

# Radlett Lodge Schools

Radlett Lodge School, Harper Lane, Radlett, Hertfordshire WD7 9HW

<b>Inspection dates</b>	11/10/2016 to 13/10/2016	
<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
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 residential provision is inextricably linked with the school, which means that they work together seamlessly.
- The residential setting makes a significant contribution towards improving the day-to-day quality of every child's experience. The children flourish.
- Safeguarding is effective and robust, and the commitment to keeping children safe permeates the school and the residential provision.
- Multi-disciplinary working results in outstanding outcomes for each child, for example, in communication and behavioural progress.
- Children are encouraged each day to develop their potential. They benefit from access to a range of fun and appropriately stimulating activities in the evening and throughout the weekend.
- The senior leadership team is knowledgeable and respected by parents and staff. It works cohesively and inclusively to ensure positive outcomes for children.
- Parents speak in outstanding terms about the work of the staff and are confident that they are valued as partners in their children's care.
- The system for the interviews of prospective residential staff would benefit from the input of the children.
- Every agency member of staff should benefit from the good system used for practice-based supervision.
- The refurbishment plan for the bathrooms should continue.

### **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?**

- Consider improving the system for the interviews of the residential staff by including input from the children.
- Ensure consistent application of the supervision system for every agency member of staff.
- Ensure that the refurbishment plan for the bathrooms continues.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection of The Lodge took place within three hours of announcement. The inspection methodology included time with and alongside residential pupils, the evaluation of Parent View and online surveys, study of residential care routines and practice, analysis of policies and records and conversation with a number of parents by telephone. Discussions took place with a range of staff responsible for managing, coordinating and delivering residential care, such as residential staff, teaching staff, support staff, the head of care, the headteacher and the trustee with responsibility for this provision. Discussion also took place with the local authority designated officer and the independent listener.

## Inspection team

Rosie Davie

Lead social care inspector

# **Full report**

## **Information about this school**

Radlett Lodge is a National Autistic Society school and 53 pupils, aged between four and 19 years of age, are on roll. Next to the school is a residential building called The Lodge. Up to 12 pupils live in The Lodge on either a weekly or termly basis. There are currently 11 pupils resident. All children attending the school have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. The staff group members are contracted to work in both the school and The Lodge. The residential provision was last inspected on 23 February 2016.

## Inspection judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding**

All children thrive at the school. Capturing the key message from all parents spoken to, one parent said: 'My son's progress has been significant.' This demonstrates that improvement is tangible.

The children enrolled at the school are diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder. Like every child, they communicate feelings through behaviour. Each child influences their environment and approaches communication uniquely through speech, sound, movement, touch, pictures, iPads or writing. All of the children require degrees of assistance and social support from other people throughout their lives. For each child, the staff work together tirelessly to identify preferred and effective routes to improve and evolve communication. One parent said: 'The residential service and school [have] given my child and the rest of our family a life.'

The average school attendance for those who are resident is currently over 96%. The vast majority improve in their ability to participate in learning, reading and capacity to take on new concepts and information. The result is that the aptitude of all children for demonstrating that they understand and benefit from their environment improves significantly. One parent said: 'My son's aggressive outbursts have reduced significantly.'

A recent development in the residential setting is the opportunity for some of the older children to take part in additional vocational qualifications. This helps them to develop their personal and social potential and results in an improvement in their ability to practise skills in independence, for example, in making informed choices in areas such as budgeting, meal planning and meal preparation.

Leaders and managers apply a mindful and sensitive approach to the admission and retention process, to ensure that the individual's needs remain central to care planning. One parent said: 'They have been careful not to rush my son's re-admission and are building up to overnights. They are supportive, understanding, and the biggest thing is that they listen to me.'

Residential and learning support staff work hand in glove with teaching staff. In partnership, they competently and confidently use a range of individualised, targeted and reviewed strategies to reach and engage with each child. One parent said: 'The staff have been patient without limit.' Enriched by the skillsets from the psychology, occupational therapy and speech and language departments, the approach to care has a significantly positive impact on helping each child to blossom. The children receive considerable support to navigate day-to-day transitions and to understand the routines of the residential provision. One member of staff said: 'No one individual can make a significant difference, but by working together we can achieve a great deal for each child.'

The approach to behaviour and conflict management is consistently applied by school and the residential home. Staff use a low-arousal approach to reduce the likelihood of anxiety, stress and frustration. The result is behavioural change. One parent said: 'My son is calmer and more able to cope.'

A structured timetable, symbolised for those who respond best to visual prompts, allows

children to know what staff have planned in advance to happen next. The result is that the children respond, participate and take an active part in shaping their experiences because they can choose to opt in or out of what is going on. One parent said: 'He was a very different child before he came.'

The children enjoy a wide range of activities, such as arts and crafts, visits to local community facilities and sensory play time. Staff routinely consult the children about how they would like to spend their time, while encouraging them to take part in new activities, which support the school curriculum. These approaches, combined, help children to be active, to achieve and to take pride in their development.

Staff develop warm and meaningful relationships with the children. Many staff said that they 'love' their jobs. They work creatively with the children to help them to have their say about how the residential service is run. Some children who use the residential service sit on the school council, which helps to provide an additional formal route for matters specifically affecting the residential provision.

The managers and leaders overseeing service delivery are visible and have a combined commitment to delivering effective services. The senior leaders know each child by name, and their respective preferences for communication and their behavioural triggers. Seamless and pragmatic working arrangements between school and the residential service enable managers to take efficient action when others identify things done differently. This results in further improvement for the child. One parent said: 'They deliver on everything.' This demonstrates that the managers and leaders are responsive and achieve a culture of partnership working.

Thoughtful and well-written policies and procedures set the scene for effective practice. Systems are scrutinised for improvement. One external visitor said: 'Not only do the managers and leaders monitor, but they review and evaluate continuously.' The leaders demonstrate that the safety of all children is paramount. Staff at all levels are fully aware of their responsibilities to report any cause for concern, which means that any identified issue or potential issue is acted upon and shared quickly with relevant stakeholders. This, combined with frequent communication with children and their parents, demonstrates that safeguarding is paramount.

As a result of the seamless relationship with school, the residential provision routinely exceeds the national minimum standards.

### **The quality of care and support**

**Good**

This year, the residential provision celebrated 30 years of delivering care and support. In the summer, children, parents, staff and teachers proudly shared an 'Alice in Wonderland' themed garden party.

Located adjacent to the school premises, the residential accommodation has its own distinctive homely building. The communal rooms offer ample opportunity for the children and staff to sit together, for example, to share sensory story time. There is immediate and easy access to rooms and resources throughout the school site, in the evening and at the weekends. This means that the combination of space offers good opportunities for all. For example, the children can have undisturbed time in the sensory room, the library or the soft play area, and those children who welcome peer interaction

can meet together in the living rooms. The environment helps children to exercise choice about where to relax or play.

The school gym/hall acts as a hub in the evening and becomes one venue for the children to have some fun, for example, practising soft golf or perfecting trampoline skills. The promotion of physical activity encourages a healthy lifestyle and positive psychological well-being. Students from a local school come weekly to volunteer, which helps to promote social inclusion.

Gardens, well-equipped play areas and outdoor gym equipment offer those children who need physical space a safe environment for self-expression. This means that the residential staff have, at their fingertips, a range of resources to support the children. At the weekend and in the evenings, the staff can and do build on the individualised work undertaken by partner colleagues during the school day. This offers continuity and consistency for the children and helps them to build and improve on, in a safe environment, their unique sensory processing skills.

Senior leaders have acted upon the recommendation from the last inspection, and dates have been set for the refurbishment of two bathrooms. To maintain the momentum of this planned progress, this inspection recommends that the activity to upgrade washing facilities continues to be rolled out across all areas of the residential accommodation.

There is ample space for each child to store belongings securely. The children have individual bedrooms, which help to maintain privacy. Staff encourage the children and their parents to be involved in personalising and, where appropriate, making rooms more homely with toys and personal effects. One parent said: 'I like that the staff always remind us that we can bring things in for our son's room.' However, staff and parents alike recognise that a low arousal environment helps some children to manage anxiety. In these circumstances, careful consideration is given to ensuring that a good balance is struck to emphasise personalised, rather than institutionalised, personal space.

Staggered arrangements ensure that each child has the best opportunity to enjoy mealtimes. The staff skilfully and thoughtfully structure the environment during these times, to ensure that children's anxieties are reduced. The cook, who is an integral part of the residential team, ensures that she has current knowledge of each child's likes, dislikes, allergies, dietary and religious requirements. She provides nutritious and well-balanced meals and is keen to, and does, ensure that any parental preferences are adhered to.

The residential staff work hand in glove with the support, teaching, occupational therapy, psychology, speech and language staff to make certain that each child receives uniquely tailored care and support. Following admission of a child, they work as a multi-disciplinary team to review and evaluate information gathered about each individual's behaviour patterns and strategies for interacting with the world around them, to produce bespoke care plans. This helps the residential staff to competently anticipate and thereby meet the needs of each individual child. For example, to manage stress, some children benefit from instant access to chew toys or ear defenders. The result is that children learn that they can soothe their anxieties.

Children receive help to be in or to maintain contact with their parents or significant others by phone or by visits to the school. One parent said: 'My son knows that if he is ever unhappy he can ring me at any time.' Staff reliably contact parents to provide weekly updates and, as a result, parents consistently say that they know that they can

visit at any time of day or night. All say that communication is of a high standard.

The arrangements for the storage and administration of medication are robust and effective. Managers routinely oversee and check the arrangements and systems in place.

## How well children and young people are protected

## Outstanding

Children present as relaxed and comfortable in the environment. The children who spoke to the inspector said that they like the staff and the residential home very much. There are no recorded incidents of bullying.

Staff proficiently use picture exchange to encourage children who are non-verbal to make known their views about their care and the residential provision. One parent, echoing the views of all, said: 'Yes, I feel confident that my son is safe.' Another parent said: 'When it is time to go to school for overnights, he is always ready to go and, as a parent, that is telling me that my son is happy and safe there.'

Key members of the senior leadership team work shoulder to shoulder to ensure that the principles from 'Keeping children safe in education' are embedded across the school and residential provision. Designated safeguarding staff ensure that key messages from research and practice are shared with staff at all levels. This ensures that the whole-school approach to safeguarding remains current and responsive to relevant issues in social care.

Using formal processes and supervision, managers efficiently ensure that they look into and address any matters arising from staff's practice or conduct. The result is a culture that places the safety and well-being of children at the heart of practice. The officer responsible for safeguarding in the resident authority said: 'We are very impressed with their robust response to any issues.'

An effective night-time procedure delivered and overseen by a dedicated team with long-standing waking night staff ensures that for each child there is a system in place to deliver the high-quality personal care available during the day.

The system for ensuring that written risk assessments remain current and dynamic is impressive. The team approach to assessing and reviewing risk, on all levels, means that staff act on their responsibilities, and managers leave no stone unturned. One placing social worker said: 'I was very impressed that they had identified and taken appropriate action regarding issues that had arisen while our child was placed in another setting.' This shows that staff, managers and leaders go above and beyond to ensure that the relevant information about children is shared with all relevant stakeholders.

Staff have a clear understanding of the action to take should a child leave the grounds of the school, or become absent during an external activity. Photographs and descriptive information for each child are readily available. Children known to have gone missing from other settings do not go missing from this service. A fob and door alarm system reinforces the staff's vigilant approach to knowing where each child is at all times. The managers are mindful of the supreme court judgment of 19 March 2014 in the case of Cheshire West, relating to deprivation of liberty. They use practice guidance to take a proactive approach, to ensure that the arrangements for keeping children safe and



within the grounds of the residential and school setting are transparent, recorded, reviewed and shared with placing authorities and parents.

Working consistently with colleagues in school, the residential service has implemented a new whole-school approach to behaviour management. There have been no sanctions since the last inspection. However, achievements are widely recognised. One parent said: 'I like that they call me to share the celebration of his achievements, no matter how small.'

The frequency and intensity of physical intervention in the residential service have reduced in the last year by over 40%. Examples of practice sampled show that physical interventions are short lived because staff have made significant adjustments in their approach with the children. One member of staff said: 'If a child becomes upset and it then takes 40 minutes to help him to make a transition from one room to another, then that is what it takes. We go at their pace.' One member of the team said: 'Our colleagues in the psychology department work alongside us to help us all to identify the strategies for working with each child that are the most effective for helping that individual to manage their behaviour.'

Fire and routine health and safety checks are carried out on a routine basis. Any issues identified through checks are noted, discussed with the leaders and acted upon swiftly. Children are encouraged to increase their understanding of safety matters, such as the understanding of fire by taking part in fire drills. Additionally, each child has a personal evacuation plan, which helps staff to know what action to take to maximise the opportunity of support, should a significant emergency arise.

Staff recruitment processes are robust and vigorous. All adults on site in the evening are employees, which means that there are no adults living permanently on the site. All visitors are required to report to staff before entry onto the grounds. This ensures that only known and vetted adults are with the children.

The experience and stability in the senior leadership team provide reassurance for parents, staff and the children. The team shares a tenacious approach to ensuring dissemination of good practice, which means that it has high expectations of staff and expects them to be alert to the signs and symptoms of potential harm.

### **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

### **Outstanding**

Having been in post for a number of years, the head of care provides stability and continuity for the children, their parents and the many members of staff. She is appropriately qualified and is a key member of the school's senior leadership team. This means that she takes an active role in the sourcing of information contributing to the updating of policies and has an influence regarding development plans.

The head of care works proficiently with the headteacher, deputy headteachers and head of weekend care to impressive effect. She said: 'We work as a team to try and use every opportunity that we can to teach the children and build on the different skills that they have.' The result is outstanding outcomes for children who achieve significant behavioural change and are encouraged to reach their potential. One parent said: 'When

my son left he was a different child.'

Many parents' feedback for this inspection reflected that managers and leaders are regularly in contact and that communication is of a high standard. One parent said: 'The headteacher is absolutely amazing.'

Across the school year, senior leaders seek written feedback at regular intervals from the children, their parents and other stakeholders. This enables the management team to define its plans towards addressing any issues that may arise. Additionally, the headteacher and head of care make contact with parents throughout the year to address any potential concerns. The result is that there have been no formal complaints since the last inspection.

The senior leaders take the arrangements for each child's care very seriously and see it as their responsibility to be proactive and to be discussing the detail of care plans with parents, for example, in relation to diet, health or cultural requirements. The result is that parental requests are embedded into practice. This respectful and thoughtful approach has a significantly positive and reassuring impact. One parent said: 'As a parent, it was a hard decision to allow my child to board. I travelled the country looking for the right place for him.'

Internal and external monitoring provides an additional layer of scrutiny. For example, visits from the appointed visitor help staff to think about their practice and offer appropriate challenge. This helps to improve practice and avoids complacency. The headteacher said: 'I think that it's right that we continue to question our own practice.'

The residential setting works efficiently with representatives from partner agencies. One representative from a local authority said: 'Our child has made significant progress. He is very happy and knows his routine. Communication is robust, and the managers and leaders always come back swiftly to answer any questions that we may have.'

The residential staff are a large team. A recent reorganisation of the residential rota brings additional continuity for the children throughout the weekends. This change has meant the recruitment of a number of new staff, however, and established and long-standing staff have worked hard to minimise the impact of the change. Recruitment procedures and processes are very robust. One member of the senior leadership team said: 'At interview, if individuals cannot demonstrate a commitment to safeguarding, we will not appoint.' To strengthen the excellent practice already happening in participation and inclusion, this inspection recommends that the views of children are represented more clearly in the interview screening process.

The senior leaders have an open-door policy. As a result, staff feel comfortable and confident about engaging with them. The induction process is clear and robust and has been designed by managers to ensure that new staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities towards safeguarding the children in their care.

The permanent and agency residential staff receive an annual appraisal and supervision. The system for structured staff is robust and strengthened by the recent introduction of reflective supervision. However, to further improve practice, the arrangements to ensure that long-standing agency staff access the same quality of formal supervision should be revised.

A thorough approach ensures that staff access good-quality training, both internally through workshops and externally from, for example, speakers. Parents are also invited

to attend practice-based workshops. One member of the leadership team said: 'Every training we do we make sure is delivered to the school and residential staff. This is to make sure that their collective knowledge is as good as it can be.' The result is staff who say that they are well prepared and equipped to do their jobs.

The statement of purpose clearly explains the ethos and purpose of the residential service. This provision is forward thinking and, as a result, it continues to exceed the national minimum standards. Encapsulating the impact of the service, one parent said: 'My only complaint would be that there are not enough provisions like this in the country.'

## 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 exceed the standard of good and result 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 their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117646
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC019505
<b>DfE registration number</b>	919/6215

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Residential special school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	11
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Male
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	Eight to19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jo Galloway
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	23/02/2016
<b>Telephone number</b>	01923 854922
<b>Email address</b>	radlett.lodge@nas.org.uk

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