

Linden Bridge School

Linden Bridge School, Grafton Road, WORCESTER PARK, Surrey, KT4 7JW

Inspection dates	18/03/2015 to 20/03/2015	
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding	1
Residential pupils' safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- The residential provision provides pupils with a superb range of opportunities to enhance and enrich their learning and development. Pupils make excellent progress within a nurturing environment that stretches their abilities and challenges them to realise their full potential.
- Excellent safeguarding arrangements protect pupil's safety and welfare within an educative approach which teaches them to think for themselves. Pupils leave the school better equipped to keep themselves safe.
- Effective succession arrangements have ensured a seamless transition from the previous head of care to a suitably qualified and very experienced successor. Her drive, enthusiasm and existing knowledge of the school brings a rich mix of knowledge of the school and having fresh ideas to drive improvements.
- Parents and pupils value the residential provision and all it has to offer. Parents say, 'We just wish the provision could offer more boarding days because our child has made such excellent progress since using it' and 'my child is more confident, outgoing and keen to try new experiences as a result of the boarding'.
- Highly individualised care planning arrangements fully recognise the strengths, needs and aspirations of the pupils. This highly inclusive provision ensures pupils have a real say in terms of their own care plans and the wider running of the school. The use of an independent visitor brings a high quality approach which ensures the express views and opinions of all pupils are brought to the attention of senior leaders.
- Pupils take appropriate responsibility for their own health care arrangements as far as their disabilities allow. Staff receive appropriate training and guidance which ensures they are able to provide excellent levels of support when this is needed. Excellent catering arrangements provide highly nutritious meals within which pupils also learn to cook for themselves.

- All of the national minimum standards are met or exceeded.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

Information about this inspection

This standalone welfare inspection was conducted by one inspector over three days. Senior leaders, including the head teacher, head of care, business manager and key workers were interviewed. Additional discussions were held with teaching and ancillary staff. Pupils proudly undertook a full tour of the school and spent time speaking to the inspector about their boarding experiences. A number of parents were interviewed by telephone, including the chair of governors.

Care plans, risk assessments and health records were scrutinised, as well as health and safety records.

Inspection team

Sophie Wood

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Linden Bridge School is a local 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 systems, a structured treatment and education programme for children with autistic spectrum disorders and visual and written cues.

Boarding is provided for students under 16 years in flats on the first floor of an annex to the main school building. Older students are accommodated in a purpose-built further education department building.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- continue to improve the overall quality of the residential accommodation
- ensure the on-going regularity of governor visits to the residential provision
- add greater clarity and description when writing individual targets.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Residential pupils enjoy safe, appropriate and highly valuing relationships with staff across the whole school provision. Their own unique personalities are demonstrated to be very well understood by the staff. This instils feelings of confidence and self-worth. Due to this inclusive and valuing approach pupils accept themselves and each other. They develop tolerance, responsibility and a greater understanding of the wider world.

An abundance of activities pushes pupils to try new experiences. Pupils frequently try new things because of the encouragement and support they receive from their friends. A cycle of success encourages newer pupils to learn from and look up to older and more experienced senior pupils. There is a tangible value for younger pupils seeing the progress made by the sixth formers.

Residential pupils greatly enjoy the boarding experience. Their comments include, 'I love staying at school', 'We do absolutely loads of different things' and 'I never, ever get bored here'. Parents give similar positive feedback. Their comments include, 'My child really benefits by staying alongside their friends' and 'I am delighted with the additional reading support; my child has finally developed a love of books.'

Pupils are actively encouraged to take responsibility for their own health needs where appropriate. They understand why they may need certain medicines and they develop an understanding of their own diagnoses. Pupils also learn about the benefits of physical exercise and a healthy diet. They frequently cook for themselves. This nurturing and environment encourages pupils to explore their own emotional needs as they undertake the journey towards adolescence.

The structure of the residential provision maximises pupils opportunities to practise and hone their self-help and independence skills. Typical routines include making their own beds, using the iron and undertaking a wide range of domestic tasks. Pupils who struggle with social interaction receive encouragement, support and plentiful opportunities to overcome their anxieties. They begin to access social occasions and external activities in safe and supportive ways. Their chances of a successful transition into the next stage of their lives are significantly increased because of this approach.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

Strong links between the education and residential teams create care plans which maximise pupils' learning and development. Subjects learnt in the classroom are built upon and extended by the activities and routines of the residential provision. Examples include English and maths skills whereby these are further progressed through practical opportunities such as budgeting and reading for pleasure. Homework is monitored and effectively supported. Individual care files hold the most up-to-date education targets, in order that wherever possible, these are factored into residential care plans.

Individual goals and targets are derived through regular consultation between teachers, care staff, parents and pupils. Pupils demonstrate a real sense of ownership of their care plans as a result. They fully understand their own goals and targets because they are instrumental in their design. Pupils are appropriately challenged and this aspect increases their growth and development. One aspect of how some individual targets are written was discussed at length with the head of care. It was agreed that there are some examples whereby greater attention to detail would make these even stronger.

Busy residential schedules commence as soon as the school day finishes. Pupils are very familiar with the routines; they understand their planners and become immediately engaged with the staff on duty. Activity plans follow a structure which allows for flexibility as well as a sense of order. This is vitally important to a high number of pupils who need and thrive within trusted routines.

A wide range of external activities provides excellent social and recreational opportunities. Some of the pupils are working towards a recognised skills for life award. This places them in local volunteering projects. Pupils take on responsibilities and develop their inter-personal skills. The success of one of these projects has been recognised through a local newspaper report. Pupils are rightly proud of such achievements and the wider community has a high regard for the school.

Pupils make extremely positive comments about the quality of the food. A dedicated catering team ensures special dietary requirements are fully catered for; allergies, preferences and dislikes are very well known. High quality produce ensures excellent nutrition and residential pupils are also able to cook for themselves in well equipped kitchens.

The residential staff team implements safe and clear health care guidance. Medication protocols are strictly adhered to and the team receives regular updated training. Health sections of pupil care plans contain relevant information, such as any specialist or external involvement which may include child mental health services and therapy provision. Staff are therefore able to provide additional sensitive support which enhances the quality of care for the pupils. Their mental and emotional well-being is assured.

The physical environment is showing some signs of age; it was not purpose-built for its current function. Pupils do not express any negativity. Indeed, they are extremely comfortable in their designated areas which are maintained to a very high standard. Pupils always occupy the same bedrooms when they stay. Many bring in personal items from home; the safety of their possessions is assured.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

Excellent safeguarding arrangements promote and protect the safety and welfare of the residential pupils. This starts with robust recruitment practice which is continually being strengthened by the business manager. Her current review of reference checks and interviewing criteria demonstrates a strong desire to ensure that safe recruitment is achieved on every occasion.

Staff across all departments fully understand and implement the school's effective safeguarding and child protection guidance. Training is regularly refreshed and updated. Staff at different levels receive the training and guidance they need to be knowledgeable and effective. For example, the new head of care is scheduled to undertake additional local authority designated person's training, commensurate with her planned additional responsibilities.

Residential staff receive training which incorporates the specific vulnerabilities of disabled young people. Additional topics are routinely added to accurately reflect modern day risks such as internet safety, sexual exploitation and being missing. Consequently, all staff have a heightened awareness of the potential safety risks for the pupils. They know what to report and to whom.

All residential pupils have a detailed 'safe from harm' risk assessment. This document stipulates the specific and individual safety risks and concerns for each pupil. Furthermore, it includes clear guidance for the staff to implement in order to reduce and minimise potential risks. Vitally, such guidance does not impose unnecessary restrictions. Pupils are equally encouraged and enabled to

take measured and appropriate risks which aid their personal development and growth. Pupils can and do make mistakes.

Lower level concerns and the general welfare of pupils also receives strict and close attention. Weekly meetings monitor current, on-going and fresh concerns, in order that prompt consultation and referrals are made to wider safeguarding agencies where necessary, to ensure the earliest possible intervention. No staffing concerns or allegations have occurred since the last inspection. However, clear policy and procedural guidance remains in place should such an event occur.

Residential staff are appropriately trained to effectively use behaviour management techniques. The actual use of physical restraint is extremely rare because staff are vigilant and act quickly to diffuse potentially volatile situations. Similarly, staff understand potential push and pull factors in relation to pupils being absent or missing. Specific protocols are in line with local authority and police guidance but no such episodes have occurred.

Pupils say they feel safe and protected. Their comments include, 'Sometimes some of us might have an argument but there isn't actual bullying'. Other pupils talk knowledgeably about other safety factors, such as, 'We learn about internet safety like how to use Facebook and not to make friends with someone you don't know'. Pupils also learn useful and practical safety skills. For example, one group is currently undertaking a first aid course.

The physical environment is safe and appropriately secure. Fire safety drills are regularly practised; a night time drill is due and scheduled. The diligence of the new care taker recently discovered a number of wiring faults which were immediately reported to the local authority for prompt attention. Regular health and safety checks are routinely conducted and kept up-to-date. One example of overloaded plug sockets was observed during this inspection. Prompt action was taken to rectify this.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

Outstanding leadership and management arrangements inspire staff to provide a superior service. The new head of care is an existing long-standing staff member. Her inclusive style and approach ensures the team is cohesive and ready to support the new staff who are about to join. Residential pupils are unaffected by the changes because of meticulous planning and careful attention to their continuing residential routines. Albeit, change as a concept is celebrated to teach pupils that it need not be scary.

The calibre and experience of staff across all departments is a strength of the school. Members of the residential team are long-standing. They say, 'Why would anyone want to leave this fantastic school'. Their collective qualifications, experience and expertise is impressive. Through an embedded supervision and appraisal process, individual staff members continue to professionally develop and improve their practice.

A very clear structure and accurate staff deployment ensures that pupils are suitably but not obtrusively supervised and supported. Older pupils value this approach. They talk about being treated as 'grown ups'. All pupils are extremely positive about consultation processes. Their input, suggestions and comments place the residential provision as a highly regarded and valued aspect of the school.

Robust monitoring systems continue to drive improvements. The governing body is comprised of a wide range of external professionals, experts in industries and parents. Governor visits to the residential provision are typically regular. However, in recent months they have become less so. Regular Standard 20 monitoring visits are continuing. These bring a fresh perspective to the head of care. Similarly, independent visitor arrangements effectively engage the pupils to offer their

honest and express views and opinions. School leavers frequently return to speak to current pupils. They frequently refer to their experience at the school as a platform for their current success.

No complaints have been received since the last inspection. Parents and pupils speak about excellent communication and an honest and transparent approach. They say this negates their need to use formal measures. The school eagerly responds to the inspection process. The one recommendation made from the previous inspection was immediately implemented.

Care records, other associated documents and policies and procedures are securely stored and contain accurate details. Dedicated systems ensure that policies and procedures are routinely updated to reflect any changes in terms of good practice and legislative guidance.

This highly inclusive school community is creative, resourceful and forward thinking. A number of the national minimum standards are exceeded.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	125475
Social care unique reference number	SC013884
DfE registration number	936/7060

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	
Number of boarders on roll	
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	
Headteacher	Ms Rachel Watt
Date of previous boarding inspection	09/09/2013
Telephone number	020 8330 3009

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