

The Loddon School

Wildmoor, Hook, RG27 0JD

Inspection dates 15–17 July 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Students, most of whom have been unsuccessful in special schools, become much more confident learners than previously. They achieve well during their time at the school and make outstanding progress in their personal development.
- Students, including those at post-16, make good progress and are well prepared for moving on to the next stage of their education.
- All staff, including from outside agencies, are committed and often highly experienced in working with these vulnerable students. The quality of teaching is typically good and improving.
- The headteacher and the Trustees have ensured that requirements for the independent schools standards are met.
- The experienced and dedicated headteacher, with a strong support team, provides good leadership. Leaders are well supported by the Trustees who are active and knowledgeable about the work of the school.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust and carefully monitored. Students are kept safe and staff deal swiftly with any problems that may arise.
- Behaviour and attendance are good. This is because of the effective support received by both the students and their families in promoting personal development and practical life skills.
- The stimulating environment enriches the experiences of the students to enable them to reach their potential.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The monitoring of teaching and learning is not always sufficiently rigorous in ensuring that clear, specific targets for improvement are consistently set.
- The evaluation and improvement plan to support post-16 provision is in the early stages of development.
- Teachers do not make as much use as they could of technology to support the development of students' communication skills.
- Opportunities are not always identified to develop literacy and numeracy skills across all subject areas.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the independent school standards', and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed nine lessons or part lessons, including a learning walk. Most lessons were jointly observed with the senior leaders. Discussions with the majority of the staff and the majority of the students took place, and staff responses to a questionnaire were analysed.
- The school's documentation was examined, including all of the statutory policies, the website, planning for subjects, records of students' progress and the welfare and safeguarding of students.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The inspector held meetings or telephone conversations with the referring bodies, supporting outside agencies, parents and the social care inspectors.
- There were insufficient responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, but information was gained from feedback given to the school from parents and the referring organisations.
- The school was last inspected in April 2012 and was judged to be outstanding.
- This inspection was aligned with a social care inspection.

Inspection team

Sandra Teacher, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Loddon School is a residential special school that provides year-round education and care for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders compounded by extreme and challenging behaviour. Students are aged eight to 19 years.
- Many have additional disabilities such as epilepsy and very severe communication disorder. Pupils' attainment is well below their chronological age. The school admits only those pupils who have the most severe learning difficulties and each has a statement of special educational needs. The majority have been excluded from their previous special schools.
- The school was established as a charitable trust in 1988 and currently has 29 pupils on roll: 25 boys and four girls. All pupils are funded by their home authority. Twenty-six pupils are looked after by the local authority and two are pupils in care.
- The school is organised into seven smaller living and learning units, each for up to four young people. A flat for supported use by an individual pupil is also provided.
- The aim of the school is to provide for the needs of the pupils through a multi-disciplinary approach that is applied consistently through the waking day so that pupils can achieve as much independence in adult life as possible.
- The school is set within 10 acres of grounds, which include animal paddocks, an orchard, an allotment, outdoor play and climbing equipment, a nature and cycle trail and an indoor swimming pool.
- There is no alternative provision.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen the leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that the monitoring of teaching and learning sets rigorous targets to help both the teachers and their students achieve even better
 - implementing a clear plan to support the best provision for post-16 learners.
- Strengthen the quality of teaching and students' learning by:
 - encouraging the use of the latest technology to support the development of students' communication skills
 - ensuring that all staff identify opportunities to promote literacy and numeracy across all subject areas.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The headteacher is passionate about the work of the school and her ambitious vision is shared by staff, parents and Trustees. Considerable commitment and hard work have gone into maintaining the high expectations and outcomes since the school's previous inspection and to meeting all the independent school standards.
- Monitoring of teaching and learning by senior leaders, both on- and off-site, has contributed to the development of good provision and practice. However, staff require more specific targets when their work is reviewed to help raise further, the quality of teaching and students' achievement.
- Middle managers, who are the teachers, are still developing their roles and are supporting the work of the living and learning assistants, many of whom are new to the school.
- The school's assessment systems are not always fully linked to session planning so that teachers can plan activities to meet the students' specific needs. The school already has plans in place to create a system that will link all the information available and support speedy analysis.
- The range of activities meets the students' needs well and makes a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Loddon has developed a specialised programme, with highly personalised and individualised learning and support programmes in place for all learners. This focuses on developing each learner to take a pathway to the most fulfilling life possible for them, taking into account their communication and language levels and learning styles.
- Despite learners having been excluded from their previous schools and respite settings because of their behaviour, community links are at the heart of the Loddon experience. Relationships with local residents and the wider community are strong and include delivering the parish magazine or working on the neighbouring farm.
- The main emphasis is placed on developing students' personal skills. This successfully ensures that students develop practical skills, for example, learning how to wash and dress. To ensure privacy and dignity, students are supported to look after themselves with basic health and hygiene programmes that are required to give them more independence.
- Learning how to work with and safely interact with different people prepares students well for adult life in Britain today and to show respect and tolerance for all.
- Students, at their own levels, develop a good awareness of the multicultural nature of their world because they live within a similar on-site community. Staff and pupils represent many faiths and different ethnic groups. This awareness is further extended through topics such as cooking, where students are encouraged to experience a range of foods from different cultures.
- Activities are enriched by a host of valuable experiences, tailored to support the students in all aspects of their daily lives. These include a visit Winchester, experiencing travelling by bus and train. Here, students light a candle at the Cathedral, and visit Wolvesey Castle and the War Museum. Such experiences not only teach them travel skills but also about a range of British public institutions.
- School surveys indicate that parents and the local authorities are happy with the school's work. Good relationships between home and school mean that there is regular ongoing communication. Every effort is made to ensure that the students' needs are fulfilled so that they can live happy lives. As one carer writes, 'He has done so well, he has changed from a child to a young man.'
- Leaders have been effective in fostering a range of supportive and worthwhile partnerships. They successfully draw on outside expertise to ensure that the students are given the best possible provision to meet their specific needs. For example, specialist physiotherapists and aromatherapists work with students individually to overcome specific difficulties.
- Equality of opportunity lies at the heart of the school's work, relationships are excellent, and the school has created a family atmosphere where each student and adult is valued.
- Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and robust, and fully meet statutory requirements. All the staff have regular training in restraint procedures and how to deal with challenging situations.
- All the required information for parents, including the safeguarding policy, is contained on the school website. Parents are informed on the website that they will receive any policy documents or relevant information on request.
- Staff questionnaires and a minority of parents indicated concerns regarding the number of new living and learning assistants. The school leaders are fully aware of this staffing issue and have put strategies in place to reduce its impact on students' learning, their welfare and staff morale. They are actively working towards developing a more creative approach to recruiting and retaining staff.
- All of the independent school standards in relation to leadership and management and safeguarding are met.

■ The governance of the school:

- The Chair of the Board of Trustees and the interim chief executive have a clear sense of the school's direction. They work diligently with the headteacher to ensure that the school has the policies and procedures required to operate effectively and to meet the independent school standards.
- They have good knowledge about all aspects of the work of the school, including the quality of teaching and students' progress.
- They ensure that all of the relevant information is on the school's website, including the safeguarding policy.
- They understand the link between staff performance and pay, and use this information to inform decisions on salary progression. They also have a good understanding of the procedures needed to tackle underperformance.
- They keep a firm track on the additional funding received for disadvantaged students. This has been used successfully to provide support such as communication tablets or more off-site visits and has had a positive impact on students' learning.
- They have worked with external consultants on the school's self-evaluation which agreed with the inspection findings.
- They have fully supported the school to help allay the concerns as regards the staffing issues, and devised creative strategies to reduce any negative impact.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. Records show that there have been dramatic improvements in their communication and social interaction skills. These improvements are carefully recorded so that the behaviour support plans can be constantly modified to guide responses when students' behaviour sometimes dips. These strategies have worked extremely successfully.
- Learning takes place in a calm, purposeful atmosphere. Students now have very positive attitudes to learning, moving between short periods of intensive teaching and their chosen reward activities without difficulty.
- The management of students' behaviour is very effective. Most members of staff know students very well and are adept at recognising triggers that indicate increasing stress and anxiety.
- Staff are skilful at managing changes, both during the day and in new activities, to minimise upset to students and to maximise learning time. For instance, preparations to support travel when undertaking trips or to work with the outside support agencies are carefully and thoughtfully managed, enabling students to succeed. This careful monitoring extends throughout the day, where the teachers and the living and learning teams are in constant communication to ensure that behaviour and safety are of paramount importance.
- Students have the opportunity to make their own choices. For example, at the café, they are encouraged to make choices about their drinks and food. They can choose an alternate activity if they are unable to attend the planned sessions, for example. In their rooms, they have communication boards which allow them to talk about their families and indicate their feelings. They write regular letters home and where appropriate, attend their own review meetings.
- Certain staff have had advocacy training to represent the children and to speak up for their choices and wishes. Students are encouraged to participate in local events and meet members of the local community. Students also enter into charitable events such as Red Nose Day and Children in Need to support children less fortunate than themselves.

Safety

- The school's work to keep the students safe and secure is good. Policies and procedures are fully in place to safeguard students and to ensure that safe recruitment procedures are followed.
- High levels of staffing mean that students are very well supervised. They are never left unattended. Members of staff are alert to the harm that students may cause themselves as a consequence of their special needs. Praise and constant rewards are used well to reinforce positive behaviour.
- Considerable emphasis is placed upon extending students' understanding of risk at a level that is appropriate to their needs. This includes consideration of sexual and physical health and well-being. For example, in science or food technology lessons, students are reminded that they are dealing with hot or dangerous substances and should consider health and hygiene issues. When horse riding or pony carting, they are not allowed to participate unless they are wearing a helmet.
- Attendance improves significantly when compared to their previous schools. The school has had considerable, notable success with ensuring that students are both punctual and have almost 100%

attendance. As a result, all the independent school standards are met for welfare, health and safety.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is good because it is generally matched well to the personal and academic targets of each student. Lesson planning ensures that students work consistently towards their personal and academic targets. However, literacy and numeracy targets are not always sufficiently emphasised within the learning activities. This leads to some missed opportunities for students to develop these skills across all subject areas. There are also missed opportunities to use the latest technologies to overcome barriers to learning, particularly in the support of communication skills.
- Sessions are carefully timed to make the most of students' concentration spans. This was seen when students were focusing on their physical development and learning how to carefully follow instructions. For example, while learning 'Yoga', they are able to settle on the mats and carry out specific movements. This positive progress has been created over time through strong and purposeful teaching. Rewards are used very effectively to mark each small success in learning. Short breaks are then created in which pupils enjoy choosing their own activities and they develop their physical skills either through bike riding or planting in the garden area.
- All members of staff are encouraged to make use of a range of communication techniques, including picture and photo cues that build well on speech and language therapy. They speak clearly and appropriately, encouraging students to recognise social cues and listen to others. Examples of this are the way in which students undertake dog therapy to learn to sign and then progress to using a tablet communicator. Part of the learning process is accepting that the activity has come to an end.
- There are specific activities that support health and diet and very successful 'juicing' sessions, where students are enabled to use the machinery, with support if necessary.
- Numeracy skills are well taught and linked to life skills, in the best sessions, so that students can learn how to measure ingredients for cooking or increase their fitness through measuring their stamina. However, this practice is not consistent throughout the school.
- The feedback is given verbally and there is good immediate spoken feedback, praise and encouragement so that students can correct their mistakes straight away.
- All staff have very regular training, particularly in learning to deal with restrictive behaviour and they model best practice for other schools as well.
- All parents and the placing local authorities are pleased with the quality of teaching and the students' enjoyment of learning.
- Leaders have ensured all the independent school standards for teaching and assessment are met.

The achievement of pupils is good

- The achievement of students is good as a result of the effective teaching and all-round care they receive while at Loddon.
- Most students have made very limited progress before they start the school, often as a result of their challenging behaviours or breakdown of previous placements.
- One of the first and most important achievements is 'waiting skills'. The school has early successes in helping to achieve them and it is built into all programmes.
- Good progress is achieved in literacy. The abilities of the most able students are recognised. During café sessions, students who are able to recognise words have a separate choice board with written words. Students are supported to sign their own names when they write their weekly letters home to parents.
- Progress in numeracy is slower than in literacy but steady. Students are developing counting skills by using numerals when they set the tables. Emerging skills of understanding money are encouraged by exchanging money when shopping and then, most importantly, waiting for their change. This is reinforced by using the self-service machines at the supermarket.
- Key Stage 2 pupils have learnt to use the resources within school safely and appropriately to take their skills into the community. Those who are learning horse riding in school progress when they reach Key Stages 3 and 4 by riding at a local centre.
- Three students have learnt to swim in the school swimming pool and now use the public swimming pool and swim lengths to develop their stamina. This enables them to walk without 'flopping and resting'.
- Students learn to negotiate obstacles to make them aware of body and spatial awareness. They then use these skills when they are out and about in the community.
- Less able students achieve well through practical and hands-on learning. Through scientific investigation and exploration, starting from basic food preparation, they then progress to helping to cook their meals.
- Students' progress in English has improved faster than in mathematics and this is partly due to

inconsistencies in some teachers' subject expertise. The school makes good use of all additional funding to provide two-to-one support, if students need any additional help to fulfil their potential.

- Expertise in art, dance and drama plays an important role in students' enjoying and making good progress in their creative development. They learn keyboard skills, and music is used as a therapeutic activity to calm and engage.
- Achievement in personal development is outstanding and lies at the heart of the school. Students are being very well prepared for their future lives through personal, social, citizenship and health education lessons. Together with the mentoring programme, this makes an important contribution to students' spiritual, moral and cultural development.
- The use of therapeutic education that covers communication, independence and well-being through a range of therapies such as aromatherapy and art makes an outstanding contribution to students' learning. It very effectively supports the ways in which students are given opportunities for learning and working with their peers. Both the one-to-one and the group work give careful consideration to students' barriers to learning. Excellent progress has been made by helping students to be motivated and keen to learn. This has a positive impact on their overall progress and achievement.
- Older students are supported to develop their employability skills. They are helped to make choices, as far as they are able, about their futures lives.
- Leaders have ensured all the independent school standards for students' achievement are met.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form provision is good. Students make good progress in working towards external accreditation. They are supported by staff to live and learn in their own houses away from the main school building. This enables students to develop their independence skills and to experience life in a smaller more homely environment.
- This environment helps to prepare students for adult life in a residential home in the community.
- Relationships between students and staff are positive, behaviour is good and staff are proud of their students and keen for them to do well. Students are safe and well looked after and effectively supported to develop skills in caring for their own personal items by cleaning and tidying their rooms.
- Students help to plan, buy ingredients and cook their own meals. They take part in work experience with the school, such as litter picking and serving in the school café and tuck shop.
- Students take part in voluntary work and experience a range of community activities such as the Guides or the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme.
- Teaching is good and students are encouraged to work with each other and with a wider variety of less familiar staff. They learn to become less reliant on staff support through the use of photo or written schedules to help them complete their tasks.
- The leadership and management are good, although the plans to support the post-16 provision are still in the early stages of development..

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	116589
Inspection number	462865
DfE registration number	850/6005

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Special (Dual registration as a school and children's home.)
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	29
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	9
Proprietor	Marion Cornick
Chair	Marion Cornick (Acting)
Headteacher	Karen Rookes
Date of previous school inspection	April 2012
Annual fees	£220,000
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