

Linden Bridge School

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

Inspection dates	31/01/2017 to 02/02/2017	
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

- This is a residential special school that has an improvement culture which is firmly embedded. Leaders, managers and staff are innovative, methodical and relentless in their search for a more effective practice.
- The school has a strong anti-discriminatory agenda. It is a beacon for the rights of children and young people who are on the autistic spectrum. It provides them with excellent opportunities for positive experiences, progress and community integration. It enables them to gradually take increased levels of control in their own lives. It educates them for life effectively.
- The boarding provision is exceptionally well managed and highly valued within the school. The provision is firmly child-focused, deeply respectful and flexible, and care is tailored to meet the needs of children and young people. They have their voices heard and know that their views and feelings count.
- Children and young people receive excellent quality of care and support. Highly experienced and competent staff are skilled at using every opportunity to make children and young people feel valued for who they are, and helping them to develop further. As a result, children and young people make outstanding progress across different aspects of their welfare and development.

- The school has effective arrangements for ensuring that children and young people are safe and protected from harm. Robust risk management practices protect children and young people, and promote their greater autonomy and independence effectively. The feelings of trust, belonging and security underpin the children and young people's increased sense of safety. Children and young people know that the adults around them are united in their efforts to provide them with a safe, supportive and enabling environment.
- The behaviour management practice is exemplary. Children and young people have made excellent progress in developing better self-regulation and emotional resilience, resulting in safer and more constructive behaviour. Boarding staff members act as strong positive role models for 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?

- Make the decision-making process around recruitment more explicit.
- Create an overarching risk management plan regarding the security of the school's premises and grounds to minimise the risk of a child or young person leaving unnoticed.
- Improve the quality of the independent visitor's reports.

Information about this inspection

This inspection was announced at 9.30 am and started at 2.30 pm. Inspection activities included: individual discussions with four boarders and three parents; observation of boarding practice to include managing transitions and circle time, engaging boarders in group activities and breakfast time at the further education department; a meeting with a boarding staff team and individual discussions with the deputy headteacher, the head of care, two residential staff, the site manager, the business manager, the family support worker and the chair of governors; a tour of the whole school including the grounds; correspondence with the local statutory safeguarding authority; and scrutiny of the wide-ranging documentation about boarding, including a full audit of four children's individual files. Comments that 23 parents made through the Ofsted Parent View were also taken into account. There were no pupil or staff responses to Ofsted's point-in-time surveys.

Inspection team

Seka Graovac

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. Students aged 10 to 16 years are accommodated in flats on the first floor of an annex to the main school building. Older students are accommodated in a purpose-built further education department building. There were 21 children and young people boarding at the time of this visit. The last social care inspection of the school was in January 2016.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Children and young people enjoy a positive experience of boarding. They are able to relax and engage in learning about themselves and the world around them. They develop many life skills and increase their knowledge. Young people said that they 'loved staying overnight at the school'. One child told the inspector that boarding was 'like a home, but more interesting, as you do more things'. During the inspection, a deeply calm and orderly atmosphere was often interspersed with happy giggles, smiles and laughter.

Children and young people have made the residence into their own space, in which they feel safe, relaxed and contented. They have their voices heard and know that their views and feelings count. They engaged very well with the inspection and enjoyed being in a position to contribute to its judgements. Each child and young person who spoke to the inspector judged the boarding to be outstanding. All of them singled out the staff as the best thing about boarding. They described the staff members as being understanding, kind, friendly, helpful, humorous and safe.

Children and young people benefit enormously from having developed positive and trusting relationships with staff members. On some occasions, these relationships have, over time, developed into strong emotional bonds. Taking into account the children and young people's diagnosis and difficulties in forming relationships, this is an outstanding outcome. A huge number of ex-boarders follow the school online and turn up to the annual alumni events, such as the summer barbeque. The school has been an important and formative experience in their lives.

The wide range of interesting activities, which children and young people are able to share with others, are hugely appreciated. Some of the favourite activities included baking, arts and crafts, swimming, Lego club, horse-riding, bowling, car showroom, travelling by train and boats, visiting new places, meals out and going together on a holiday.

Children and young people's progress in their learning is excellent, going well beyond what might be expected. The school has helped children and young people to develop a love for learning. The great majority of young people continue with their education after they have left this school. Some young people have progressed so much that they were able to rejoin their peers at mainstream colleges.

A parent said to the inspector that their child's progress went beyond what they thought was possible for him to achieve. Another parent described how, at the beginning of their child starting to board, they simply could not believe the changes that were happening in front of their own eyes. She gave several examples of his progress and repeated: 'We just could not believe that he would ever be able to do that.' Another parent talked about their son's level of independence as a fantastic achievement.

Examples of children and young people's excellent progress include:

- A child has established a regular sleep pattern. (The parent said: 'In the past, he used to run around for hours and hours, making noises and sometimes screaming. We could not calm him down. Nobody could sleep. Now, he asks to go to bed in the evening.')
- A child eats a wider range of food. (The parent said: 'our son used to eat only cereal. Now, he has a normal diet.')
- Having recently experienced a mental locked-in syndrome and a complete inability to respond to others, a child now enjoys participating in group activities. He now needs significantly less medication to control a serious health condition.
- A highly anxious child, who used to engage in challenging behaviours several times a day, is now calm and well-behaved.
- A child who used to be a school-refuser now respects boundaries and consistently attends school.
- A child who used to find being in a group of people anxiety-provoking is now able to cope with large crowds and enjoys community events, such as switching on the Christmas lights .

The boarding provision is managed very well, with the progress of children and young people always being at its centre. Leaders and managers have a thorough knowledge of the children and young people's needs and progress. They monitor the boarding provision with utmost rigour to make sure that it remains effective at enabling children and young people to continue to thrive and reach their potential.

The boarding provision has such a calm, positive and happy atmosphere that it is easy to forget how challenging and complex children and young people's special needs are. The school has effectively embedded a strong anti-discriminatory agenda and it is a beacon for children's rights. It provides children and young people who have an autistic spectrum disorder with excellent opportunities for positive experiences, progress and community integration. The school and its boarding provision have had a strong positive impact on children and young people, and their families.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The quality of care and support consistently exceeds good. It results in children and young people having highly positive experiences and achieving excellent progress across different aspects of their welfare and development. A parent said to the inspector that they could have not wished for or even imagined a better school for their son. All parents who spoke to the inspector had full confidence that the boarding provision was outstanding.

Excellent communication, respectful relationships and clear expectations are set from the beginning of the boarding experience for each child or young person and their parents or carers. Boarders have made an introductory video to welcome a new child or young person into their fold. In the video, they ask questions that a new boarder might have and provide reassuring answers. Through their own visual and verbal language, and by

using music, they have creatively captured their experience of the residential provision; it provides a personalised and effective welcome to a new boarder. New boarders are gradually and sensitively introduced to staying overnight at the school, at a pace that is comfortable for them.

One of the outstanding characteristics of this boarding provision is the respect for the centrality of the children and young people's views, wishes and feelings in the planning, delivery and review of their care. Children and young people are involved as much as possible in shaping their care. One young person was proud to share with the inspector that she wrote her own care plan. The residential service is child focused, deeply respectful and flexible around the needs of children and young people. It enables children and young people to gradually take increased levels of control in their own lives.

Boarding staff's very close partnership with parents and teachers underpins the outstanding practice. Children and young people know that the adults around them are united in their efforts to provide them with a safe, supportive and enabling environment.

Before their child starts boarding, parents of the prospective boarders receive comprehensive information about boarding. At the same time, they are asked to provide clear information and indicate their consent to their child's involvement in various activities. Consenting to other matters, such as the arrangements for personal care, administration of medication and first aid is also covered. Excellent communication between parents and boarding staff continues throughout the child or young person's use of the boarding facilities.

The care practice is incisive and highly effective. Boarding staff know children and young people in their care exceptionally well. They provide children and young people with excellent care that fully meets their needs and promotes their identity. Each child or young person has an up-to-date individual support plan, a risk management plan and a behaviour management plan. These plans seamlessly interlink to provide a comprehensive and multi-faceted picture of what a child's or young person's needs are, and how these can most effectively be met. Staff support children and young people exceptionally well to reach their specific targets and developmental outcomes. In line with the whole school approach to providing education for life, the targets focus on communication, emotional regulation and transactional support.

Excellent catering arrangements, an exceptionally wide range of relaxing and stimulating activities, individual health care plans and robust medication procedure underpin the high quality mental and physical health promotion. Well-organised group activities promote children and young people's social skills, and the development of team spirit, very well. Activities in the local and wider community are highly effective at supporting children and young people's social integration. Volunteering opportunities help them to develop altruistic and non-discriminatory attitudes towards other children, young people and adults, and to give value to being good citizens.

In line with the whole school approach, boarding staff use every opportunity to help children and young people to develop their cognitive and functional skills. Staff use activities of daily living effectively to promote children and young people's life skills, and maximise their independence. The school's employability project has been hugely

successful at giving young people the confidence they need to succeed in the world of employment. The school's 'education for life' philosophy is effective.

The school provides a comfortable and safe residence. The physical environment has been significantly improved since the last inspection. New carpets have been laid throughout and the majority of the walls have been repainted. New toys, multiple participant video games and educational tools have been ordered. The environment is well maintained and enriched with visual cues and pictorial guidance. This helps children and young people to experience structure and know the sequence of events. Knowing what is coming next instils them with calm and confidence, and greatly helps them to comply with the instructions.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

The school has effective arrangements for ensuring that children and young people are safe and protected from harm. Safeguarding has a high profile within the school. Boarding staff have a good working knowledge of the school's clear and up-to-date policies, procedures and guidance that enshrine sound safeguarding practice. They receive regular training on a wide range of safeguarding topics. They have good safeguarding awareness and maintain high levels of vigilance. They consistently implement good safeguarding practice in their work. Through bringing together designated safeguarding leads and senior staff across boarding and academic provision on a regular basis, weekly welfare meetings contribute to a well-coordinated safeguarding practice across the whole school.

Boarding staff provide an emotionally and physically safe environment for children and young people. Children and young people told the inspector that they felt safe and relaxed when they boarded. They also felt safe when out in the community, with staff members. Staff have helped them to develop an increased awareness of the risks to their safety, and learn how they can minimise those risks. A renowned national charity has provided workshops to children and young people on online safety and safety in the community, bullying and race, religion and culture. Some young people have undertaken first-aid training.

There is a warm and nurturing atmosphere in the residence. Children and young people told the inspector that there was no bullying or discriminatory behaviours. They knew that this was a 'telling school' in which everybody has a responsibility for reporting bullying. They reported finding it easy to speak to staff members and ask for guidance and help. They said that the staff were very nice to everyone. The children and young people were keen to stress that they themselves were also very nice to each other, and looked out for each other.

There is an effective complaints procedure. Since the last inspection, one young person has raised a complaint. Records clearly demonstrate that the complaints procedure was followed to good effect. The process enables children and young people to have a voice and reinforce their rights.

Secure relationships and underlying trust between children and staff members make a strong contribution to the children's deepening sense of safety. The parents told the

inspector that they trusted boarding staff 100%.

A robust risk management practice protects children and young people, and promotes their greater autonomy and independence effectively. The individual risk assessments for each boarder are comprehensive and regularly updated. Students receive effective support to remain safe while exploring new situations and trying out new behaviours.

The behaviour management practice is exemplary. Staff understand that all behaviour is a form of communication, and are able to understand its meaning for the individual child or young person. As children and young people's means of expression and communication skills improve, their challenging behaviour reduces in frequency and intensity.

The individual behaviour plans are very detailed. The signs of escalating levels of anxiety that link with the challenging behaviour are identified on a five point scale. The plans set precise actions for staff to follow which seek to address the underlying anxiety, and help children to regain emotional and behavioural control. Staff proactively support children and young people to find an activity that promotes their inner calm, and to use it to regulate their feelings and behaviours. Since the last inspection, there has been only one incident in which staff members had to intervene physically and hold a young person, in order to ensure everybody's safety. Clear records demonstrate that this incident was appropriately managed. This young person has used talking with staff to regulate her anxiety since then, which has proved effective. She has also found appropriate strategies which calm her.

Other records on the individual files also show that the children and young people are making excellent progress at developing safer behaviours. One child has begun to recognise when he is becoming overwhelmed and has learned to take himself to a safe space, before his anxiety escalates too far. His progress in developing self-regulation and emotional resilience is an example of outstanding progress.

There have been no incidents of a child going missing from the boarding provision. However, there was an incident when a young person deliberately left the school premises, at the beginning of the school day. The school swiftly followed their protocol for missing young people. The young person was found safe and well, several hours later. The police and the education safeguarding lead for the local authority have contributed to the review of the security of the school premises, including the grounds. Enhanced security has been achieved through a temporary measure, and more work has been planned to permanently raise the height of the fence. The chair of governors is expecting a full report on the review of the arrangements for enhancing the security of the school and its grounds, together with any learning points to be presented at the next meeting. In order to minimise the risk of a child or young person leaving the school unnoticed, it is recommended that the currently fragmented information is brought together in an overarching risk management plan.

A site manager ensures that good health and safety arrangements are followed. The maintenance and servicing takes place at the required frequency. Staff support children and young people to participate in regular fire drills, and learn about fire safety.

No new boarding staff have been recruited, since the last inspection. Scrutiny of the recruitment records show that staff members are always carefully selected. However, on one occasion, a basis of the recruitment decision was not as detailed as it could have been, taking into account all the information that was available.

The school has effective links with the local authority's leads for safeguarding children. The head of care has appropriately and proactively shared information of safeguarding significance. He has contributed fully to all multi-agency investigations that have taken place.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

This is an outstanding residential special school. Leaders and managers have an extraordinarily positive impact on the lives of children and young people, and their families. They are visionary professionals who are passionate about helping children and young people to achieve their potential. They aim high for children and young people, and have the skills and resources to support them to achieve excellent results.

The residential school has an amazingly positive inspection history that is driven by a strong improvement culture. The boarding was judged consistently outstanding by Ofsted, every year, since 2007. The leaders and managers have continued to find ways to refine the practice further and help children to achieve even better outcomes.

The head of care, who has been in his post for just over one year, has been instrumental in building on the excellent quality of care planning and risk management. He has inherited a highly experienced, exceptionally skilled, very stable, qualified and committed staff team. Based on the recommendations from the previous inspection, the staff have become more articulate and incisive in describing their exceptional quality practice. They have become better at more precisely linking the impact of their support on children and young people's experiences, outcomes and progress. The excellent practice and its effectiveness are now more fully reflected through the newly introduced care plan format.

Regular and good quality staff supervision, team meetings, reviews of individual staff performance and practice, and a comprehensive training programme have all contributed to the further development of the boarding practice and the outstanding professional competence of the staff.

The school invests in the staff and facilitates a distributed management style. In the absence of the headteacher, other leaders and managers have comfortably stepped up to cover this role. All parents who expressed their views on the Ofsted Parent View strongly agreed (94%) or agreed (6%) that boarding is well organised and managed effectively.

This is an innovative and creative residential special school. The school is spearheading smart use of the information technology in social care and education management. The school has embarked on developing a bespoke online system for recording and monitoring individual children and young people's progress and outcomes. This is a very

exciting development that promises to combine effectively an intuitive, online technology with a high focus on children and their experiences, outcomes and progress.

This is a modern school that safely uses social media platforms to instantly share information and achieve close partnership with parents of the children and young people who board. The school's family support worker plays an important role in advocating for children and young people's families. This partnership builds on trust, protects children and young people, and strengthens the effectiveness of the boarding provision.

The head of care has reviewed internal channels of communication and developed more systematic links between the academic and boarding staff. This has led to a more enhanced collaboration and a more effective whole school approach to providing education and care to children and young people. The head of care has also amended the annual review format to reflect the more integrated approach to planning and supporting children and young people's progress, and monitoring their achievements and outcomes.

The head of care is a well-respected member of the senior management team. His role as the designated safeguarding lead for the whole school acknowledges his expertise in this area, and has raised the profile of safeguarding and welfare provision in the school further.

The board of governors also has a strong vision for children and young people, and what they can achieve in the right environment. The head of care's regular, half-termly monitoring reports enable the board to maintain clear oversight. An independent visitor provides external scrutiny and regular quality assurance reports. However, in order to be truly helpful to an outstanding boarding provision, these reports need to be less repetitive and more evaluative.

The board of governors has continued to support and challenge the school's leaders and managers to develop an even more exceptional service. As the local authority is finalising its full review of the residential provision, the school is well poised to continue to advocate for what is best for children and young people.

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 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	9367060

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	47
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	Four to 19
Headteacher	Rachel Watt
Date of previous boarding inspection	18/03/2015
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