

Linden Bridge School

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

Inspection dates 26 January to 28 January 2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Good	2
How well children and young people are protected	Outstanding	1
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- The highly competent, skilled and effective staff team have high aspirations for children and young people and the commitment, enthusiasm and drive that encourages and supports them to achieve.
- Parents are effusive in their descriptions of the difference boarding has made to the lives of the children and young people and their families. One said, 'It's been wonderful for our child and us as a family: Fabulous school.'
- Staff are exceptionally nurturing of, and consistent with, children and young people. This provides them with a calm and relaxed environment in which they feel sufficiently safe and secure to begin to try new things and develop self-care and independence skills. Parents say this gives them hope for the future.
- Children and young people benefit hugely from the variety of activities that they not only enjoy immensely but which enable them to learn and develop vital social and other skills.
- The senior management team place a high value on the role of the residential provision in improving outcomes for children and young people. Staff are encouraged and supported to develop their skills to provide a continually improving and evolving service to children and young people.

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?

- Formalise the links between the residential team and the family support and the speech and language therapy teams.
- Ensure that written care plans provide information for staff on the cultural background of, and how to provide support and direction to, children and young people.
- Further develop risk assessments so as to provide precise guidance for staff on support requirements for children and young people with epilepsy when bathing.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted carried out this inspection with three hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice over two evenings; informal discussions with young people during shared meals and during boarding time; meetings and discussions with the headteacher, the head of care, residential staff, the site manager, the catering manager, the family support team, and staff responsible for recruitment records; contact with the local statutory safeguarding authority and the chair of governors; a tour of the accommodation; and scrutiny of the wide ranging documentation about boarding. The views of parents and carers were sought during the inspection, as well as their contributions on Parent View. There were no pupil or staff responses to Ofsted's point in time surveys.

Inspection team

Maire Atherton

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Linden Bridge School is a local authority maintained special school. It provides day and residential provision for children and young people between four and 18 years of age who have a diagnosis on the autistic spectrum. It is in a residential area in Surrey.

Boarding is provided for students aged 10 to 16 years in flats on the first floor of an annex to the main school building. This may accommodate a maximum of 16 children and young people on a Monday and Tuesday or Wednesday and Thursday. Sixth form students are accommodated in a purpose-built further education department building, with a maximum of six, using a model of block boarding of three weeks at a time. There were 20 children and young people boarding at the time of this visit. The last social care inspection of the school was in March 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Children and young people make significant progress as a consequence of their residential experience. They say that they really enjoy boarding, this is reflected in their presentation as many engage in singing and humming as they go about their business, as do the staff. The suggestions box indicates that some staff voices are preferred to others! Parents are unanimous in their praise of the development of self-care and independence skills achieved by their children. Comments include, 'It's been really positive on all levels, brought X on a lot; developed communication, more tolerant of others and food'; 'It has helped a lot with self-help skills' and 'Boarding is making a huge difference in the level of maturity.'

Staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of the wide range of needs presented by the children and young people and how these can be met in boarding. They tailor the care they provide according to children and young people's individual needs and abilities. Staff's level of engagement with children and young people is exceptional and enables them to achieve very well. Progress is monitored and systems are under review to capture the small steps towards the bigger targets.

Children and young people are kept safe and are learning how to keep themselves safe. There is always someone immediately available to children and young people, to share good things or concerns. Staff communicate very effectively with children and young people so that they have the information they need to understand decisions, even those they disagree with.

There is excellent evidence of warm bonds established between children and young people and staff and amongst themselves. Older students are seen as role models by the younger ones and take this responsibility seriously. Their behaviour is of a very high standard and children and young people treat each other and staff with respect. One parent observes 'X is much calmer, she'll come in and listen to music in the bedroom, happy in her own space, which didn't happen before. This has made a big difference to the whole family'. Children and young people seek the company of staff for fun and reassurance. Laughter is a common sound, reflecting the high levels of enjoyment.

Children and young people are the focus of all that staff do. They very carefully plan shifts with a strong balance of structured activities and free time. This structure maximises opportunities for children and young people to build self-confidence and enables them to tackle new challenges. A parent said of their child 'X has increased the range of things he is willing to engage with.' Another said 'It has helped X in managing and coping with anxiety.' Young people have a voice in what they do and can opt to join particular groups. This is achieved in the main because staff have an in-depth knowledge of the children and young people and can anticipate the choices they are likely to make. Staff are very flexible and accommodating of these choices where possible. Children and young people participate in the wide range of activities offered, Lego club is a favourite and, as with many of the activities on offer, promotes the development of a number of skills. The ability to make and sustain friendships is the most important to children and young people and their families. One said, 'It's the social side, feeling that X has friends; being able to share activities has made a huge difference, they learn from one another.'

Young people's needs are very well understood by a staff team who are effectively deployed providing opportunities for one-to-one, in addition to very well structured group activities. Staff have a very good awareness of the importance of transitions and manage these successfully. One parent described the introduction to boarding as 'excellent'. Children and young people new to boarding are supported at a pace and style suited to their individual needs and wishes, and those of their family.

The leadership team have established a very strong advocacy system in the boarding provision. It is run by a national charity and is known to young people and their families. A consistent visitor facilitates regular boarders' council meetings and provides small group workshops and opportunities for discussion with individuals. The visitor also participated in an 'at home' when children and young people invited their parents to an evening in boarding. A successful and enjoyable event said young people, staff and parents who attended.

Residential and teaching staff update each other daily on significant events for children and young people. The residential team are adopting and adapting targets set by education staff, using a new model for the school, for children and young people to work on in boarding. The senior management team are working on improved use of the electronic recording system by all staff to demonstrate the effective communication. Staff positively encourage and support education, with structured reading time where children and young people read to each other choosing books in the residential library that link to their school levels. Links between the residential team and the family support and speech and language teams are not currently formalised. The speech and language team are not directly employed by the school. Their programme does not allow time for sharing of communication strategies with residential staff. The senior management team has recognised that closer working between the departments would benefit young people.

Staff very effectively model and promote privacy and dignity. Staff are consistently polite, friendly and warm to all those they interact with. This creates a calm, welcoming atmosphere. Children and young people are caring of, and speak kindly to, each other and this is recognised and praised by staff. Staff skilfully promote inclusion and enable children and young people to see difference as something to be celebrated. Children and young people are developing self-awareness and a sense of identity.

Staff carefully consider how to use the accommodation in the light of the needs of each individual and the group. There are some shared bedrooms across the boarding provision and sharing is subject to rigorous risk assessment. This may mean that boarding is not used to capacity at all times. The accommodation is not purpose built, with small communal spaces and narrow corridors. Staff are creative in its use with the current group of young people and make good use of education rooms where appropriate, for example, the home economics room for cooking. The programme of refurbishment is ongoing. Children and young people are happy, comfortable and confident in boarding. They are sure that their belongings are safe.

Children and young people benefit from an excellent range of activities, both on and off site. Examples include bowling, riding for the disabled, a trampoline park and the cinema. Year 11 students' engagement in a skills for life award scheme includes volunteering in the local community. This is proving a really successful venture that benefits both the young people and those they are involved with. Staff also support the use of local facilities, such as the library. On-site activities that children and young people enjoy include swimming, cooking, arts and crafts and games, both in the hall and at the table.

Children and young people know what a healthy lifestyle looks like. They benefit from balanced

diets and exercise, which most enter into enthusiastically. Staff are strong ambassadors in the promotion of health. They also provide support for children, young people and their families to access specialist services where required, for example mental health provision and the management of sexually inappropriate behaviour. Staff adhere to the robust policies and procedures that underpin the administration of medication systems and ensure that children and young people receive the right medication at the right time. Guidance for staff on the management of young people with epilepsy while bathing is insufficiently precise.

The dedicated catering team are aware of, and responsive to, the dietary needs, likes and dislikes of children and young people. The head of care is developing a system for children and young people to actively contribute to menu planning. Children and young people enjoy mealtimes as social occasions. There is lots of interaction, punctuated with laughter, and excellent table manners demonstrated by all.

Staff compile very detailed descriptions of what children and young people can do and what they need prompting or support with, based on information provided by parents. The very good practice by staff in giving direction and support is not reflected in the written plans, neither is there direct information about the cultural background of children and young people.

Staff actively observe and seek the views and feelings of children and young people throughout their time in boarding. They influence activities and staff are open and responsive to any requests made, either verbally or using other forms of communication.

Children and young people board for two nights in the main house or four nights in further education. Staff facilitate contact where necessary and children and young people have easy access to a phone, some have their own mobiles. One parent expressed her pleasure when her child took the initiative in contacting home just to tell her what was happening. Parents are very complimentary about the level of contact with staff and particularly appreciate the home/boarding diary, which is well used. One parent said, 'It enables us to keep up to date and provides a basis for conversation.'

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Children and young people are and feel safe in boarding. The established, experienced and very competent staff team convey a strong sense of security that children and young people respond well to. Staff encourage children and young people to express themselves appropriately, whatever they are feeling, at all times. Staff are highly attuned to and aware of the individual needs and presentation of children and young people. This enables staff to interpret behaviour swiftly and act in response to the satisfaction of children and young people. This mitigates against the need for formal complaints. Staff have an excellent knowledge and awareness of child protection indicators and know the action to take should they have concerns.

The designated safeguarding leads in the senior management team have current knowledge and training in safeguarding. They respond to any identified concerns promptly, including allegations against staff, liaising effectively with partner agencies to secure the welfare of young people. Senior leaders attend weekly meetings to monitor all safeguarding concerns to ensure that intervention is timely, appropriate and sustained where necessary. Safeguarding records are comprehensive, stored securely and provide a full account of the actions taken. These records are monitored by the independent visitor. A new safeguarding policy was implemented in January 2016, with oversight by the governing body. The headteacher is partway through rolling out training to all staff.

The small, consistent staff team establish secure relationships with all children and young people. The key worker system provides children, young people and their families with a named member of staff but any may be approached, as can the named advocate. Children and young people are confident that staff listen and take what they have to say seriously.

Staff are aware of any child or young person who may be a potential flight risk due to anxiety, caused by traffic noise for example. They use highly effective strategies and actions to minimise any such risks. Older young people may have fobs to enable them to move freely around the school, others have some appropriate restriction on access. There have been no incidents of any child or young person going missing or leaving the site without permission.

Staff engage children and young people in regular discussions about how to keep themselves and others safe in accordance with their level of understanding and ability. For some this may mean prompting to close a bathroom door for privacy, for others this could be direction to a bedroom or bathroom for private time. Staff are vigilant about potential risks to children and young people. Staff are knowledgeable about and active in monitoring online safety and talk with children and young people about, for example, age-appropriate games, what to be aware of when using social media and visiting websites.

Risks to individual children and young people are very well identified as are the strategies to minimise these. These are implemented to very good effect.

Staff are trained in and knowledgeable about the behaviour management method used. They have an excellent understanding of each young person. Staff are highly adept at reading non-verbal cues and can predict triggers for individual young people. Careful planning and thoughtfulness combined with honed distraction and diversion techniques used subtly and unobtrusively, very successfully minimise any episodes of challenging behaviour by children and young people. As a result there is a decidedly peaceful and calm atmosphere in boarding. Staff are diligent in their review of all incidents and the analysis is used as a learning tool.

The application of the staff recruitment policy and procedure is robust, ensuring only suitable people are employed to work in the school. There are sound procedures to ensure that risk assessments are undertaken where necessary and strategies to reduce any potential risk are applied.

Staff are very enthusiastic about training and actively seek opportunities to expand their knowledge so as to improve experiences for children and young people. For example two staff have recently undertaken training to deliver a programme to enable children and young people on the autistic spectrum to learn about the links between their thoughts, feelings and behaviour in addition to specialist knowledge to support individual children and young people.

The boarding environment is safe and secure. The site manager implements the health and safety systems effectively, ensuring that all monitoring, maintenance and servicing takes place as required. Children and young people know what to do in the event of a fire and this has been tested through drills at different times of the day and night.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The highly experienced, committed and enthusiastic senior management team continue to provide outstanding leadership. The acting head of care for the past 18 months has very ably led and supported the staff team through the ongoing review of the residential provision in special schools in Surrey. Although this has created uncertainty for staff they have not only maintained but further developed their work with children and young people who board. She is now

instrumental in supporting the robust induction of the newly appointed head of care, alongside the headteacher.

Staff aim high with children and young people and support them to make significant achievements in their two nights per week or three week blocks in boarding. Staff provide a warm, calm nurturing atmosphere which enables children and young people to feel safe. This provides them with a secure platform on which to try out and build new skills and enhance existing strengths.

The dedication, enthusiasm and commitment of staff is exceptional. The ethos and objectives are embedded in practice as staff enable and empower the children and young people to develop confidence and independence. Staff consistently deliver an excellent boarding experience to children and young people.

The highly skilled, experienced and suitably qualified small staff team work very effectively together. There is a review of the staffing structure underway, looking at creating a deputy post instead of two senior posts. An agency staff member is being deployed to cover the induction period of the head of care. There is a part-time vacancy, this is not being filled pending the outcome of the local authority review. Staff are creative in how they manage activities and deploy themselves very effectively to ensure equality of opportunity, with on- and off-site activities. Further creativity will be necessary to maintain this level of activity when the contract for the agency worker ends in mid-February.

The senior management team are committed to continuing improvement and achieve this through consistent monitoring, evaluation and making changes as a result of this. For example the criteria and process for admission to the residential provision is under review. All policies and procedures have either recently been reviewed or are currently under review. The new head of care has hit the ground running with excellent support from the staff team. In the first few weeks of appointment he has completed an evaluation of boarding and devised an action plan for ongoing development. The experienced governing body ensures that one of their number makes regular visits to the boarding provision, including attendance at social events. Since the last inspection there has been a new independent visitor appointed. The advocate for children and young people brings another view so that monitoring is undertaken from a range of perspectives.

The staff team are in constant communication about their work. There are handovers between each shift, daily planning and weekly staff meetings. Staff benefit from and feel supported by regular formal and informal supervision. Annual appraisals are thorough, with a strong focus on the development of staff to enable them to meet the changing needs of young people. The previous acting head of care is instrumental in supporting the robust induction of the newly appointed head of care, alongside the headteacher.

The senior management team model and promote open communication. They undertake regular parental surveys on specific issues. Parents confirm that any concerns are listened to and action taken where necessary. The senior management team achieve the same level of open communication with partner agencies and other schools which forms the basis of positive relationships.

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	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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	124
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	4 to 19
Headteacher	Rachel Watt
Date of previous boarding inspection	18/03/2015
Telephone number	020 8330 3009
Email address	info@linden-bridge.surrey.sch.uk

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/ofsted." If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

if you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.co.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016

