

Linden Lodge School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Seka Graovac
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Date of last inspection	13/11/2009

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

This specialist residential school provides boarding and education for children with a wide range of visual impairment and other very complex needs. Those needs include severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school provides weekly or part time residential accommodation for pupils in four units in two separate buildings. There are 37 full time residential places available for pupils aged six to 19 years of age.

The school provides a waking day curriculum where learning extends beyond the classroom. It aims to give residential pupils the opportunity to develop their independence to the best of their ability by making every experience a learning opportunity.

The residential care staff work alongside other professionals within the school, such as teachers, school nurse manager, therapists, resource and mobility teams, as well as other professional agencies such as children's services. The school has extensive indoor and outdoor facilities available including a soft play room, ball pool, swimming pool, hydro pool, sensory room, a music room and an all weather play area. There is a library service with large Braille, Moon and picture symbol books and audio tapes. The school is situated close to local shops, public transport and leisure facilities.

At the time of this inspection, 54 pupils used the residential service either on a full time or part time basis. The inspector had the opportunity to meet with many of them and to observe their interactions with staff and other children. The children's feelings and views, as well as the views of their parents informed the inspection process and findings. The methodology included a written satisfaction survey that was carried out by Ofsted.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced full key inspection. The quality of the provision was judged against the full range of the national minimum standards for residential special schools and the 'Every Child Matters' outcome areas.

The main inspection finding is that the school continues to promote outstanding outcomes for children with special needs. Under the exemplary leadership and within the context of the excellent partnership working, the whole provision truly revolves around the children and their needs. Children receive highly individualised support that holistically addresses their physical, emotional and social needs, exceptionally well. They benefit from being with their peers and caring adults in a safe and highly

stimulating environment. The school has a strong learning culture in which each pupil's development is maximised through extended learning opportunities and appropriate, multi professional support. The school is very effective in empowering children to strengthen the awareness of their rights and their 'voice'. Staff have a high level of expertise and commitment towards achieving the best for children entrusted in their care. The parents report being very satisfied with the service. They know that their children are safe and that they enjoy staying at the school. This outstanding school makes a tangible positive difference to people's lives.

In addition to running an outstanding service, the school is spearheading further development of the understanding of the needs of the children with visual impairment and multiple disabilities, within the wider community. The school's management and staff are committed to finding and sharing the best practice to promote children's growth and integration. The school effectively promotes good practice and the rights of children with disabilities, outside the school's boundaries.

While the actual children's welfare promotion practice is excellent, it has been agreed with the school that some aspects of the service are not fully meeting all the specifications of each national minimum standard. This report makes three recommendations for improvement. They relate to the records of vetting of staff and volunteers, formal staff appraisals and the system for recording of internal monitoring processes.

Improvements since the last inspection

The last inspection was conducted in November 2009. The school was judged as outstanding in all the aspects of its provision. However, two recommendations were made.

The school was asked to ensure that there is a written record of each complaint that includes details of the person making the complaint, the date of the complaint, the nature of the complaint, any action taken and the outcome.

The school was also asked to ensure that there is a clear written rota that indicates the staff on duty at all times during each day and night.

The school has successfully implemented both recommendations. Comprehensive records of complaints and staff duty rosters are kept. The improved record keeping facilitates better monitoring.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Healthy living is very high on the school's agenda. There is a whole school approach to the promotion of good health. Significant resources and numerous initiatives are in place to ensure that children's health is supported and promoted, effectively.

Children have direct access to a wide range of health professionals who are managed by the Primary Care Trust, but based at the school. They include an exceptionally experienced school nurse manager. Children also benefit from the health support provided by many other highly skilled clinicians and therapists, such as physiotherapists, mobility specialists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists. Some children receive regular massage therapy or counselling, if deemed to be beneficial for them.

In addition to providing appropriate programmes of specialist interventions, the health professionals work closely together with the school staff to ensure that they know how to consistently meet each child's health support needs. Excellent communication and record keeping successfully underpin the highly effective health care arrangements that are in place. Comprehensive medical and specialist health care plans include a wealth of information. They effectively facilitate the consistency of good practice. The arrangements for the provision of first-aid, treatment of minor illnesses and for dealing with medication are robust and protect children well.

The school provides a good variety of well-balanced, healthy and nutritious meals. The individual meal plans identify and appropriately address specific dietary needs of each child. The assistance with eating is sensitively provided in a manner which promotes children's dignity and choice. The children report enjoying the food at the school, as well as the socialising aspect of having meals together.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The promotion of children's welfare is paramount for the school. The safeguarding is very effective and permeates all aspects of the service provision. The school provides a physically safe and emotionally nurturing residential environment. Feeling safe and being appropriately protected gives children good opportunities to develop their confidence and awareness of their own rights.

Children are protected by the management's wealth of expertise and the fact that there are four designated child protection officers within the school. The school's robust procedures for dealing with allegations or suspicions of abuse appropriately link with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Through the involvement with the council's safeguarding steering sub-group, the Head of Residential Care contributes to the promotion of the safeguarding in the area. All staff receive regular training that specifically focuses on child protection, as well as on other topics that are relevant for meeting children's needs safely and effectively.

The suitably high staffing levels ensure that children receive appropriate levels of supervision. The staff's caring attitudes, vigilance and competence ensure that children are not bullied or intimidated. There have been no incidents of a child missing. Staff sensitively respect children's privacy within the context of the high levels of supervision and support they need.

The school is committed to celebrating children's achievements. Staff create a positive and rewarding atmosphere in which children receive appropriate encouragement to develop and strengthen their constructive behaviours. Reactive behaviour management plans are in place for individual children who need them. They ensure the consistency when dealing with challenging behaviours.

Regular health and safety checks ensure that the physical environment is maintained secure and free from avoidable hazards. Due to children's visual impairment, the school takes great care to ensure their safe access across the campus. The mobility department makes significant contribution to children's safety by providing good quality induction training and orientation for all new pupils. They also provide comprehensive information, training and support to staff.

The fire safety awareness is high. The school has excellent relationship with the local fire services.

All staff and volunteers undergo the council's vetting procedure to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. However, the related records do not always evidence the most robust approach. For example, although volunteer's references are verified, staff references are not.

There is a clear complaints procedure that is effectively implemented. The school's genuine commitment to providing what is best for children contributes to enabling children and parents to feel free to raise any issues or worries they have.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school has a holistic approach to care and provides highly individualized support. Each child has a comprehensive individual care plan that details their needs and the support to meet those needs, very well. Children benefit from having developed trusting relationships with the residential staff, the other school staff and the management. In addition, some other people named by, but independent from the school, regularly visit. The school's arrangement for the independent listeners provides children and their parents with additional assurance. There are so many different people to whom they can turn for support, if they feel they need it.

The targets identified in the children's care plans overlap with those set in their individual education plans. The school is highly committed and effective in providing a waking day curriculum. Excellent communication and very effective partnership working across different professional remits ensure that children are consistently supported to learn and progress.

The school is very effective in giving children an exceptionally wide range of opportunities to enjoy, learn and achieve within the school and the local community. Under the watchful staff eyes, children safely engage in a great variety of activities, such as blindfold cricket, boccia, rock climbing, music, arts and crafts, computer

games, ball pool, sensory stimulation, swimming, hydrotherapy, trampolining, fitness, birthday celebrations, X factor competitions, theme nights, dancing and visiting places of interest. The school has extensive grounds with all weather playground for bike riding and ball games, a woodland walk, adventure play area and sensory garden. Children regularly attend youth clubs, guides and scout groups.

The school's extensive programme of activities successfully facilitates the development of children's mobility, social skills, confidence and enjoyment of life. While the school's provision of activities is designed to maximise children's educational and personal potential, children describe the residential school as the place to be happy in, be with friends and have fun.

The school is mindful that while actively encouraging children to enjoy a lively and stimulating lifestyle that this is balanced with the ample opportunities to have free time and to rest.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school is very committed to listening to children. It is effective in enabling children to express themselves. Children are given good opportunities to shape their lives, as much as possible. The respect for children's rights and their individuality is fully embedded in the school's ethos, procedures and practice.

Consultation and participation between the school, child, parents and other professionals continue throughout the child's time at the school. Comprehensive professional assessment reports, statements of special needs, individual plans for each child and minutes of regular review meetings are complemented by a document titled 'all about me'. This document is written from the child's perspective. It captures everybody's commitment not only to share relevant information, but to work together towards strengthening the identity and the voice of the child. Through consultation, the school enables parents and various other adults who know the child well to contribute towards the child's increasing ability to understand and express choices for themselves.

Staff are competent in using a wide range of ways of communicating with children. They are highly observant and sensitive to expressions of children's feelings. In addition to individual interactions, children have many other opportunities to express their views and feelings. The school's council and unit meetings are regularly held and competently facilitated by the school staff and management. Children's self-esteem grows in knowing that they can express themselves, they are listened to and their views count. This empowers them and gives them confidence to contribute progressively more to the decisions made about their lives.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school takes great care to ensure that the physical environment enables children's independence. The premises have been suitably designed and adapted with the specialist equipment to meet the specific needs of children who come to the school. On-site mobility and orientation department, as well as the school's occupational therapist contribute to ensuring that the environment is suitable. They also contribute to enabling the children and staff to use it as freely and safely, as possible.

Children enjoy being in an environment that is stimulating and that they know well. The premises are maintained tidy and clean. The maintenance department ensures that everything is in working order.

At the time of the inspection, the communal areas were tastefully decorated for Christmas and looked lovely. Children are appropriately supported to personalise their bedrooms, which are either single or shared between two. There are sufficient and suitable washing and toileting facilities. The school has an excellent range of recreational facilities on site.

The children report loving the school. Their parents report being aware of that and being very pleased that is the case.

The school's programme of life skills is effective. The school works in close partnership with children, their parents and other professionals within and outside the school to ensure that the children's transition to adult life is as smooth as possible. The school's waking day curriculum gives residential pupils increased opportunities to develop their life skills and independence to the best of their ability. Older children are supported to learn budgeting and cooking skills, if appropriate and in line with their transition plans.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a comprehensive Statement of Purpose. It provides parents, teachers, residential staff and any other interested parties with accurate information about the school's care principles and practice. The school aims high and under the exemplary leadership is effective in facilitating outstanding outcomes for children.

An experienced and qualified Head of Residential Care provides leadership in residential practice. She is closely involved in the residential care provision and has regular direct contact with children and their parents. The strong residential management team includes a deputy manager and four unit managers. The management cover arrangements and the availability of advice and support to staff are excellent. The school's management ensures that children and staff enjoy the

stability of efficiently run schools.

Good communication and the extensive internal monitoring processes ensure the high quality of residential support. However, the school could not demonstrate that all the records as listed in the national minimum standard are being signed as monitored.

The school carries out regular surveys of the parents' satisfaction with the school. The findings are taken into account when considering the development of the school.

The school's management is appropriately supported and constructively challenged by the Governing Body. Some governors are members of the Residential Care Committee. This committee plays an active part in the monitoring of the quality of the residential care provided. The governors receive regular written reports on the conduct of the school from a person independent from the school that they have appointed. They also receive a comprehensive report from the school's principal, on an annual basis.

The school has achieved formal recognition from many relevant bodies for the high quality of its work. As effectively leading and spearheading the development of the best practice in the field, it has been designated as the National Support School by the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services. It has received numerous other awards, such as gold artsmark, sports mark, green flag status, makaton centre of signing award and award for being a centre of excellence in promoting and developing social skills.

The school is also registered as a centre for National Vocational Qualifications. The residential care staff report having extensive training opportunities. This is in addition to a comprehensive induction programme that all staff undertake at the beginning of their employment. Staff also have access to good line management support and clear written guidance. The guidance includes a wealth of regularly reviewed and updated policies and procedures that enshrine good practice. However, although there are many good monitoring processes in place, the school does not have a formal system for appraising individual staff performance and practice.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Staff ensure that children's needs are appropriately met at all times. This includes the special needs that arise from children's visual impairment and disabilities, as well as those arising from their cultural or religious background. The school provides an environment in which children are valued for who they are and learn to respect the others. Special attention is made to enhance children's social skills and promote children's integration with a wider society. Significant resources and numerous initiatives are in place to promote equality and diversity. The school is very effective in promoting the values of diversity, equality and community cohesion internally and further afield.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- review the recruitment procedure for staff and volunteers and improve the related record keeping so that includes all the records as listed in the national minimum standard (NMS 27)
- introduce and implement a system for formally appraising individual residential staff performance on an annual basis (NMS 30)
- review and improve the current internal monitoring systems so that the school is able to evidence that all records are monitored and signed as listed in the related national minimum standard. (NMS 32)