

Pontville Residential School

Pontville School, Black Moss Lane, ORMSKIRK, Lancashire, L39 4TW

Inspection dates

Tuesday 9 February 2016 to
Thursday 11 February 2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Pupils make significant progress as a result of the highly effective collaborative working between care, therapy and education staff. Staff implement strategies compiled following on-going, detailed assessment of pupils' needs. This ensures pupils receive tailored care and support to promote their specific developmental requirements.
- Pupils flourish and improve their social, communication and behavioural skills. Through extremely responsive and positive relationships with staff, they are developing confidence and self-esteem knowing they are valued as unique individuals.
- The safety of pupils is central to all practice. Effective safeguarding measures protect pupils. Staff are confident and competent in their safeguarding role and implement appropriate action to protect pupils' welfare.
- Using a multi-disciplinary approach to behaviour management, the education and therapy team closely monitor incidents and train staff to develop their understanding of behaviour. Consequently pupils benefit from successful strategies to reduce their anxiety and assist them in managing their emotions.
- Leaders are passionately committed to providing pupils with high standards of individualised care and support. All staff share this dedication which is clearly demonstrated through numerous examples of best practice in providing care and support for pupils with complex needs resulting from communication difficulties.
- A particular strength of the school is the support they provide for families. Staff work

in partnership to promote pupils' development and provide additional support in the form of information workshops.

- Leaders are proactive in extending the benefits of their expertise to the wider community, working with teachers from other schools and community groups to help develop a broader understanding of communication difficulties to benefit young people in the wider society.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen safeguarding procedures to ensure that all information is shared including decisions around actions taken.
- Expand further the opportunities for pupils to enjoy exhilarating sports and opportunities with community youth groups and holidays.
- Provide opportunities for staff to talk with governors in confidence and in private.

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of the inspection. Meetings were held with the acting head teacher, deputy head of care, principal speech and language therapist, business and finance officer, pastoral head and designated safeguarding lead, residential staff and pupils. Both residential houses were visited with observation of staff and pupils' interactions and activities. The inspector joined pupils for one meal. Policies, records and individual pupil files were examined. Telephone or email contact was made with parents and the local safeguarding team

Inspection team

Elaine Clare

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Pontville School is a non-association independent school. It provides residential provision for up to 15 boarders in two residential units within the school itself. The school provides day places and boarding for both boys and girls with social communication difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, including autistic spectrum continuum. The residential facility provides care from Monday to Friday afternoon during term time only. The school is located in a residential area on the outskirts of a busy market town and is set in its own grounds. A range of community facilities in the town are available within walking distance. The last inspection was undertaken in January 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Through highly personalised support pupils with complex needs make excellent progress. Meaningful and well-considered targets are derived from genuinely close, collaborative working between care staff, therapists and school staff. This enables resident pupils to grow and develop their social, communication and behavioural skills. Developing pupils' life skills and independence skills is integral throughout the school's curriculum, including the time they spend in the residential environment. Care staff support them to become confident young adults at a pace and level appropriate to their ability and vulnerability.

Pupils benefit from living in an inclusive community where individual need and differences are accepted without prejudice. Residential staff develop solid, meaningful relationships with them and often, their families. The excellent support provided by staff is recognised by all. For example, one parent encapsulated this opinion about staff by stating; 'They work flexibly and holistically with my son whilst at the same time catering for and meeting all his cultural and religious needs.' Another parent says; 'Both my son and myself get fantastic support from staff at the school. They understand his needs and I am happy his needs are being met.'

Staff know the pupils very well and are nurturing and responsive to their needs. Through consistent, positive interactions, pupils develop warm, trusting relationships with staff. As pupils develop their social and communication skills they learn how to deal with social situations and establish friendships. Pupils benefit from excellent behaviour management approaches with their behaviour improving as a result of systematic, rigorous analysis of incidents and strategies by the speech and language therapists, therapy team and staff.

Residential pupils say they enjoy their residential experience and it is helping them when planning for their future. For example, two spoke about developing specific interests whilst in residence and are looking to pursue those interests when they leave through potential college courses. Their view of their own future provides evidence of their personal growth, development, ambition, self-confidence and esteem. Based on their personal starting points, outcomes are outstanding.

Staff are skilled in communicating effectively with pupils which results in high levels of on-going, daily consultation where the views and wishes of pupils are known and understood. As a result, pupils contribute effectively to aspects of the residential provision such as the food they eat, activities and the appearance of the living areas. This provides them with a feeling of worth and with the experience that their views are important to others and can be used constructively to plan for change.

Leaders and managers are aspirational and with the enthusiasm and commitment of the staff team ensure pupils receive individualised support so that their unique and specific needs are met. Pupils thrive in an environment where they are valued as individuals and

where their views and opinions matter. A parent remarked 'the school has been absolutely fantastic'.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Residential pupils are very positive about the activities on offer. Good planning by the care staff team ensures that early evening activities are successfully and safely facilitated. Engagement with the local community is promoted through regular use of leisure facilities and shopping excursions. At this time pupil's access to community group's, residential field trips or holidays could be broadened which could enhance their social and communication skills with other children outside of the school setting. On-site, residential pupils have access to a wide range of games, clubs, well maintained grounds and sports facilities. This provides them with new opportunities and experiences.

Highly individualised care plans demonstrate that staff know pupils extremely well. Support strategies are specific to the needs of each pupil and include particular therapy interventions for staff to use to promote development and provide a constructive experience. Staff are skilled in implementing these support strategies within a structured environment. Adopting a positive and enthusiastic approach, staff offer a nurturing environment where pupils can develop their individuality, benefit from opportunities to maximise their potential and improve their self-esteem.

Residential pupils live and thrive in a safe, supportive and nurturing environment. High quality individualised planning documents and risk assessments marry together to identify need as well as determining strategies to meet those needs. They are monitored, reviewed, evaluated and updated regularly to keep them current. Key workers support pupils to evaluate their own plans, which ensures pupils views and wishes continue to be incorporated in them.

Interaction with pupils is calm and focused allowing them to respond positively to the support staff offer and build trusting relationships. Enabling pupils to make their views, opinions and needs known is a clear priority for staff. Speech and language therapy is embedded into the whole day, supporting pupils with communication difficulties. Care staff receive training to support pupils' communication needs. Individual support plans include information on assisting pupils with their social and communication skills. This integrated approach to therapy allows pupils to benefit from the consistent application of communication methods best suited to their individual needs.

Residential house group meetings take place regularly. They provide a forum for residential pupils to raise issues and talk together. Records show that residential pupils raise a variety of matters ranging from menus, wanting more outdoor activities, and giving feedback on staff. Records consistently demonstrate all matters have been actioned by staff and residential pupils spoke about how satisfied they were with the responses they provided. Residential pupils' views are also sought in a variety of other ways. This demonstrates to residential pupils that their thoughts and opinions are valued.

Mealtimes are orderly, social occasions where residential pupils sit together with staff and talk about their day. Catering arrangements are good. Food is plentiful and individual diets are catered for. Residential pupils say they like the food and put forward their own meal ideas. They take turns to help with clearing up after a meal time, which helps them learn basic household skills.

Individual health and well-being profiles highlight all medical and health needs. Their emotional needs have a high priority. Valuable therapeutic work by the therapy teams help reduce pupils' anxiety levels. Liaison with external health professionals, such as the child and adolescent mental health service, ensures pupils receive the specialist support they require. Systems for the administration of medication are robust. Staff are well-trained to manage medication safely and managers and staff regularly audit the process to monitor safe practice.

Accommodation for pupils is comfortable and tailored to meet their individual needs. This enables them to relax and reduces their level of anxiety. Major plans are in place to fully refurbish one of the residential buildings so it meets the same standard as the other residential block.

Parents report extremely positively on the school and the residential provision. One commented that 'staff are very knowledgeable and understanding' and another that staff 'understand his individual needs'.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Residential pupils confirm they feel safe within both their placement and residential environment. This view is fully supported in the communication undertaken or viewed during the inspection from parents and other professionals. Behaviour management in the residential units is well managed by creating a warm, calm and relaxing atmosphere where needs are addressed and met. As a result, serious behaviour management incidents occurring in the residential provision are extremely rare.

Effective safeguarding measures protect pupils. All staff are acutely aware of pupil's vulnerability and staff responsibility for ensuring safety. Pupils are happy and relaxed in the residential environment. Parents report they have no concerns about their child's safety.

Staff are well-trained and confident in their safeguarding role, with the necessary understanding of current issues that can pose risks to pupils such as child sexual exploitation, e-safety and radicalisation. The designated safeguarding officer considers all concerns referred by staff. Appropriate action is taken including consultation with, and referral to, Local Authority Designated officer (LADO). Since the last inspection, there has been an allegation against a member of staff who works in the school. The LADO was not fully informed of all the circumstances around the allegation. The management of such an allegation relies on the decision made by an individual pastoral manager. This does not allow the wider senior management team to have a clear oversight and outcomes of the concerns raised and decisions to take no further action. This practice could potentially place pupils at risk. Ofsted was not notified of this serious event. This does not support Ofsted in carrying out its duty to monitor safeguarding

arrangements within the school.

Managers take a robust multi-disciplinary approach to behaviour management. The manager and therapist's train staff to develop their understanding of the behaviour of pupils and the strategies for managing it. She closely monitors incidents of inappropriate behaviour in terms of its cause and the effectiveness of support strategies. Therapists observe pupils in the residential setting to consider the impact of environmental factors and suggest improvements to assist pupils in managing their emotions. The assistant psychologists, interim head teacher and speech and language therapists are readily available to staff for advice and guidance in relation to behaviour concerns.

Staff also receive training in a model of behaviour management which focuses on de-escalation of potentially difficult situations and the use of physical intervention as a last resort. Extremely positive relationships between staff and pupils underpin successful behaviour strategies. Through consistent implementation of behaviour management plans, pupils develop a sense of safety, protection and trust enabling them to respond to the support staff offer. In line with the integrated, multi-disciplinary approach, all staff involved with a pupil meet together to compile risk assessments. These are highly specific to the pupil and robust documents. Termly reviews of pupils' plans and risk assessments by this multi-disciplinary group ensure strategies are current and appropriate for their developing needs. Consequently, incidents involving physical intervention are not frequent in the residential provision and behaviour management is excellent.

Throughout the school there is an emphasis on educating pupils so that they can keep themselves safe. E-safety has a high priority with input from the local community police officer and on-going work by staff to ensure pupils are aware of the risks they face when using the internet. Parents and carers are included in this programme to ensure they have sufficient knowledge to monitor their child's on-line safety. A proactive approach to bullying helps pupils appreciate the effect of their behaviour on others.

There have been no incidents involving pupils leaving the residential provision without permission. Appropriate measures are in place to protect pupils who are at high risk if they leave the premises without staff support, including site security and liaison with the local police in line with local authority protocols. These measures do not restrict pupils with greater levels of independence.

Pupils participate in regular fire drills and can safely exit the residential areas when needed. Checks to maintain a safe environment are regularly undertaken. Pupils individual risk assessments, coupled with coping strategies, promote a safer environment for all. Individual strategies are updated as required, based on each pupils identified risk and progress.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The head teacher and the head of care both left the school in December 2015 after a long and distinguished service. Interim arrangements have been put in place and new

heads have been appointed to the roles commencing in April 2016. The interim head is passionately committed to providing high standards of individualised education and care for pupils and senior leaders share this dedication. The two senior residential workers view the residential provision as an integral and valuable aspect of the school. The stable and experienced care staff team support the work of education staff and the therapy team in implementing specific strategies to support residential pupils. Pupils benefit enormously from this truly multi-disciplinary approach to their education and care.

Training and development of staff has a high priority to ensure all staff understand autism and have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively support pupils and promote positive outcomes. The appraisal and supervision process to manage staff performance ensures they understand their role, have clear objectives and training to support pupil progress and achievement.

Monitoring of the residential provision is a continuous process on all levels to drive improvement and ensure pupils benefit from high standards of care and opportunities to develop. Incidents occurring in the residential provision are closely scrutinised by the management team to evaluate the effectiveness of support strategies and implement changes to programmes of individual support. Detailed and thorough reports by an independent visitor identify action points to improve the quality of provision. The reports have not commented that residential staff have had the opportunity to meet with the governors to talk about their experiences about the residential provision. Areas on how the school can improve further, identified at the previous inspection have been addressed.

Working with parents and carers is a particular strength of the school. Staff work collaboratively with families, know them well and keep them informed of the pupil's targets and progress so that pupils benefit from a consistent approach. Working with the belief that children and young people with specific learning needs can be further helped by developing a broader understanding in the wider community, the school provides workshops for external professionals on specific, relevant topics and organises training for teachers from other schools and community group leaders. Leaders and managers are aspirational and proactive in disseminating excellent practice to benefit children and young people with specific learning needs.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	133540
Social care unique reference number	SC061727
DfE registration number	888/6050

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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	6
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	5 to19
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Henderson
Date of previous boarding inspection	20/01/2015
Telephone number	01695 578734
Email address	info@witherslackgroup.co.uk

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