

Radlett Lodge Schools

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

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

Radlett Lodge is a purpose built school and residential facility for children with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and is owned by the National Autistic Society. The home is located just outside the village of Radlett and approximately two miles from the city of St Albans. Both facilities are located on the same site and are integral to each other. The School and Lodge provide a service for 38 weeks of the year.

The Lodge is a two-storey house, which accommodates up to a maximum of 14 pupils at any time. The lounge and dining areas of the home are light and airy. There are televisions, videos and play stations available for all pupils to use, as well as a large selection of outdoor equipment for use in the garden area. There are also computers that can be used for homework or leisure.

The Principal has overall responsibility for both the School and the Lodge. The Head of Care manages the residential care provision. The staff group are contracted to work in both the school and the Lodge.

Summary

This was a key announced inspection to assess key standards of the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes. Judgements have been made under Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Positive Contribution, Economic Wellbeing and Organisation and the overall quality rating confirms that this service provides good outcomes for young people. The promotion of equality and diversity is good.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The recommendation from the last inspection has been addressed. The school has amended its Statement of Purpose to reflect the service offered regarding the number, age range and gender of residential pupils that can be accommodated.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Staff are focussed and committed to ensuring a good quality provision for healthcare for young people staying at this school. They are proactive and responsive to their emotional and health care needs. The health and care files of the young people contain comprehensive and up to date information regarding the health needs of the young people. The systems in place ensure that all the required health information is gathered from parents and shared with all agencies involved with the young people. There is a support team of specialist health professionals including a speech therapist, occupational therapist, educational psychologist and physiotherapist. Staff demonstrate a good understanding and awareness of the health needs of the young people in their care. Training and guidance for young people on personal health care and safety is provided across the whole school and done in a caring and sensitive manner. The school uses established and innovative approaches to working with the young people. An example of an innovative and professional approach is the recent introduction of the 'sound beam' equipment used by trained staff to help young people develop an awareness of their

body space and movements. From observation, it is evident that the young people enjoy using the equipment and learn about different movements and their personal space. The staff are well trained in the health needs of the young people, medication administration and first aid. Additional training with regard to special medication and health procedures is provided by the local community nurse services. Individual health care plans are in place that address any special health or medical need. Parents consent for the school to administer medication is sought and recorded. The systems in place ensure the safe administration and storage of medication.

The catering manager produces a two week seasonal menu that reflects the dietary and cultural needs of the young people. Young people have been encouraged to try different foods as part of the equality and diversity work taking place across the whole school. The meals provided are well presented and healthy in content. Comments from the visiting advocate include, 'I have meals in The Lodge occasionally and can testify that the food is nutritious, plentiful and tasty.' The cook is aware of the need to cater for special diets including the different cultural needs of some young people. Care plans contain detailed information about the young people's dietary requirements. The staff are very aware of the individual needs of the young people and enable them to make a choice. For example, the staff use the young people's symbols boards to enable them to make a choice or show them alternatives for them to choose from. Staff support the young people to try new foods and exercise choice in a careful, considered and professional manner. Mealtimes are organised to encourage the young people to develop their social skills. From observation and comments from the young people and staff, it is evident that mealtimes have improved and are a much more relaxed and sociable time for all. Outings to local cafes and restaurants are also used to encourage young people to develop their social and independent living skills. Young people are provided with adequate quantities of well-prepared food and drink. Young people's comments about the food provided is positive and their observed enjoyment of meal times supports this.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The privacy of young people is respected by staff. There are clear plans in place that ensure consistent care is provided that respects the young people's need for privacy and dignity. Staff were observed to be discreet when meeting the personal and medical care needs of the young people. Careful and considered approaches are in place to help the young people understand their personal routines and develop their skills. All records are kept confidentially. Young people issues are not discussed openly. Young people's privacy is respected and information is handled in a confidential manner.

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. The school has received one formal complaint that is being dealt with through the school's procedures and the complainant is kept informed of the process.

The Head of Care 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 receive training on safeguarding young people as part of their induction and through ongoing refresher training. The young people are made aware of the need to keep themselves safe through information in the school

booklet and from education sessions in school. Young people are protected by staff who are aware of how to respond to allegations and disclosures.

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. Individual behaviour support plans include any potential bullying behaviours and strategies for management, such as the use of 'social stories'. Many of the young people that completed a survey, produced in different formats by the school, indicated that they felt safe at the school. Young people are protected from bullying.

The staff are aware of the individual needs and risks for young people with regard to their potential for running off. There are no incidents of absconding from the school. The risk assessments and behaviour plans, for the young people, reflect the school's procedures and include clear actions for staff to ensure the wellbeing and safety of the young people at all times. However, there is evidence of some discussions and reviews of risk assessments not being updated on an individual young person's file. The high staffing levels reduce the risk of young people running off. This is supported by comments received from the advocate as follows, 'safety is a priority. The children are supervised at all times, and there is appropriate staff to pupil ratio.'

Records of any restraints, which are few, and incidents are well written and monitored by the Head, the deputy and provider. The use of sanctions is limited though the school has begun to introduce the concept to some of the young people to help them look at their behaviours. The records for sanctions does not include the opportunity for young people to share their feelings and opinions following any implementation of a sanction. The staff are all trained in Studio III techniques, which is accredited training, that helps them to work positively with the young people, enabling the young people to move away from difficult situations and return to a calm, positive learning place. The behaviour training is co-ordinated and organised by senior staff with support from the school psychologist. The school has recruited two behaviour management coordinators. They work with staff focusing on more practical support through role modelling and observation to support staff to develop their skills in managing different social situations or identified difficult situations with the young people. There is a multi-disciplinary approach to training and planning that ensures a consistent approach to working with the young people across the whole school. Staff are provided with a detailed behaviour management guide that new staff find very useful and informative. Individual behaviour management plans contain clear strategies for working with individual young people. They link to the young people's communication passports and management interventions used in education time. There are good methods of dealing with behaviour issues that are clearly documented and risk assessed.

The school has 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. 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. The premises are secure and all visitors sign into the building and must show identification. Accident records are detailed and monitored by the bursar, deputy and provider. The school has maintenance and housekeeping teams so

all repairs are efficiently dealt with and the school is clean. Emergency situations are dealt with efficiently and effectively. Young people are protected by good health and safety procedures.

Recruitment procedures are robust and in line with national guidance. The personnel records confirm that all necessary checks are completed before staff commence work with the young people and induction training is put in place as soon as employment begins.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Appropriate educational documentation is held on individual case files. These include individual needs such as cultural and religious needs. Baseline assessments are completed and contain information on education attainments, targets and inform regular reviews. Individual support is comprehensively detailed in each young person's care plan and observations and discussions with staff showed that staff ensure each young person's individual needs are met. Young people are provided with additional support from speech therapists, occupational therapists, school psychologist and the behaviour support team. Staff are positive in their approach to education and its value for young people. The education and care teams work well together to ensure a consistent approach to working with and supporting the young people across the whole day as the school operates a '24 hour curriculum'. Each young person's day is structured both in their educational and leisure activities as structure, routine and consistency are an important part of these young people's lives.

From observation and discussion with staff, it is evident that staff promote and support the educational attainment of young people throughout their stay at the school.

The underpinning ethos of the school's approach to working with the young people is Structured Positive Empathy Low arousal and Links (SPELL) and Studio III behaviour management techniques. Staff are well trained in in these approaches for working with young people with autism and in the use of different communication skills. Individual support is comprehensively detailed in each young person's care plan and observations and discussions with staff evidence that staff ensure each young person's individual needs are met. Staff are very aware of individual personal issues of the young people and the effect on their behaviour and interactions with others. They have a good awareness of young people's behaviours and levels of understanding. The school has developed excellent and inventive systems that ensure consistent and informed practice takes place. For example, "quick reference" cards, which give an outline of each young person's needs; behaviour plans; targets and communication tools, are carried by the member of staff allocated to each young person for each shift. Staff use these tools and their skills to ensure a structured, consistent and supportive approach is given to each young person. Positive feedback is constantly given to the young people to reinforce and develop their learning and self-esteem. Young people have access to independent advocate who visits each term. Information about access to the advocate is made available to parents and young people. All young people are given individualised support, help and guidance in line with their needs and wishes.

There is good evidence of different activities within the school and boarding houses. A member of staff is allocated hours each week dedicated to developing equality and diversity activities and awareness across the whole school. There is evidence of good work and activities with the young people on topics such as 'Black History Month' and 'Asian week'. Young people are supported to join in different activities such drama presentations and artwork. There is a new

schedule of activities for each evening that offer the young people the opportunity to choose different things to do either individually or as part of a group. For example, some young people went on a trip to local shops and café whilst others participated in an exciting sensory sound and light game. The young people are allocated to a member of staff for each activity and are told who it is. Supervision on activities is good and young people clearly enjoy their time with staff and their peers. One young person wrote, 'I like having fun'. Parents' comments include, 'our child does get to visit shops and is encouraged to choose and pay for goods.' Comments received from the advocate include, 'I have seen activities in The Lodge which allow and encourage individuals to pursue personal enthusiasms.' Young people are supported to undertake a range of activities in line with their ability.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Consultation with the young people about their stays in the home is limited. However, the staff work well with the young people to encourage and support them make choices and decisions through the use of appropriate communication systems such as the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). The school has made arrangements for an independent advocate to visit, though the young people do have the support of their families. Young people are involved in their reviews through their input into their 'record of achievement' and communication passports. The school supported the young people to voice their opinions about their stay at the school as part of the inspection. They used different forms of communication tools to produce questions for the young people to complete. They ensure that every young person has a voice. Young people's answers include, 'I like living at the Lodge' and 'I like having fun'. The school has made positive links with local schools and the young people enjoy their contact and attendance at different local events. Opportunities are also provided by the National Autistic Society for young people to attend and share their opinions.

The care files for individual young people contain good information and details regarding their health and social care needs. The standard of information gathered and shared with all disciplines and staff working with young people in school and family is excellent. All aspects of the young people's needs are assessed and identified actions and interventions are clearly stated in their care plans. Each child has an autistic assessment baseline report completed by the school's psychologist and speech and language therapist. This is linked to individual targets for the young people and progress is regularly reviewed and linked to the 24 hour plan to ensure a consistent approach to working with the young people. Each young person has a 'communication passport' and 'record of achievement'. Young people, their parents, teachers and care staff all have input into these documents. These provide detailed information about the young people and ensure that a consistent approach is used by all staff to meet their individual needs.

The admission and leaving process is documented in the school's welcome pack for young people and their parents. There are good procedures in place that enable young people to visit the school prior to any overnight stay. Transitions are well planned and take into account the individual issues and difficulties of the young people concerned. Transition plans are produced for those young people leaving the school or moving classes and are linked to their communication passport. The information produced in these plans includes comments and input from the young people. They are produced in formats that enable the young people to participate and to understand the content. They are personalised with photographs of the

young people enjoying different activities during education and social time. Files sampled evidence some good work with young people and their families.

Care files contain clear information regarding contact arrangements for the boarders. Some parents visits their children during the week and say that they are pleased with the welcome provided and the opportunity to spend time spent with their child. Young people have access to a pay phone but due to their limited skills staff provide mobile phones and call parents for young people to sit and listen to. The more able young people are able to make meaningful telephone calls to their parents. Systems are in place to ensure that parents are kept informed of their child's activities, behaviours and achievements whilst boarding. However, records evidence that not all parents receive regular calls. Young people are able to maintain contact with their families.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The premises are clean and tidy. The premises are secure and well maintained. The space, facilities and grounds meet the requirements for accommodation and provide a safe secure environment for young people. The school and boarding house are bright, clean and well furnished. There are different spaces available for the young people to use during their stay. These include a 'chill out room', activity room, computer and games rooms. In addition, the boarders have access to all the school's facilities. The young people are encouraged to personalise their bedrooms during their stays. The school and boarding flats are well maintained and meet the needs of the young people.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school has delegated time for a member of staff to focus on developing equability and diversity throughout the school. Young people are encouraged to join in different events and activities that raise their understanding and awareness of different cultures. The school has policies and procedures in place with regard to 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.' Staff receive training in cultural awareness. There is good evidence of the promotion and development of social inclusion and work with the young people to help them achieve their potential.

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. Parents are provided with an information pack that details the provisions for boarding at the school. The young people's guide is detailed and produced in different formats to aid their understanding about life at the school. The stated aim of the residential department is 'To provide a positive, caring, environment that promotes the development of the whole child'. The systems, training, commitment and positive approach by the whole staff team ensure that this aim is achieved.

The school has appointed a new residential service manager to take responsibility for managing the residential unit alongside the Head of Care. Staffing levels are very good with a high staff to pupil ratio. The level of agency staff used is low. The school has recruited new staff and agency staff are currently used to cover gaps in waking night cover. Staff handover systems ensure that information is shared and care is consistent. Staff are well trained in the different

methods and approaches, used across the whole school, to support and enable the young people to achieve their potential. The school is managed by the National Autistic Society and the staff are well supported in receiving training to meet the needs of autistic children. From observation, it is clear that staff have a good understanding of young people's needs. They work with the young people in a caring and skilled manner that reflects the school's ethos and training. However, recording of telephone contact with parents is not consistent and so some parents are not kept regularly informed. Recording about young people is not completed daily and so recording is focussed on incidents and behavioural issues.

The staff induction training programme for new staff is comprehensive and covers all areas of their work and allows time for them to get to know the young people. All staff progress to National Vocational Qualification Level 3 (NVQ) on completion of their induction training. There is a good commitment by the provider and Head teacher for all staff to achieve NVQ Level 3 in child care. Training opportunities for staff include the required statutory courses and ensure that the staff have relevant skills and competencies for their work with the young people. Senior staff are supported to attend the National Autistic Society training for leaders. The staff are given time to attend meetings, handovers and training sessions. Each member of staff has an individual training profile that contains records of supervision and planning for appraisals. Staff supervision links into their performance reviews. Supervision sessions focus on care practice and personal development. Staff say that they feel supported and well prepared and trained to work with the young people. Records evidence that the school benefits from a well-trained staff team.

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. The school's annual development plan addresses any identified areas for development. Monthly monitoring visits are made by the provider and any issues raised are actioned by the Head and her senior staff team. The monitoring and management of the school means that young people receive a good level of care and education.

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 risk assessments are in place for any child that may be at risk of running away. Any changes to an assessment are reflected in the child's care plan. National Minimum Standard 8

- ensure that each child has permanent private and secure records of their history and progress. This refers to the need for more frequent recording of contact with parents. National Minimum Standard 18
- ensure that staff receive training in dealing with complaints. National Minimum Standard 4
- ensure that where sanctions are imposed, children are encouraged to write or otherwise have their views recorded and sign their names against them, if possible, in records kept by the school. National Minimum Standard 10