

# Lonsdale School

Brittain Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 8UT

## Inspection dates

29/11/2016 to 01/12/2016

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

**Good** **2**

The quality of care and support

Good 2

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good 2

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is good because

- Children make progress during their time in the residential provision. In particular, they make progress with developing their life skills.
- All staff have completed safeguarding training. There are effective safeguarding arrangements in place, and the school governors monitor these arrangements through regular visits and scrutiny of reports.
- Governors undertake regular monitoring visits during which they spend time with the children to gather the children's wishes and feelings.
- Staff support the children to prepare for and make the transition into the residential provision.
- Staff have high aspirations for children. The staff are proactive in considering how they can continually support the children to reach their full potential.
- Staff assess risks comprehensively so that children can safely engage in a wide variety of activities.
- Children are encouraged and supported to learn how to build and maintain positive relationships with both each other and staff.
- An area identified for improvement is the need to ensure that children's files contain accurate and current information.

## **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?**

- Ensure that staff regularly review and monitor the children's files and records. This is to confirm that all outstanding work is completed and that the records contain correct information.

## Information about this inspection

The inspection took place within three hours of announcement. Inspectors visited each of the residential areas, ate meals with the children, participated in activities and observed the interactions between staff and the children. Meetings took place with children, the headteacher, head of care and residential staff. Discussions were held with parents, the chair of governors and the local authority designated officer. The inspectors gathered children's views through face-to-face contact and through observation of interactions. The responses to the online questionnaire Parent View were considered during the inspection.

## Inspection team

Michael Mulvaney

Lead social care inspector

Trish Palmer

Social care inspector

# **Full Report**

## **Information about this school**

Lonsdale School is a local authority maintained residential special school for pupils who have a range of physical and neurological impairments. The school is funded for 84 places with up to 23 residential pupils aged 11 to 18 years at any one time. The focus of the residential provision is to enhance the pupils' learning and independence.

Groups of residential pupils stay each week, between Monday to Thursday ranging from one to four nights.

The residential accommodation is on the first floor above the school and comprises a social dining area and four flats. The flats have four to six bedrooms with adjoining adapted bathrooms and shower facilities. Each flat has its own kitchenette and living area. The school moved to new purpose-built premises in January 2013 and is co-located with a secondary school in Stevenage.

The last inspection of the residential provision took place in November 2015.

## Inspection judgements

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

**Good**

Children make good academic and personal progress. They enjoy positive experiences during their stays, which enhance their lives. Children who stay in the residential provision have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The children's views and wishes are central to staff practice. Staff understand the children's individual needs. They adapt activities and use specific equipment to offer all of the children equality of opportunities. Staff take time to listen to and understand the children's wishes. They use and understand the children's different methods of communication and are able to easily ascertain what the children are communicating. Staff know and understand the children's different personalities, they use appropriate humour and have a positive rapport with them. Children clearly have strong attachments to staff and like to spend time with them. During the inspection all of the children were observed to have good relationships with the staff team members, who know and understand their individual needs, likes, interests and hobbies. The children could all name staff who they like to spend time with. Staff offer the children consistent support, and they are passionate about promoting positive outcomes for the children.

The children attend a wide range of activities in the community and within the residential provision, which gives them the opportunity to build and maintain positive friendships with peers. There is regular consultation with the children, and there is good evidence of staff listening to and acting on their wishes and feelings. For example, children asked staff to support trips into the local community to the shops, and this has become a regular activity. Other children attend theatre groups and choir, with staff support, and this helps to maintain friendship groups outside of the school environment.

Children are given the opportunity to develop their independence skills, in line with age, ability and level of understanding. Staff incorporate skill development into individual placement plans and education plans. One child said, 'I have learnt to cook here. At home I cannot get into the kitchen as it is not accessible to my wheelchair.' This shows the positive outcomes that children can identify from their time in residence.

Staff understand the difficulties for children and families regarding the transfer into residence. Parents and children are fully involved in the transition planning. Staff support the children to complete an induction using the children's preferred communication methods. Residential staff communicate well with families to complete an assessment of needs ahead of the children's first stay. These assessments form the basis of the care and initial placement plans which are used to guide the staff in the care of the children. Parents whose children attend the school welcome the support that is provided to their children. One parent said, 'I am totally happy with the provision and I think it is wonderful, it does so much for him.'

Staff teach the children the importance of respect and tolerance for each other through regular one-to-one meetings as well as group meetings. This provides the staff with the opportunity to ensure that anti-social behaviour does not develop. During the inspection, staff were observed bringing together two children who had been cross with each other.

They skilfully helped the children to learn tolerance of each other's differences and opinions. Children happily socialise throughout residence, moving from flat to flat to spend time with different friends. The staff are flexible and circulate with the children to ensure that the support that they need is on hand.

Staff understand how to safeguard children effectively. Staff receive regular training to ensure that they retain an up-to-date knowledge base. The staff know how to manage safeguarding concerns to ensure that all of the children are protected.

The management team provides consistent and stable leadership of the residential provision, which gives children a seamless transition from and to the school day.

Managers have worked hard to improve the recording of children's day-to-day activity. Further development of records is needed to ensure that there is no misfiling of information that could lead to ineffective communication.

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

**Good**

Staff clearly understand the needs of the children, they spend quality time talking to the children and they listen to and act upon the children's wishes. Staff are sensitive to individual needs and they treat the children with dignity and respect. There is a clear understanding of children's cultural and religious needs, which are included in the care plans. As a result, the children benefit from living in a nurturing, supportive environment.

Healthcare arrangements are robust. Nursing staff work closely with residential and school staff as well as the paediatric consultant and multi-agency workers. Speech and language therapists are in regular communication to support the children with eating and communications planning. This ensures that staff have the most up-to-date information to enable them to work effectively with the children.

Some family members visit the children during their stay in residence. A grandfather visited to read to his grandson, and another picks up his grandchild for dance clubs. Both talk in glowing terms about the positive support offered by the staff. These examples typify the partnership work that the school encourages with families to maintain contact and involve them in the children's lives during their time in residence.

The flats are decorated to a high standard with input from the children, who have also been encouraged to personalise their bedroom with posters, pictures and bedding. The children proudly show them off. A picture with the name of each child is displayed outside the bedroom. Each room is purpose built with access to a highly equipped bathroom giving children the choice of shower or bath and other equipment which gives them as much independence as possible. Children have been and are continually involved in choosing pictures and furnishings for the different flats.

Children enjoy a variety of nutritious meals in the communal dining area. This is a social hub, where there is music, chat and fun. Staff work to carefully devised care plans, which include helping and encouraging those children who need support with eating. The kitchen staff know the children's dietary needs. They are alert to and regularly check

ingredients to reduce the risk for children who have food allergies.

Members of the multi-disciplinary staff team at the school work closely and co-operatively to ensure that children receive high-quality care and support. The children are looked after by a dedicated and stable staff team that knows and understands their needs well. The staff have relevant training to support them in working with children with complex needs. The care is supported by policies and procedures that have been updated and reviewed since the last inspection.

Staff are enthusiastic and want the children to make progress in all aspects of their lives. The staff make the stay for children a fun and educational time with new learning opportunities. Children who are preparing to leave are well supported.

### **How well children and young people are protected**

**Good**

There have been no safeguarding referrals made since the previous inspection. All staff have completed appropriate safeguarding training and they know and understand the whistleblowing procedures. Managers and staff are aware that child protection and/or safeguarding concerns must be immediately shared with the appropriate professionals, in accordance with local procedures. Staff know how to follow up the outcome of the referral quickly to ensure that appropriate action has been taken to protect the child from further harm. When staff are not satisfied with the response, from either the local authority in which the school is situated or the placing authority, they escalate their concerns. The staff have effective links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

Children say that they feel safe and that they know how to complain. There is regular contact with the independent visitor; the children understood this role and how to contact the visitor if needed.

The children are encouraged to contact their parents and carers regularly and privately, assisted by staff if necessary. There is a noticeboard with details of the NSPCC and ChildLine, and the independent visitor, with a photograph of them and the dates that they are due to visit.

Good-quality risk assessments help the staff to provide children with opportunities to experience activities safely. Children do not go missing from residence. The well-defined approaches ensure that children are supervised and monitored at all times. The staff are keenly alert to the risks to the children when they are in the community, and they have completed training that highlights the risks of exploitation and of radicalisation.

Staff maintain contact with each other through two-way radio transceivers. This means that they can monitor the children who may visit other flats or attend groups and clubs within the school. The staff do not tolerate anti-social behaviour, and children will report to staff if they have any concerns. There are regular visits from governors, who observe the practice in residence to ensure that safeguarding processes are in place and are followed.

The health and safety checks are carried out by an external facilities team and monitored by the school. The children have personal emergency evacuation plans, and

the lift is designed so that it can be used in the event of a fire. These arrangements protect children's physical safety.

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

**Good**

The suitably qualified and experienced head of care started in her role in January 2015. She holds a national vocational qualification level 4 in health and social care for young people.

Staff receive regular supervision and they comment positively on the quality of this. The supervision meetings focus on the children's welfare primarily and on what staff can do to make each stay more enjoyable. Appraisals support the ongoing development of staff. The manager has a flexible approach to the deployment of staff and ensures that there are sufficient staff to meet the children's needs.

The staff work with colleges to provide bespoke packages of support that encourage children to challenge themselves to get the best possible outcomes. As a result, the children make good progress from their starting points. Staff set targets to help the children to achieve their goals. These targets are linked to education goals and identified education needs. The assistant headteacher has analysed the impact of the residential provision and this highlights that the children make even better progress when staying in residence. Children develop their life skills as they work on their specific plans. For example, shopping for food for a shared meal is included as part of maths and the home economics curriculum.

The senior management team meets regularly to review the care provided with routine checks and monitoring of the care. The culture of the residential provision is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all of the children. Leaders and managers ensure that children make good academic and personal progress, that they are safe and achieve their goals.

The governors routinely meet to consider the residential provision. This scrutiny ensures that practice is in line with the policies and the statement of purpose. The headteacher has used the improvement partner as a critical friend and the action plans have been instrumental in driving forward improvement. The governors review these action plans to ensure that the standards are met. The school has implemented action planning meetings and steering group meetings as well as discussions held with the children to monitor the quality of care. The oversight provided by the governors strengthens the effective management of the provision.

Staff communicate well with other professionals and parents. One social worker commented, 'I am extremely pleased with the support that the staff provide to the children. The workers have a good relationship with me and this allows clear communication.' Parents also comment that regular emails and phone calls mean that important information is shared.

There have been no complaints since the last inspection. The process applied by the management in dealing with any matters of concern gives confidence that any complaints would be managed effectively within the policy guidelines.



## 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 if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117679
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC056425
<b>DfE registration number</b>	

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>	23
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	11 to 18
<b>Headteacher</b>	Annemari Ottridge
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	03/11/2015
<b>Telephone number</b>	01438 726 999
<b>Email address</b>	APestiaux@lonsdale.herts.sch.uk

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