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21 March 2014

Mr R Legate
Principal
Linden Lodge School
61 Princes Way
Wimbledon Park
London
SW19 6JB

Dear Mr Legate

No formal designation monitoring inspection of Linden Lodge School

Following my visit to your school on 21 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings.

The inspection was a monitoring inspection carried out in accordance with no formal designation procedures and conducted under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was carried out in response to two complaints made to Ofsted which raised serious concerns. The complaints were deemed to be qualifying complaints and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector decided that an inspection of the school should take place to follow up the whole-school issues that were raised.

Evidence

Over one day, the inspector observed the school's work, particularly safeguarding procedures. She considered the response to pupils presenting challenging behaviour and whether behaviour management procedures are suitably adjusted for pupils' needs and disabilities. Staff training, support and access to advice were also considered alongside the effectiveness of leaders and the governing body in monitoring and evaluating policy and practice for behaviour management and safeguarding across the school. The inspector met with the Principal, the Chair of the Governing Body, a parent governor and spoke informally with pupils. She took into account responses to the on-line Parent View and the results of the annual school returns of parents' views. The findings of the Social Care Inspection which took place on 19–21 March 2014 were taken into account, particularly with regard to safeguarding.

The inspector considered the summary data held by the school on the pupils' progress across all year groups and undertook two learning walks with senior staff across the primary and secondary phases.

Having considered all the evidence I am of the opinion that at this time:

the school's safeguarding arrangements meet requirements and the monitoring and evaluation by leaders and members of the governing body of the policy and practice for behaviour management and safeguarding are reasonable.

Context

There are currently 141 pupils on roll between the ages of 2 and 19. Of these, 27 pupils are in the sixth form. The school also supports 400 pupils in outreach work through the Hearing Support Service and 260 pupils through the Vision Support Service. A further 120 pupils are supported by the Hearing Support Service through the Cochlear Implant programme at St George's Hospital. A total of 780 children are supported under the umbrella of Wandsworth Sensory Support Service. Some services are provided at Willow Primary Sensory Support Centre and at the Rowan Secondary Sensory Support Centre. On site, the school provides education for day and residential pupils with a wide range of very complex needs, deaf-blind multi-sensory impairment, and severe, profound and multiple learning difficulties. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Around a third of the pupils are provided with weekly residential care. A high proportion of the pupils are from a broad range of minority ethnic groups.

The local authority advisory service for the visually impaired is located on the school site and is managed by the Principal who is responsible for outreach services for pupils in other settings as well as for care and education within the school. Since 2009, the school has had specialist status for sensory and physical needs and is recognised as a national Support School.

Achievement of pupils at the school

The school has careful records of the steps in pupils' progress at all levels. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the children's progress is tracked against meticulously planned learning journeys. The exceptionally complex needs of the pupils mean that they are unlikely to meet the Early Learning Goals. Nevertheless, children generally make the best progress possible and, from the evidence in the classes visited, it is clear that their education and care plans are followed diligently and respectfully.

Across the school, the pupils working across levels P1 to P3 are making at least good and mostly outstanding progress in communications skills, personal development and aspects of literacy and numeracy. Well over half of the pupils reach their annual goals, set against the highest likely outcomes in literacy and almost 80% in

numeracy. Those pupils working between Levels P4 and P8 make excellent progress in both literacy and numeracy but particularly in using and applying their skills in number. Generally, pupils unable to work with objects of reference learn well through constant repetition of sensory, musical and other concrete cues. There is a similarly encouraging profile of progress at post-16, with a very successful emphasis on independence and preparation for the next stages of training and experience.

The quality of teaching

No full lessons were seen on this one-day monitoring inspection but from the two learning walks, the wall displays of pupils' work and from the records seen, it is clear that all teaching and resources are very well adapted to meet the exceptionally complex medical and multisensory conditions of the pupils. Learning is carefully integrated with therapeutic work, physiotherapy sessions, speech and language therapy and feeding routines. Staff at all levels work extremely positively with families, therapists and residential staff to promote common expectations, language and resources to extend learning.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

There is a very strong culture of safety throughout the school. Staff are acutely aware of the demanding needs of the many pupils with regressive illnesses and life-limiting conditions. All resources and the environment are geared to support the many different needs of pupils, from those with deaf-blind/multi-sensory impairment to profound and multiple learning difficulties, wheelchair users and those with some mobility. Safeguarding procedures in both the residential care and in the day school are extremely robust. The most recent health and safety audit has awarded the school a SafetyMARK of excellent. However, the school is concerned that because of the complexities of funding, some extremely vulnerable pupils could be at risk as its resources will only stretch to limited medical support on site. There is only one school nurse and one assistant for the day school and no nurse at night in the residential provision. As a result, senior leaders and governors are rightly concerned that they may no longer be able to admit pupils with too great a level of need. Pupils attend very regularly and, despite their considerable medical needs, current attendance at 92% is above that for special schools generally.

The school pays good attention to staff training, but some staff would benefit from further support in dealing with pupils where self-harming is an issue. Classroom-based staff would also benefit from further training when dealing with challenging parents, carers and with external agencies. The contract with parents for the day school does not emphasise sufficiently that the primary function of Linden Lodge is to promote the best learning possible for the pupils, albeit taking into account their complex needs. Not all parents necessarily fully understand the role of the school in promoting the pupils' development.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

Governors are highly committed to the school and are excellent ambassadors for its work. They take their statutory duties with regard to safeguarding very seriously, promoting the school's interests at all levels. They are especially assiduous in dealing with the care of the pupils and with the time-consuming funding issues. Through a range of mechanisms, governors gain first-hand information on the effectiveness of the school's provision for the pupils and capably challenge as well as support the school.

The Principal is devoted to promoting the best interests of the pupils. To this end, he has established a highly effective senior team who share his vision and go the extra mile to achieve the best possible academic and personal outcomes for the pupils. Linden Lodge is a very reflective learning community which is always striving to do its very best and to improve further. Monitoring and evaluation systems are rigorous, staff training is a high priority, pupils' progress is carefully tracked, and interventions are assessed regularly to establish their impact on learning, physical development and personal needs. Staff training is recognised as a very high priority because of the very complex and changing needs of the school population. The school has, however, yet to establish a clear framework of staff training needs required to manage as well as possible the current cohorts of pupils. The school has copious documentation on all aspects of its work. Logs of incidents of any kind are well recorded and managed. However, the safeguarding policy and procedures do not include details for dealing with allegations against staff as these are held in a separate, readily available, document.

Partnerships with parents are strong and those parents who responded to the online Parent View and those who replied to the school's annual questionnaire are satisfied with the work of the school. The very good links with external agents have been sustained between successive inspections. However, many of the therapists are managed by the health service rather than the school and this, at times, limits the school's effectiveness in using their expertise fully in the best interests of the pupils.

External support

The school is supported well at many levels by the local authority and by individual medical practitioners and therapists. The interface, however, between education and health with regard to funding is very complex and this places an undue burden on senior staff and governors. Much of what the school has accomplished has been through its own fundraising and its many very effective partnerships, including those with parents. There is scope to explore further with the help of both education and health the way in which its work is funded for both out-of-borough and in-borough pupils.

Priorities for further improvement

In order to improve even further, the school should consider:

- refining the safeguarding policy so that procedures regarding allegations against staff are held within the document rather than as a separate policy
- providing further training for class-based staff in dealing with pupils, parents and carers, and external agencies when there are issues of self-harming
- no longer accepting pupils whose needs are beyond the school's current funding, resources and expertise unless meaningful additional support is provided.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Education, the Education Funding Agency, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children's Services for Wandsworth. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Sheila Nolan

Additional Inspector