

Lonsdale School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Lucy Martin
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About this inspection

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

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

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Service information

Brief description of the service

Lonsdale School was opened in 1971 as a purpose built school for pupils with physical and neurological impairments. There are 84 places with 26 residential places. The residential accommodation comprises of five self-contained units which can accommodate up to 26 pupils per night. The accommodation is shared by two groups of boarders each staying for two nights per week. There are five 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. The school provides special fittings and adaptations to meet the needs of pupils. One of the flats is aimed at supporting young people to develop more independent living skills.

Summary

This was an announced inspection during which all the standards identified by Ofsted as key areas were assessed. The overall quality rating is good with three of the outcome areas judged to be outstanding. The young people enjoy their time boarding and feel well looked after by members of staff whom they know well. There is strong leadership and the staff team demonstrate a genuine commitment to the young people they are caring for and a good awareness of their individual, and sometimes complex needs. Health needs are well met and a high level of individual support is provided. The young people are listened to and their care plans are of high quality. There are sound and effective links between the educational and residential parts of the school.

A small number of recommendations have been made to ensure that there is effective external monitoring by the governors, that staff have regular formal supervision, a review is undertaken to ensure the secure storage of confidential information and that there is consistent practice regarding recruitment checks.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were five recommendations made at the last inspection. All except one have been met. Improvements have been made in the school's promotion of equality and diversity. Staff have undertaken training in this area and the young people's care plans now include cultural and religious needs. Events such as Chinese New Year and St. Georges Day are celebrated.

Staff have received training in the school's complaints procedure and the care plans are in formats which the young people can understand. There has been training in managing behaviour which did not include the techniques of physical intervention as this is not currently required but could be quickly arranged if needed.

The recommendation regarding written governors' reports has not been met. They are visiting the school and reports are being written but not at the required frequency of a visit once every half term.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school actively promotes the health needs of every pupil and their health and personal care needs are met to a high standard. The young people at this school have a wide range of disabilities and some children have complex medical needs. There is 24 hour nursing cover provided at the school by a team of paediatric nurses who are employed by the local primary care trust. This ensures that all medical needs are met by experienced and qualified personnel who also administer all the medication given out on the school site. Specialist input available at the school includes physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech and language therapy. There is also an independent counsellor who visits the school every week.

Young people's health needs are clarified and discussed with parents before they stay overnight at the school. Clear written information regarding medical needs is maintained and updated on a regular basis. Annual medical reviews take place at the school with input from all the health care professionals involved and which parents attend.

All medication is securely stored and the records for the administration, storage and auditing of the medication are kept in excellent order. There are clear systems and procedures in place with regard to medication being brought into the school and the use of emergency medicines. The nursing team works closely with the residential staff team and there is regular contact with parents regarding health issues. Appropriate medical consent forms are in place.

The young people are provided with a healthy and well balanced diet. The school has a 'healthy schools' award and has been awarded the top five star award in food hygiene from the local council for the second consecutive year. There are choices provided at every meal, including a vegetarian option, and healthy foods such as fresh fruit, vegetables and salad are available. The menus are produced in formats that enable all the young people to have a good understanding of the meals available. In addition, every young person has an eating and drinking plan to ensure that their individual support needs are met. Any assistance for young people is provided in an appropriate manner which promotes dignity and choice. Mealtimes are sociable occasions with the staff and the young people sitting together and enjoying each others company. Drinking water is readily available at mealtimes and there are water coolers distributed around the school. There are good opportunities for the young people in the independence flat to shop, prepare and cook their own food.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The staff team respect the young people's privacy well. They are sensitive and discreet when attending to any personal care or medical needs of the young people. One young person commented 'They are good at respecting my privacy and taking the embarrassment out of personal care tasks.' A pay phone is provided which is centrally located but can be easily moved if more privacy is required. The duty office is left unsecured and while the young people's files are locked in a filing cabinet, other confidential information is available and could be read by others. Care plans are in cupboards in the residential flats but these are unsecured and could easily be accessed.

The school has a clear complaints procedure. Information about how to complain is available to the young people in different formats to enable them to have a good understanding of the process. Staff have received training on the complaints procedure and parents are provided with clear guidance. No formal complaints have been received and the school staff work hard to ensure that any issues raised by the young people or parents are resolved effectively on an informal basis.

There are sound procedures in place to protect the young people. There is a clear child protection procedure which has been recently reviewed and the school has a small leaflet which reminds staff of their responsibilities in this area. Regular refresher training is provided for all staff and the school's designated person has received appropriate additional training. The young people are advised on internet safety. The school has a policy identifying the action to be taken if a young person goes missing from school. No such incidents have taken place and there are clear procedures in place to monitor attendance.

The behaviour of the young people is excellent and there are very positive relationships between the staff and the young people. The atmosphere at the school is warm and welcoming and the young people feel safe and accepted. Since the last inspection there has been training for the whole school in positively managing behaviour and as a result very few incidents take place. Appropriate records are maintained of incidents but numbers are low. There have been no incidents requiring a physical intervention at the school since the last inspection. The school's approach to working with the young people continues to emphasize their positive achievements and behaviours. All the young people have residential and school targets they work towards and there are awards which recognise their achievements. There are few incidents that take place regarding bullying and the young people say that when they do happen staff take effective action.

The school has robust health and safety measures in place. Required checks and maintenance with regards to electrics, gas and water regulations are carried out and any shortfalls addressed. Devices and equipment for disabled young people are routinely checked and serviced and there are risk assessments completed regarding the young people's behaviour and activities.

Overall, the school has good recruitment procedures in place with clear evidence that the required checks have been completed. However, not all the files seen contained evidence that every step had been consistently carried out, for example that direct contact had been made with each referee to verify references. Governors take an active part in the school and regularly visit the residential flats to talk to staff and young people. Not all have had Criminal Records Bureau checks completed.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The education and residential staff work closely together to provide the best outcomes for the young people. The residential part of the school is part of the main building and there is little physical separation. This helps ensure that there is a lot of informal communication between the residential and the education staff. There are handovers at the beginning and the end of the school day and whole school training has taken place. There is an awareness of targets both in education and residential and a positive way of working with the young people which is evident throughout the school. The independence programme that takes place in one of the

flats provides excellent opportunities for the young people to live more independently and do their own shopping and cooking.

There is a diverse group of young people at the school, some of whom have complex care needs. All receive high levels of individual support. There are a range of different communication aids used by the young people which the staff team use well to ensure that their needs, wishes and concerns are communicated. In addition to the high levels of support provided by the specialist health professionals at the school, there are two independent listeners and an independent counsellor. The young people enjoy their time boarding and there are strong, positive relationships between the young people and the staff team. The young people feel able to talk to a number of different members of staff about concerns or worries. One young person commented that the residential part of the school was good at 'Helping, listening and having fun.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The young people feel that there are opportunities to express their views and that they are listened to. The staff team are skilled and patient in their interaction with those young people who use communication aids to ensure that their views are known. There are formal opportunities for consultation such as the school council and there is a pupil group consulting on the plans for the new school. In addition, there are lots of opportunities for informal discussions with the young people, for example regarding activities and their residential targets. Admissions to stay in the flats are carefully planned to go at the young persons pace and include staying at the school for extended days for as long as necessary.

There are excellent care plans in place for the young people. There is a comprehensive assessment of need and risk which is regularly updated. The care plans contain detailed information regarding the young people's individual support needs and include how their racial, religious and cultural needs will be met. There is also a summary of the care plan which is in a format which the young person can understand which is an excellent development. Clear residential targets are in place which are linked to the residential achievement awards. These all work together to ensure that individual care needs are well met.

The young people only stay overnight at the school for two nights a week but they are encouraged to maintain contact with home. Most of the young people have their own mobile phones but can also use the payphone if necessary. Parents are complimentary about the communication with the school and feel that they are kept well informed about their child. One commented, 'As a parent we are kept well informed by home/school diaries, phone calls, letters and messages. We are able to contact school at any time if needed.' Another said, 'This service always promotes a happy lively staff environment. They are always welcoming, I know when my child stays that they are safe, well fed, well rested, healthy and looked after and treated like an extended family.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school is purpose built to meet the needs of young people with physical disabilities. The residential flats are located in the main school building which promotes close working

relationships. All the accommodation is wheelchair accessible and is in a good state of decoration and repair. The flats all have their own lounge and kitchen area and the bathrooms has specialist equipment. There are some intermittent problems with the heating and hot water systems which have been difficult to resolve.

There is a night time auditory monitoring system in operation in all the bedrooms. This information is included in information sent to parents and is provided to ensure that the medical and care needs of the young people are met.

There are plans to build a new purpose built school by 2012. There is a pupil group consulting on the new school plans.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a clear vision and set of aims which are supported by the residential Statement of Purpose. An additional Statement of Purpose has been produced outlining the facilities and support provided in the independent living flat. Parents and young people have good access to information about the school's care principles and practice. There is an information leaflet about boarding for parents as well as in picture form for young people.

The residential staff team is sufficient in number to provide good staffing levels. There is a small but consistent staff team which is well balanced in terms of age and gender. Shortfalls in staffing are well covered and ensure that the young people are always looked after by people whom they know well. Staff feel well supported by each other and from senior management. There are regular staff meetings as well as good monitoring of their practice and performance management interviews. However, staff do not receive formal supervision at the frequency of once every half term as outlined in the national minimum standards.

There are good training opportunities provided for the staff team. There is a rolling programme in National Vocational Qualification training and the head of care is an assessor. There has been a wide range of training provided to staff in the past year which has included areas such as faith, culture and diversity, communication training and mealtime training. This ensures that the staff team have the relevant skills for their work with the young people.

There is strong leadership and management of both the school and boarding. The head of care is part of the senior leadership team and is actively involved in all aspects of the school. There is active monitoring of practice within the residential flats and a keen interest in further development. The governors visit the school on a regular basis but are still not writing a quality report at the required frequency of once every half term.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There has been significant work undertaken in the past year to develop a greater awareness of issues regarding race and culture. These have included questionnaires to parents and staff training. There is excellent knowledge and promotion of issues regarding disability.

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):

- review the security regarding access to confidential information (NMS 3)
- ensure that there is consistent practice regarding recruitment checks (NMS 27)
- ensure that staff receive formal supervision at the frequency outlined in the national minimum standard (NMS 30)
- ensure that the governors visit the school once every half term and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. (NMS 33)