

Linden Bridge School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	John Chivers
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	3 July 2008

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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

Linden Bridge School is a local education authority maintained special school for children with special needs, specifically for pupils who are diagnosed with an autistic spectrum disorder. The school provides a structured 24-hour curriculum, with the opportunity to build social, communication and independence skills through education and leisure activity. A range of communication systems are used throughout the school including Picture Exchange Communication Systems, TEACCH (a structured treatment and education programme for children with autistic spectrum disorders), and visual and written cues.

Boarding is provided for under 16s in brightly decorated flats on the first floor of an annex to the main school building. Over 16s are accommodated in a new purpose built Further Education Department building.

Summary

This was an announced, full inspection. All of the key standards of the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools in the sections Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution, Economic Well Being and Organisation were assessed. There were no recommendations set at the last inspection and no recommendations are made as a result of this inspection. The boarding provision continues to be organised and managed to a high professional standard and affords an equal standard of care and support to the resident children having full regard for equality and diversity issues in all aspects of its operation.

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 recommendations made or areas set for improvement as a result of the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school has full regard for health and medical matters concerning the children and ensures these areas are closely monitored, reviewed and recorded.

The school has attained the 'Healthy Schools Award' and has a 'School Nutrition Action Group'.

The school's menu provides for a balanced, nutritious and varied diet and any special medical, cultural or preferential dietary needs are also catered for. Older children prepare meals as part of their independence training and life skills programmes. The meals provided are of excellent quality, ample portions, well presented and fully enjoyed by both children and staff. Meal times are a well ordered social occasion. Catering staff are trained in food hygiene and a current food hygiene inspection report from the local Environmental Health Department is held. The school's kitchen is well equipped and organised and provisions are safely and correctly stored. Refrigerator and freezer temperatures are taken and recorded.

The school has a range of health and medical policies, procedures and guidance. Children retain the services of their own General Practitioner; however the school doctor also visits the school fortnightly. Children's files hold detailed health and medical histories and signed parental consent forms for emergency medical treatment and appropriate medication administration are also held. Children's health care is closely monitored and recorded in appropriate reports and care plans. Children are encouraged to lead healthy life styles and undertake regular physical exercise via a range of activities. Children's medication administration records are clear and detailed and a weekly audit of medication held occurs. Medication is securely held in locked cupboards and controlled medication is held separately in a locked metal cabinet. All care staff are trained in medication administration and first aid.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school has a policy and procedure regarding privacy and confidentiality of which all staff are aware and have full adherence to. Confidential records are securely held in locked cabinets and drawers within a locked office. There are three telephones available for children's use without reference to staff which are situated at private locations. Children's help and advice lines are displayed by the telephones. Children have the use of lockers in which they may keep valued and treasured possessions. Toilet and bathing facilities afford good privacy. Staff treat children with dignity, respect their privacy and, when necessary, provide intimate care with due sensitivity.

The school's complaints procedure is available and a pictorial 'widget' version of the procedure is held for the children. Contact details of individuals and organisations are included in the procedures should a child wish to complain externally. The complaints procedure is reinforced to staff periodically at team meetings. There is also a comprehensive staff whistle blowing policy which contains the Ofsted whistle blowing 'hot line' telephone number. The school's complaints book is available and shows that only one complaint has been received since the last inspection. The complaint record is clear, detailed and shows action taken and an outcome. Children enjoy and benefit from the excellent pastoral service provided and raise no complaints or concerns about the standard of care they receive or the way staff treat them.

The school has a policy and procedure regarding child protection which is accessible to all staff. Staff also have access to the county council multi-agency safeguarding procedures. The head-teacher and head of care are the school's designated child protection liaison officers. Children learn about aspects of their personal safety via the school curriculum and discussion and advice sessions during boarding circle time. Children are closely supervised and staff are alert to safeguarding issues. All staff receive regular training in child protection and safeguarding. The head of care said there are no current child protection or safeguarding issues regarding the pastoral aspects of the school. Children feel safe, secure and well cared for by the staff. Children also have individual identification badges including their photograph when on trips and excursions from the school.

The school has an anti-bullying policy and associated information is available and displayed for the children's attention. Bullying is not an issue in the school and no bullying or intimidating behaviour among the children is evident. The close supervision arrangements and diligent support afforded to the children, coupled with the warm, homely and friendly ethos help reduce the likelihood of bullying occurring. Children raised no issues in this area.

The school has a policy and procedure regarding children who are absent without authority, though no unauthorised absences have occurred.

There are comprehensive policies and procedures covering behaviour management, care and control, child care practice, children's rights and permissible and non permissible sanctions. The school follows the 'Positive Options' system of behaviour management which is a recognised and approved method of behaviour management in Residential Special Schools and Children's Residential settings. All staff are trained in Positive Options behaviour management. Children's behaviour is closely monitored and recorded in care plans, progress reports and review reports. Children have individual risk assessments. All of the current children are within the school's remit in terms of behaviour management and control and no issues in these areas are evident. Staff have excellent working relationships with children and their behaviour is very well managed. There is consistent interaction and engagement by staff and children respond to staff requests and instructions with cheerful obedience. The school's sanctions and restraint records are available and show minimum use in these areas. Only permissible sanctions are used and any restraints used appear appropriate and necessary in the circumstances described in the records. The boarding sections behaviour management arrangements are effective.

The school has a health and safety policy and a separate health and safety policy is held for the boarding provision. The health and safety 'law' poster is prominently displayed. The school has a termly health and safety audit which includes areas for action, actions taken and dates for completion. Fire instructions and notices are displayed and fire instructions are also displayed in 'widget' form for the children. All staff are trained in fire awareness. There is a current written fire risk assessment and fire evacuation drills and fire alarm tests occur on a regular basis. Servicing of the school's fire fighting equipment also takes place at the required periods and a full fire inspection has recently taken place. The school has current utility safety test certificates and a mains fixed wiring test is scheduled. There are a range of generic risk assessments which are reviewed and updated as appropriate. Standards of cleanliness and hygiene are high throughout the school and no safety hazards are evident in the areas of the school accessed. The school takes positive steps to keep children, staff and visitors safe from the inherent risks of fire and other potential safety hazards.

The school has a staff recruitment policy and an equal opportunities policy. Only one new member of staff has been appointed since the last inspection. The member of staff's personnel file shows the school's recruitment and vetting procedures to be sound and all required information including two written references and a check via the Criminal Records Bureau at enhanced level is held. The County Council ensures that taxi drivers who transport children to and from the school also have Criminal Record Bureau checks at enhanced level. The school's arrangements in these areas are sound and help ensure that only suitable staff are employed to look after the children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school's commitment and achievements regarding children's education, learning and support is outstanding with children enjoying and benefiting from the support and learning experiences provided.

The school has a policy regarding boarding support to the education section. Statements of Special Education Needs and Individual Education Plans are held on children's files. The individual

education plans are detailed and include targets, strategies, evaluation and actions. In addition comprehensive review reports and progress reports are held. There is close liaison between care staff and teaching staff with sound information exchange occurring daily. Working relationships between care staff and teaching staff are excellent. Care staff play an active part in supporting children's education and learning by encouraging and leading a range of activities and learning experiences for the children. There are numerous examples of children's achievements and attainments displayed around the school and boarding units. The school had an 'arts week' at the time of the inspection which all children took part in. The programme, activities and staff inputs demonstrate the school's high level of commitment to children's all round education and learning. For example, they have recently been involved in a range of activities and subjects, including dance, art work, music, lectures and discussions, and a visiting 'animal arc' road show. Children show a keen interest and benefit substantially from such provision by increasing their knowledge and gaining confidence and competence in such areas. Some children involved themselves in discussion and debate with external speakers on subjects such as natural history and evolution. The school's arrangements also have full regard for equality and diversity in children's learning and a range of information on different religions, cultures and ways of life are prominently displayed.

The school has a range of policies which help support children in many areas including policies to combat racism, dealing with sexuality and relationships and the care needs of children from ethnic minority groups. Children have comprehensive care plans covering a range of areas and a care plan questionnaire which asks children a total of 80 questions in order to obtain their views, opinions and needs. Care staff provide an excellent standard of care and support, are knowledgeable about individual children's needs and demonstrate a high level of commitment and competence in their dealings with them. Children also have access to external specialist support when needed, and an advocacy service.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school takes its consultation duties with children and parents seriously and provides sound forums in this area. Admissions and discharges from the school are carefully planned and children's care plans are of an excellent standard ensuring all key areas are covered.

The school has a policy regarding children's rights and provides a range of forums where children can communicate their views and opinions, and exercise choice. These forums include one to one discussion with key workers and other care staff, daily circle time where group discussion takes place and the school council which meets on a regular basis. School council minutes show a range of areas discussed and decisions made. Children also make a contribution to their annual reviews as appropriate. Care staff are observed to openly seek children's views on a range of matters that affect their daily lives and children are always listened to by staff. Parents views are also sought.

The school has a clear referral and admissions criteria, an induction policy for new boarders, a children's induction check list and comprehensive boarding information for parents. Children may visit the school and have overnight stays as part of the admissions process prior to a permanent placement. The school's arrangements in this area help to ensure that only appropriate children are admitted and that the school can cater for their individual needs.

Key workers prepare comprehensive written care plans for their allocated children which are detailed and cover all key areas including 'identity' and any diversity needs as appropriate. Care plans are closely monitored and reviewed by care staff and are of a high standard. The school has a written home-school agreement with parents and any contact children have with their parents or significant others is clearly recorded.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Parents supply children's pocket money which is recorded by the head of care. Children have access to personal requisites as needed. Children are supported to wear fashionable and age appropriate clothing.

Older children are prepared to leave the school via attendance at the 'Further Education Unit' where transition plans are thoughtfully prepared and include contributions from the child concerned, their parents, care staff, teachers, educational psychologist, speech and language therapist and connexions workers. The transition plans include independence training and life skills subjects. Older children enjoy their nine week stay in the further education unit and benefit substantially from the programme provided.

The boarding areas are decorated and furnished to a very good standard and are very well maintained, though some areas are scheduled for redecoration in the near future. Communal areas are homely and comfortable and have a range of domestic items, fixtures, fittings and equipment. There are numerous books, games and art and craft materials available in the boarding units. Children's art work and other achievements are displayed.

Children's bedrooms are homely and comfortable and are personalised to varying degrees. Children said they enjoy living in the boarding units and the facilities provided.

Children's personal and intimate care needs are well met and toilet and bathing facilities afford good privacy. Staff have full regard for children's dignity and privacy and whilst supervision is close, this is not intrusive.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding with the school having full regard for these areas in both education and pastoral time. The boarding section is organised and managed to a high professional standard and affords an equal standard of care and support to the resident children.

The school's Statement of Purpose, prospectus, written aims and values, comprehensive boarding information for parents, a boarding handbook and 'DVD' are all available. The documents provide a wealth of information for parents regarding all aspects of the school.

There is a stable and well established staff team who are sufficient in number, skills experience and competence to meet the needs of the children and enable the school to meet its aims and objectives. The staff duty roster is available and gives clear information regarding staff on duty and duty times worked. The boarding section is appropriately staffed by day and night including both sleeping in staff and waking night staff. Senior staff are also on call each night. The staff

team have a mixed gender and are currently of white European origin. Staff are clear that the school has full regard for equal opportunity and equality and diversity issues and that no discriminatory attitudes or practices exist within the service. There is excellent communication and consistency between care staff who work exceptionally well as a team.

All except one member of staff hold the National Vocational Qualification at level 3, the other holding the level 2 qualification and intending to progress to level 3 in due course. The head of care holds the National Vocational Qualification at level 4 and also holds the Registered Managers Award. The head of care has substantial experience of working with and managing services for children with special needs and provides strong and effective leadership to the care staff team. Training is active with staff attending a range of courses annually including child protection and safeguarding children with disabilities. Formal staff supervision occurs each half term and written notes of supervision sessions are held. Staff also have supervision contracts and are formally appraised annually. Staff are appreciative of the excellent support they receive and are content with the frequency and content of supervision. Staff also have access to a 'staff well being service'. Staff in discussion are also very supportive of the school's management and ethos and are proud of the standard of care and support they provide.

The head teacher and head of care monitor the school's conduct and sign appropriate records each half term. Standard 33 visits occur each half term and reports on the visits are available. The Standard 33 reports show a sound level of monitoring and scrutiny of the school's operation and the combination of the school's internal activities and Standard 33 visitor act as a robust quality assurance mechanism. In addition parents questionnaires are available and are received annually. Parents comment most favourably regarding the service and standard of care and support their children receive, especially around the areas of independence training and living skills their children learn.

The school has a current insurance liability certificate.

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

There are no recommendations.