

Radlett Lodge Schools

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Martha Nethaway
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Date of last inspection	01/12/2009

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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

Radlett Lodge is a purpose built school and residential facility for children with a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder; it is owned by the National Autistic Society. The accommodation is located just outside the village of Radlett and approximately two miles from the city of St Albans. Both the school and the residential facilities are located on the same site forming a residential special school. The school and lodge provide a service for 43 weeks of the year offering, day, weekly, termly boarding and short breaks.

The Lodge is a two-storey house, which accommodates up to 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

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was a full announced inspection that concentrated on the key national minimum standards. The overall judgement in this report is based on the standards inspected within the relevant Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall quality rating for this setting remains at outstanding. The school meets its aim to look beyond students autism to their individual needs. Staff are caring professionals who demonstrate commitment and passion for their work. The school recognises that many students have very special needs but believe that compassion, tolerance and positive intervention can bring about positive change. The outcomes for students are excellent because students learn in a positive and caring environment. Students benefit from the high ratio of staff and receive consistent education and care. Students have access to and feel included in their local community.

There are no recommendations being set as a result of this inspection visit.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations set at the inspection visit.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The promotion of students good health continues to be outstanding. Student's holistic needs are addressed because the model of practice is outcome focused and looks thoroughly at the developmental needs of each child. There is a flexible and responsive approach to the individual needs of disabled children. At the school, staff actively promote the students physical health by teaching health education programmes which include personal hygiene schemes in work, sex education programmes and drugs education. There is a proper assessment of health care needs and there are good health interventions to ensure that the highest quality of care is being achieved. One of the key strengths of the school is the careful vigilance employed during personal hygiene routines to ensure that any personal health issues are noted and recorded and that appropriate action is taken. Students are encouraged to keep themselves fit and healthy. This is because students have a very active leisure time. For example, students engage in four physical exercise sessions per week which includes an intense aerobics session and ball skills. Students also participate in trampolining, soft play activities and youth club where they play snooker and table football.

The school has achieved healthy school status which is a national scheme. This best practice promotes the health and well-being of students through a well-planned and taught curriculum in an environment that promotes learning and healthy lifestyle choices. Students are offered a balanced, nutritious and enjoyable diet that promotes good health and well-being. Meals are prepared using high quality meats, dairy, fruit and vegetable products. Students are encouraged to eat three meals a day and there are additional snacks available. Students are encouraged to make healthy choices. In addition, students' sensory, cultural, religious, health and dietary needs such as vegetarian, gluten free and dairy free diets are being fully met. Staff are very sensitive to students who have unusual food preference which are linked to sensory needs. This is fully addressed in the students' eating plans and is monitored by health care professionals where this is appropriate. For example, food portions can be individually tailored to suit individual needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The system in place to promote the safety and welfare of students is outstanding. Staff are provided with a comprehensive range of policies that specifically address staff recruitment, counteracting bullying, unauthorised absence, complaints,

behaviour management and health and safety. The senior management monitor and review the effectiveness of policies and ensure that staff practice reaches the highest standards. The school meets its aim of providing a positive, caring environment that promotes the development of the whole child.

Students' privacy and integrity are being respected because staff understand their duty to respect confidentiality. Staff and students are encouraged to work together on the basis of confidence, respect and trust.

Parents, carers and other significant stakeholders are provided with a detailed complaints procedure provided by the National Autistic Society. Students are provided with a child-friendly version which is easy to use and all students are offered the support of their key worker or their preferred person to help them clarify and make their complaint. In addition, students have direct access to an independent advocate who visits the boarding provision on a regular basis. This provides extra safeguards to ensure that students are not vulnerable, isolated or disempowered. The school believes that this is crucial to promote the vision of choice and control for disabled students. Since the last inspection no student has made a complaint. Similarly, Ofsted have not received a complaint about the school.

The welfare of students is promoted outstandingly. The school has in place an effective child protection and safeguarding policy which is reviewed regularly. In addition, the school carries out internal annual school safeguarding practice audits which is reported to the management of the school and the governing body. All staff receive thorough child protection and safeguarding training which includes a programme of annual refresher training. Staff have a clear understanding of their important role in terms of their day-to-day practice and that students have a right to a caring and safe environment.

Students are protected because of constant vigilance by staff for signs of bullying. This includes staff being aware of the recognition of bullying behaviours in students with autism where the intention of such behaviour might be unclear. All staff are provided with training and the school has in place an effective anti-bullying policy.

All students are provided with high levels of staffing supervision. Their whereabouts are carefully monitored. There have been no occasions when students have gone missing. This is because staff ensure students are safe and properly supervised. In addition, the security of the building is given a high priority. All external doors are operated by an electronic key fob system. There are also electronic gates to the premises.

At the school positive reinforcement helps to keep the students motivated throughout the day. All students participate in assemblies and certificates of achievement are handed out on a weekly basis. All students have in place a behaviour support plan which clearly describes known behaviours and triggers for the child and then list the rewards and the motivating items and strategies to work with the child. Staff are highly skilled and successful when supporting students to manage their behaviours. This is particularly evident in the problem solving approach

that is adopted at the school especially with the psychology team who help to explore and clarify the intentions behind the child's behaviours. Staff are highly adept at responding consistently to help the child to change and modify their behaviours. This results in the child learning different coping strategies to regulate their own behaviours.

Since the last inspection, the school has appointed two behaviour coordinators who are actively involved in the implementation of behaviour management plans and provide advice and assistance to staff. Each behaviour coordinator spends one evening a fortnight in the boarding accommodation ensuring consistent approaches to behaviours are being employed across the school and residential environment. All staff are trained in the use of physical intervention. Given the complexities of students behaviour the use of this type of intervention is relatively low. There is careful scrutiny of all physical interventions with the expressed aim of reducing or eliminating physical interventions. There are no occasions where staff apply sanctions as a means of controlling and responding to students behaviours.

Students live in a school that provides excellent physical safety and security. All students have in place a personalised risk assessment which is reviewed as circumstances change. In addition, the school has an extensive and wide ranging risk assessments regarding the premises, activities and all health and safety matters applicable to boarding and the school. These are monitored and reviewed by the school's health and safety action group which includes senior managers. As a result of these positive steps, students' welfare is robustly promoted. One staff member summed this up, 'We follow health and safety guidelines and keep up to date with reading risk assessments and attend all the relevant training.'

Recruitment procedures ensure that all staff who come into contact with young people have been thoroughly vetted. In line with best practice a number of staff have attended the safer recruitment training programme and this further demonstrates that the school places safeguarding students at the heart of their work.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school continues to provide excellent high quality 24 hour care and education. Students receive outstanding support enabling them to progress at school. Teaching and learning is individualised to meet the range of each particular student's need. This is because staff have in-depth understanding of autism which enables them to provide the key elements that gradually empower students to learn more effectively. For example, staff provide a highly structured and predictable working environment because the physical surroundings and the work tasks presented are structured to improve access and encourage learning. Students learn about visual and auditory attention because staff deliberately extend and motivate students to concentrate longer on a task. This is because staff use a wide range of support mechanisms to enable students to learn more easily, for example, signs, symbols, photos, pictures,

written messages and the use of pointing gestures. These are intentionally taught in a wide variety of situations which includes the school environment and in the residential setting. More recently, the school has refocused with energy, the use of the picture exchange communication system (PECS), an augmentative communication system. The school has increased the structure and communication opportunities at meal times and this has been extended to a range of leisure activities. This has positive outcomes for meeting student's communication needs.

All students are allocated a key worker. Part of their role is to get to know the students as individuals so that their physical, emotional, social, health and educational needs can be met. Through individual planning, high levels of staffing and the use of carefully risk-assessed activities, all students are able to take part in the full range of activities. The school provides certain activities designed around students' strengths and their personal hobbies. For example, art sessions and music sessions which help students to learn how to play the piano. The school has developed the playground area which has had an extremely positive impact on the quality of lives for students. They enjoy using the extensive equipment and this has greatly contributed to the development of social skills. Some of the skills learnt have included sharing with others, turn taking and waiting and working together.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school has a number of school-based consultations. Students are encouraged to make their own choices in a variety of ways and this includes very practical choices related to breakfast, lunch, snack-time and choosing their own materials during cookery. Activities such as art or music sessions are being given as options of how students can use their leisure time. Staff are highly proficient at using the picture exchange communication system to help students to successfully express a range of wants and needs. This is evidenced by how staff engage students with using 'choice boards' where the students can request activities to participate in during their free time.

The school is adept at actively listening to students with very complex communication needs. This is because staff monitor behaviour closely, as through this, they can ascertain whether a child is happy or understand why the child might be upset, anxious or uncertain about something.

The student council provides opportunities for students to express their opinions and feelings about the time they spend at the school. All information relevant to the school council is provided in verbal, written and picture format. The student council has proved to be a useful forum to enable students to contribute to the running of the school.

All students have in place a comprehensive care plan that clearly sets out their assessed needs and how staff will meet these. There is a strong focus on students

engaging in self help skills appropriate to their ability so that they can become as independent as possible for later life. For example, students are encouraged to help make their own drinks and drinks for peers and to look after their belongings. One staff member commented, 'Some children focus on practical life skills like laundry and recycling.' In both the school and the residential environment students are supported to make choices, and where appropriate, share activities and help their peers.

Students experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes. Staff go to great lengths to always prepare students as thoroughly as possible for any impending changes. This is done through discussion with parents and carers to determine the best approach and then through comprehensive transition planning over a twelve month period. For example, when a new boarder is potentially joining the school a welcome pack is sent to the student prior to admission. Parents and carers are involved throughout the transition process and gradual visits occur initially starting with either a few hours in school or a tea visit, then one overnight stay before staying for a whole week. One student commented, 'The Lodge is a good place to stay.'

Students are able to maintain suitable contact with their parents and carers. Parents and carers are encouraged to visit the boarding accommodation so that students can keep in contact with people that are important to them. Students are also able to maintain contact via phone and through letter writing.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The boarding accommodation is a two storey purpose designed building. The accommodation is well presented and clean, well maintained and pleasant. There are single and twin bedded rooms. Students share with others broadly in their age group. Students are able to personalise their bedrooms to reflect their preference, taste and culture. There are a number of bathrooms and toilets allocated to specific children. In addition, students have access to a large and secure play area with a range of apparatus outside the boarding accommodation. Students have access to the school facilities which include an art room, soft play room, sensory room, kitchen, library and large gym, in the evenings and at weekends.

Since the last inspection, the school has made improvements by fitting new carpets or linoleum in bedrooms and adapted furniture to ensure the boarding accommodation has a homely feel whilst meeting the needs of students. Finally, the school is planning to change all the radiators to be 'cool to touch' and remove the radiator guards and a programme of repainting the upstairs of the boarding accommodation is planned.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The management structure at the school is highly evolved, successful and operates in an effective and organised manner. The boarding provision is managed by the residential service manager and overseen by the head of care and the principal. The school fully recognises the benefits of strong leadership and accountability which have helped to achieve the high quality care within the boarding provision. The principal and senior management are passionate about their work in providing outstanding leadership with a clear vision that supports the culture and ethos of the school. One staff member explained, 'There is a strong senior management team which delivers good training to staff and encourages staff development as well as the students.'

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school has a culture of inclusion, ensuring that all students have the right to access high quality activities, whatever the level of their disability or restrictive behaviours. The schools meets its aims to integrate equality and fairness across assemblies, religious education, activities and resources. The school promotes equality and diversity into care plans and provides training for staff. For example, the school uses a range of approaches to ensure the facilitation of communication with all students and their families.

The school has in place a Statement of Purpose which is accessible, clear and concise. This means that parents, carers, students and significant stakeholders understand what are the facilities, resources and staffing levels on offer. The school also provides information via the school's website.

Throughout the school and in the boarding provision staffing levels are high. Rotas are well organised to ensure that there are enough senior staff to maximise opportunities for consistency between staff groups to ensure a comprehensive knowledge of each child's needs, preferences and medical issues.

Training within the school is of a very high standard and is offered through a variety of internal and external courses. This ensures that the professional development of staff is enhanced and enriched by the extensive programme of training.

The systems to monitor and review the performance of the school are outstanding. The senior management team complete a range of internal audits and gather statistical information which demonstrates how effective operational policies are in practice. The quality assurance system is effective because it analyses the quality of care and focuses on the management of the school. An external member of the organisation visits the school every half term and provides a detailed report about the outcome of their visit.