

Laleham Gap School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Date of last inspection	10 December 2007

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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

The Laleham School and Gap House School amalgamated in April 2005 and the provision is now known as Laleham Gap Residential Special School. The schools are on different sites. Gap School ceased to have residential status at the beginning of the 2006/07 school year and the Laleham site now provides care and education for pupils who have high functioning autism and/or speech and language difficulties for an age range spanning 10 to 16 years. The school does not normally admit children or young people who, for emotional or behavioural reasons, may inhibit the care, education and management of the majority of pupils. At present, there are 24 pupils boarding, two girls and 22 boys, accommodated on four Wings, Northdown, Dixon, Viking and Gap. The schools, separated by a distance of five miles, are both well positioned to provide the pupils with the necessary opportunities and experiences to support their education and social development. Both schools are located in residential areas, close to local amenities and within easy reach of the seaside.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection. The visit was conducted to assess the school's commitment to providing good outcomes for children in relation to the national minimum standards and best practice. There were no actions recommended at the previous inspection. The pupils' health is adequately provided for through the school nurse who works closely with colleagues promoting healthy lifestyle initiatives. There are safe systems in place to manage the receipt, administration and storage of medicines in the school. Pastoral care remains a very strong feature of the school's provision and communication and links with parents and other services promote the wellbeing of the pupils. The implementation of three new initiatives this year has greatly enhanced the provision for the pupils and underlines the school's commitment to 'Every Child Matters' principles. The catering of breakfast and the evening meal has been de-centralised and they are now provided within each residential wing. This arrangement is very much a preferred option for the pupils who express their satisfaction with the quality of the meals and the range of choice. Pupils benefit from having their meals in smaller dining rooms and being able to engage in life skills learning, such as participating in budgeting, shopping and preparation of the meals. The difficulty children face, particularly those with autism, when transferring from junior to senior school has been lessened through the new transition arrangements for Year 7 pupils. These pupils are provided with a base within the school where they can have their meals and enjoy their break times away from the noise and pressures of the main school environment. This has been particularly successful and has contributed to individual progress and positive group dynamics. The young people have settled into their new environment more quickly. It is envisaged that the pupils will be gradually integrated with older pupils as the year progresses. The pupils benefit very much from the school's approach to meeting economic wellbeing outcomes. The financial reward for effort and commitment to tasks related to this subject supports pupils to work for gain and to understand the principles governing personal responsibility and good citizenship. The school is well managed and the staff benefit from strong and effective leadership. The staff team work well together and are committed to providing the pupils with positive experiences. Safeguarding is excellent and every effort is made to achieve high health and safety standards. The child care practice is continually monitored and evaluated through an 'Every Child Matters' audit, steered by the head of care. Other effective systems contribute positively to this process.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommended actions made following the previous inspection. The school has, however, developed many aspects of its service.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The pupils benefit from a well organised and well managed medical provision within the school. The school's nurse, having developed safe medicine handling procedures and practice, continues to support and engage colleagues in health related initiatives. A current project, 'food for thought' focuses staff and pupils on the nutritional value of different foods through colourful learning materials distributed to the residential wings. There are good recording systems in place which indicate proper medicine administration practice as well as safe storage and disposal of unused medication. There is a strong emphasis on promoting healthy lifestyles through healthy eating, a range of exercise opportunities and educational programmes on sex, drugs and relationships. The school staff are vigilant and the school responds swiftly to incidents suggesting pupils' health or welfare might be endangered. There is a very low incidence, however of such issues. Specialist services are accessed by the school to address students' individual physical, emotional or mental health requirements and essential support is provided for parents and peers as necessary. The nurse has developed good working relationships with the parents and plays a prominent role in supporting inter-disciplinary links so as to maintain and enhance good practice. The school has introduced new measures to encourage pupils to play a more active part in choosing, purchasing and preparing food. All meals, except lunch, are now prepared within three of the four residential wings. This has proved to be an exceptionally successful venture. A number of pupils, whose eating habits and behaviour caused some difficulty and remained a concern when they had all their meals in the central dining room, have responded positively and now eat much better. Pupils contribute to menu choices, participate in shopping and are involved in the meal preparation. The staff cater individually for those pupils on special diets and are inventive in their approach to their presentation. The pupils commented very favourably about the new arrangements and some indicated that they would prefer to have all their meals within their own residential area.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school places much importance on ensuring that the children enjoy their accommodation and have the desired personal space to spend time alone. All the senior pupils, in Dixon wing, have large single bedrooms and where possible and necessary, other pupils in other wings have the same provision. The staff have a good awareness of each individual young person's safeguarding requirements and make allowances for more discreet supervision where appropriate. Detailed intimate care guidance informs good practice and the staff ensure that the children's dignity is maintained at all times. Whilst the majority of the children find verbal communication most difficult, the means to making known concerns, anxieties and complaints are outlined in the children's booklet and reinforced by their key worker. Other sources of help, such as access to the independent visitor and the national helpline are detailed in the documentation and the close liaison between the staff and parents is an important factor in determining how children

feel about life at school. There is a comprehensive complaints policy, the process is outlined in the children's guide in written text and also in Makaton form. The pupils, when asked how they would formalise a complaint, were clear on the process and feel confident that complaints are dealt with. Only one complaint was registered since the last inspection and the written record indicates that the process was followed. The pupils commented that 'there is never any need to make a complaint because the staff listen to us if we have a concern'. There is a rigorous approach to safeguarding the children and the staff are vigilant at all times, given the vulnerability of the children in their care. There are regular training programmes, which address child protection and staff demonstrate an acute awareness of the procedures to follow if they have any concerns surrounding the child's safety. The school has established strong links with the local social service agency and the children's safeguarding service and consult with them as necessary. There are effective security systems in place to prevent intruders and to monitor the external areas of the school premises. Additional and improved lighting has been installed following responses in the pupils' questionnaires and observed needs through health and safety audits. There are clear policies on behaviour management which are designed to provide overarching guidance focusing on non-punitive measures. Individual behaviour management support plans, created by a multi-disciplinary team, including the parents, highlight the precise strategies that are most effective for the child. The staff apply the principles of the behaviour management programme with skill and confidence and implement the strategies sensitively and purposefully. Any physical intervention is carefully recorded and such incidents are monitored through a database so as to identify the reason for the behaviour and the effect of the management strategies. This has led to, in many cases, a greater understanding of the child and a decrease in negative behaviour. Individual risk assessments are routinely conducted, kept under constant review and amended as circumstances dictate. The school is well maintained and health and safety issues are promptly addressed. Fire safety installations are routinely checked as per a schedule and an annual audit is conducted. Fire evacuation drills, nine in the past year, are conducted at regular intervals and occur during the day and the evening. The staff are regularly reminded to be vigilant and to report safety hazards so that they can be dealt with. Generic and individual risk assessments are completed and reviewed as necessary or as circumstances change. Due to the low turnover of residential care staff there have been no new appointments this year. There is a sound recruitment process, however, which is evidenced by documentation, including full employment history, checks and references, in personnel files.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The multi-disciplinary practice is well established within the school and the children benefit from consistency of approach from all staff. There is shared information on care plans, individual education plans, behaviour management and where appropriate, on communication programmes. There is regular liaison between education and care staff at other times, particularly at the beginning and end of the school day. The two staff teams engage in some training together and individuals in each team play an active role in each other's settings. Programmes of support for each child include input from the parent, the key worker, class teacher and other relevant personnel. Each child has a key worker responsible for coordinating the implementation of the care plan and ensuring that the child's needs are continually assessed and met. The staff have forged positive, meaningful relationships with the children and use their extensive skills to communicate with them and understand their needs. Some of the care plan targets relate to educational needs and pupils are supported during the evening with such activities as reading

and other homework tasks. There is much good peer support in evidence, particularly through the anti bullying crew and individual mentoring. An excellent new source of support for the younger pupils is the establishment of a transitional process for Year 7 children. There is a recognition of the difficulty new pupils, and particularly those on the autistic spectrum, find adapting to change. To reduce the stress and anxiety the school has provided a base in the school for Year 7 pupils where they can engage in certain activities separate from the remainder of the school. For instance, they have their lunch time meal and break time activities within a location which is less noisy and is equipped with resources which engender calm and encourage peer participation. There are many individual successes emanating from this initiative, particularly related to eating habits and behaviour. It is planned to integrate the younger pupils on a more gradual basis and to extend this idea to Year 8 also. Support needs are discussed within inter-disciplinary and team meetings on a regular basis. Pupils are encouraged to integrate, outside classroom time, through visits to other residential wings and by participating in events and activities within the school and the wider community.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The main formal consultation forum is the school council, which is used effectively to ascertain children's views and communicate information to them on all matters affecting their wellbeing. All the children are represented at this forum and the representatives put forward proposals for consideration to the school's senior management. The school has responded positively to pupils' views and requests and some of the changes include the extension of the anti bullying crew, the award scheme and the introduction of a breakfast club for senior pupils. The very successful provision of meals in the residential areas initially resulted from pupils' suggestions. Daily consultation occurs through residential unit meetings and now, particularly, through dialogue at mealtimes within the residential wing. Pupils' views are also sought through annual anti bullying surveys and their reviews. The school places a great deal of importance on preparing prospective pupils and their parents prior to their placement. Initial meetings between the school and the pupil, their family and representatives of the placing authority determine the young person's needs and the appropriateness of the placement and establish the continuing role of the parents. The head teacher and the head of care visit the prospective pupils in their own environment so as to assess their suitability for placement and consider carefully the impact their admission would have on existing placements. The new 'organisation of Year 7', introduced this year, complements the pre-admission process and provides young pupils with a smooth transition from junior to senior school. Each pupil has a care plan which, following an assessment of their needs, identifies objectives and appropriate support measures to help them meet those needs. A small number of targets, normally two, are agreed for each individual pupil and the staff encourage and support the pupils to achieve whilst acknowledging their individuality and ability. The care plans are monitored closely by key workers, their team leader and the head of care. The quality of the written record of pupils' progress is excellent in some wings and very good in others. There is a particular focus on life skills learning and the many opportunities provided for the pupils by the staff, within the school and the wider community, to have practical experience is good preparation for moving on. One parent commenting on the progress her child is making, stated, 'He's only been there for one term and is already more confident with handling money when shopping'. All the pupils return home each weekend and have the opportunity to maintain daily contact with family by telephone and by email. The school encourages parents to visit and parents indicate that they 'are made to feel welcome'. One

parent acknowledging the usefulness of consultation and face to face communication, commented, 'I would like more frequent parent consultation evenings'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school has worked hard on converting the concept of economic wellbeing into a purposeful daily task based exercise. Two generic targets for each of the five 'Every Child Matters' outcomes are agreed for each pupil and their application is monitored on a daily basis. For instance, for 'Being Healthy' one task is, 'I will attempt to eat a healthy diet this week, with a piece of fruit or a portion of vegetables every day'. The introduction of new economic wellbeing targets is an excellent initiative and places a better and more meaningful focus on economic wellbeing. There is a clear intention to increase pupil's awareness of economic well being for the future. The school provides pupils with the 'opportunity to learn the principle that good contribution can result in financial gain' through an award scheme. Each pupil is rewarded according to their daily contribution to the task and receives the relevant amount at the end of each week. This, combined with greater opportunities to engage in life skills and social learning, achieved through the changes to the meals provision, enhances their preparation for transition and adult life. The school continues to strive to raise the standard of accommodation facilities so that the children experience the same comfort and homeliness that they have within their family setting. There is an understandable reluctance to finance structural changes or expensive cosmetic exercises given that the school is at an advanced stage in planning a new school build on another site. Every effort, however, is made to ensure that existing accommodation is safe and decorated and furnished to a high standard. Some of the old windows in Dixon wing have already been identified as needing attention, such as secondary glazing, to prevent leaks and draughts. The bedrooms are decorated in a variety of colours and furnished to a high standard. The children can choose colour schemes and their parents are also heavily involved in the process, sometimes replicating, to some extent, the child's surroundings at home to enhance their comfort and reduce their anxiety. Individual staff play a prominent part in creating a pleasant living atmosphere for the children by helping the pupils to personalise their bedrooms and enrich communal areas with posters and artwork. Each residential unit has its own 'identity' and this is maintained through a good knowledge of the children's likes and dislikes, consultation with the children and their parents and, primarily, a desire to create a homely environment.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school's statement of purpose provides all interested parties with the relevant information relating to the care and education of the children. It focuses, appropriately, on the range of need presented by the children and the philosophy of care implemented in practice. All services incorporated in the statement are effectively met and senior management are continually devising ways of improving practice, such as the database, which monitors behaviour management. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school continues to demonstrate its commitment to meeting diverse needs not only through improved care planning and key working but particularly through the excellent initiatives introduced within the past year. The measured approach to transition by gradually introducing new pupils to the main school environment acknowledges their difficulty to manage new situations. Furthermore, the focus on economic wellbeing targets and on life skills learning provides each individual pupil with excellent opportunities to prepare for leaving school. There are sufficient staff in each

residential unit, with children's needs dictating the appropriate level of staff available and their function. Each year a rationale is produced, indicating desired staffing levels for each individual child, based on their specific needs at various times of the day. One parent commenting on the staffing expertise and their support to pupils, stated, 'Everything is geared towards each child as an individual with individual needs, whilst still encouraging group participation'. Where necessary, where there is a change in a child's circumstances or an increased level of risk, the staffing ratio is increased accordingly. Whilst there is currently a deficit in the number of permanent staff in Northdown wing the team is adequately supported by staff from other residential wings and more senior staff. There is a clear staffing structure and each level of management has a good understanding of their responsibility and who they are accountable to. The school is well managed and the head of care gives effective leadership to an experienced and committed staff team. The current head of care has been in post for the past 13 years. The staff receive regular formal supervision and informal support as required. Staff confirm that the formal supervision meetings are purposeful and the staff appraisal process contributes to good performance management and professional progression. Other support mechanisms include weekly team meetings, team leader meetings and effective senior-on call advice. Workloads are well organised and the staff rosters allow for handovers, weekly meetings and regular training. The school places much importance on training relevant to the needs of the children as well as National Vocational Qualification courses. The training matrix indicates that a wide range of training has been offered to each individual member of staff and they have responded enthusiastically. Team leaders are responsible for monitoring the care practice in their own wings, particularly the implementation of care plans. The monitoring process is overseen by the head of care who checks and signs all records specified in national minimum standard 32.2. Where relevant, comments are made and appropriate action recommended where necessary. These records are also monitored by the head teacher. The senior management team members are also actively involved in the monitoring process, particularly health, behaviour and pastoral care, and have a thorough knowledge of each child's needs and how the care practice contributes to meeting those needs. Monthly visits are made by the school's independent visitor. A representative from the local authority responsible, conducts a monitoring visit to various residences each term and makes a thorough audit of the practice, through examination of documentation, observation of practice and consultation with young people and staff. The resultant written report contains recommendations for improvement, where appropriate, which is followed by an action plan for implementation.

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):