awards to reflect the individual skills levels of the young people. Good staffing levels, staff competence and comprehensive risk assessments ensure the safety of the young people who board at the school. The school has comprehensive risk assessments for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds including fire and young people's behaviour and activities. These assessments have taken into account the daily activities in and outside the school. Comprehensive assessments with regard to manual handling are completed and regularly reviewed. All staff receive regular training and updates in manual handling. All staff are required to read and sign as read, the health and safety policies and manual handling policies for the school. The fire and security systems have been upgraded and staff receive fire training. Fire safety equipment is checked regularly and a detailed record kept. Required checks and maintenance with regard to electrics, gas and water regulations are carried out and any shortfalls addressed. All visitors sign into the building and must show identification. Young people are protected by robust health and safety procedures.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school effectively supports and enables young people to achieve educational attainments. The achievements in school and boarding are strengthened by the development of linked targets and rewards for the young people. The young people's files contain copies of their education and achievement records which are regularly reviewed. Young people are supported to attend their reviews. Staff understand the importance of individual education plans and liaison between the school unit and boarding is good. Effective links are maintained with the school and parents through the use of the residential, home, school books. The staff support and encourage the young people to complete homework. There is a good balance of school and free time for the young people that board. Young people are provided with a range of opportunities to learn and develop their skills. The development of the independent living flat has provided an excellent resource that enables and supports young people to develop and learn new skills for their future. The school enables and promotes young people to achieve in line with their individual

abilities. Individual support is comprehensively detailed in each young person's care plan and observations and discussions with staff showed that staff ensure young people's individual needs are met. Care plans are linked to the individual health and education plans of the young people with detailed information from specialist health and education professionals. The staff have established positive working relationships with the young people based on mutual respect, a full knowledge of their needs and a good understanding of the interventions that effect positive outcomes. The young people receive an individual, caring approach from staff that reflects and meets their diverse and often complex needs. There is ample evidence of excellent practice that recognises and supports the individual needs of young people with disabilities and the promotion of positive images and expectations for disabled people. Aspects of young people's cultural and religious needs are not as detailed in care plans or as evident in care practices in the boarding house. The young people's comments about the staff and their boarding experience are very positive. Their comments include, 'we have an independent flat which I am on. We are encouraged to do as much as possible for ourselves.' and ' Lonsdale is good at giving advice and support and making every experience fun and educational'. The school provides access to an independent listener and counsellor, both are used effectively by the young people. Young people receive individual support, when they need it, in line with their needs and wishes.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The young people are given opportunities to express their views, opinions and wishes through flat meetings, the school council, key sessions and through daily interaction. The young people in the independent flat are fully supported and positively encouraged to have their say and participate in their future plans and development in readiness for their move on from the school. The Head encourages the young people to participate in all aspects of their school day and has supported them in participating in the future development plans for the school. The young people are pleased with their involvement in developing the building design of their new school and there is plenty of evidence that demonstrates their input through the Hertfordshire Building Schools for the Future Project and links with the local community and other schools. The young people indicate that they are listened to and staff were observed providing reasonable responses when approached by young people. They come across as very confident and considered in their comment and opinion about their school life and future. The staff encourage and support young people to make choices. They are skilled and patient in their interaction with young people that use different communication tools so ensuring that all young people have a voice. Young people are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run. No young person is assumed to be unable to communicate their views. Staff provide excellent care for young people and meet their individual needs with the knowledge and understanding they have of them. A comprehensive assessment of need and risk assessments are in place for each young person and information is reflected in care plans that include comments and views from the young people and their parents. Care plans are generally well written. However, not all are in formats that are suitable for those young people with communication difficulties and some do not contain sufficient detail with regard to the cultural and religious needs of some young people. Young people say, 'we have a meeting once a year for our chance to give our thoughts' as their care plans are reviewed on a regular basis and any changes are effectively communicated to the staff team. Admissions to the school are well planned and clear policies and procedures are established and followed. Care files contain clear information regarding contact arrangements for the boarders. Young people are provided with

access to telephones, though many have their own mobile phones for use outside of school hours. The majority of young people only stay at the school for two nights and so maintain regular contact with their families. Young people are able to maintain contact with their families and friends.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school is very well equipped to meet the needs of young people with physical disabilities. The fire and security systems have been upgraded. Several areas of the school and living accommodation have recently been refurbished and new facilities provided. This includes the large food technology teaching room that is equipped with adjustable fixtures and fittings for wheelchair users and is accessible for out of school activities. This is an area much appreciated by the young people, especially those that are working on their independent living skills. The school and boarding areas are bright, clean, well furnished and accessible to wheelchair users. The young people are encouraged to personalise their bedrooms during their stays. Boarders have access to all the school's facilities such as the swimming pool and the new interactive computer screen in the hall. The school is well furnished, decorated and maintained to meet the needs of the young people. The process for preparing young people for leaving school has improved with the effective implementation and running of the independent living flat. The young people have individual targets and programmes designed to enable them to work towards developing their independent living skills. Flat meetings are held each week and the young people are encouraged and supported to look at and review their individual targets. The school has developed good links with local community colleges and resources that will enable the young people to move on from the school in a supportive and considered manner. The independent flat is small but well equipped and the young people have access to the new food technology teaching room. Young people receive very good care and support to help them into adulthood.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a written Statement of Purpose and function which sets out all the required areas of information about the service and facilities provided. An additional Statement of Purpose has been produced outlining the facilities and support provided in the independent living flat. Young people are admitted to the school in accordance with the school's policies and procedures. The staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the young people. The school provides 24 hours nursing cover. Staff demonstrate a commitment to the young people they are caring for and a good awareness of their needs. Rotas allow time for staff to attend meetings and training sessions, receive supervision, undertake tasks as care workers and complete records. There is a clear improvement in the regular provision of supervision since the last inspection that links into the staff's annual performance interviews and reports. Supervision sessions focus on care practice and include observed practice sessions with well recorded feedback. Staff feel supported and state that the management team are available and approachable. The school has an experienced and effective senior management team. Young people are cared for by staff that are well managed and supported. Staff are encouraged and supported to attain qualifications to achieve and maintain competency in the care of young people. The commitment to National Vocational Qualification Level training is on going with many staff achieving Level 3. There is an induction programme for new staff to assist them to

become familiar with their duties and responsibilities and the young people. However, it still does not include complaints training. There are varied training opportunities for staff that include the required statutory courses and ensure that the staff have relevant skills and competencies for their work with the young people. It is evident from observation and comment from the young people that there is a good relationship between them, the staff and the Head. The young people clearly enjoy staff's company and find them very approachable. The young people's comments about the staff and school are very positive and include, 'I like the staff. I am happy at the school'. 'Staff are nice'. The home is monitored in all aspects of service delivery by the Head and her senior staff team. The Head has delegated areas of responsibility to members of her senior team and they carry out the monitoring of their areas in a thorough and well recorded way. The monitoring and management of the school means that young people receive a good level of care and education. The school development plan, for the forthcoming academic year, includes the school's work and progress towards the future development of the new school. The young people have been very much involved in the planning project. Regular governor meetings are held and recorded. However, there is no evidence to support the required unannounced monitoring visits to the school by the delegated governor.

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 the school provides or secures the provision of training for staff in safe and appropriate physical intervention techniques with children, and the circumstances in which they may be used, which includes training in reducing or avoiding the need to use physical intervention. National Minimum Standard 10.12
- ensure that staff receive training in the school's complaints procedure. National Minimum Standard 4
- ensure that the school's placement plan includes cultural, religious, language and racial needs and how they will be met and are in formats, appropriate to their level of communication, to enable children to know the content of their plans. National Minimum Standard 17
- ensure that children are encouraged and given opportunities to take part in activities which take account of their race, culture, language, religion, interests, abilities and disabilities. Birthdays, name days, cultural and religious festivals are celebrated (where appropriate) and children participate with staff in planning these events together. National Minimum Standard 13.3
- ensure that written reports of governors' visits are provided to the Head of the school and made available to inspectors at the school. National Minimum Standard 33