

Radlett Lodge School

Radlett Lodge School, Harper Lane, Radlett, Hertfordshire WD7 9HW
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Radlett Lodge is a National Autistic Society school with 55 pupils aged between 8 and 19 on roll. A residential building is on the school site. Up to 12 children and young people live at the residential home on either a weekly, termly or flexi-boarding basis. There are currently 11 children and young people resident. All of the children and young people attending the school have a diagnosed autistic spectrum disorder. The staff group is contracted to work in both the school and the residential home. The school was last inspected in January 2017.

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 October 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **Good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **Outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **Good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 11 October 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Staff in the residential unit work hand-in-glove with their education colleagues to ensure that the children and young people make meaningful social, emotional and behavioural progress.
- Creative problem solving and a focus on finding meaningful solutions help the vast majority of children and young people to progress in their ability to learn and to communicate.
- The ethos of delivering child-centred care and education permeates through the whole service.
- Children and young people thrive and flourish. When a child or young person is not making progress for any reason in any aspect of their life, this is identified quickly and a multi-disciplinary plan of work is implemented to support that individual.
- Safeguarding practices are robust, effective and embedded throughout the school and residential provision.
- There is a seamless approach to implementing models for improving communication development and using communication aids.
- The staff work tirelessly to facilitate the best experiences for the children and young people.
- The children and young people are comfortable and at ease with the staff, who come to know the children and young people extremely well.
- The vast majority of parents have the utmost confidence in the staff and the leadership team. They see and can describe the progress that their child makes.
- The leadership team is unrelenting in its pursuit of high-quality service delivery.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Opportunities for the 38-weekly and 43-week termly boarders to go out into the community, particularly at the weekend, have reduced.
- The appearance and decor of some of the bathrooms are dated and tired.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Consider expanding and creating more opportunities for the 38-weekly and 43-week termly boarders to access the local community, particularly at weekends.
- Complete the refurbishment of the remaining bathrooms used by the children and young people in the residential provision.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The vast majority of the children and young people at this school thrive and flourish because of the quality of the individualised care and support that they receive from the dedicated staff and leadership team. The staff from the residential unit have strong working relationships with the school's multi-disciplinary team, and together they work hand-in-glove to deliver an excellent service. The quality of support from the staff at the school has a positive impact on the progress and experiences of each child and young person.

The speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and behaviour support staff come into the residential base to work with the children and young people and the residential staff after school and during weekends, which helps to maximise opportunities for the children and young people to progress in areas such as communication and behaviour. The arrangement helps to ensure that there is consistency and continuity to the assessed and personalised approaches for working with each individual. One parent said, 'My child has a solid team around him of really good people who understand him, his behaviour and how his mind works. When he comes home, people are amazed at what he can do now.' The parents see and experience the progress that their child makes because of boarding at the school.

A team of waking-night staff provide nurture, support and assistance to those children and young people who need it throughout the night. Some of the children have made significant progress with their toilet training routines because of the support that they receive. Changes such as this improve the quality of a child's life.

Breakfast and learning support assistants help and support the children and young people to get up, get dressed and ready for their morning. This support helps them to navigate daily routines positively, and means that they make a successful transition into the classroom. Because of this thoughtful and beneficial approach, all of the residential children and young people have excellent rates of school attendance.

The multi-disciplinary staff work together to bring to life the ethos of the residential provision, as described on the school's website. The staff use a range of creative and alternative communication methods to engage and make connections with the children and young people. Pictures, symbols and gesturing help to show the children and young people what is next and encourage them to interact with staff. With perseverance and encouragement from the staff, the children and young people manage change successfully. Some of the children and young people use speech. The staff dedicate an abundance of patience and time to listening and understanding. The children and young people learn to trust the adults around them and participate as fully as they can in their day because of these thoughtful interactions.

The school uses a number of different systems to capture and record outcomes. Staff record examples of a child's or young person's 'magic moments' on a daily basis. This helps the team to have a good sense of what the child or young person has enjoyed, achieved, or what has gone well for them. In partnership, the residential staff and the

school staff carefully review progress. A recently introduced model enables the staff to track changes in behavioural development. The staff across all disciplines focus on the social communication and emotional regulation of each child and young person. These bespoke approaches enable the school and residential staff to give detailed feedback to parents and other agencies. The multi-disciplinary team adjusts the strategies for engaging and communicating as the child's or young person's abilities change. The result is a child-centred approach to care and support.

The staff have good relationships with other professionals, who say that communication is helpful and clear. The staff work hard to provide regular updates and to share information with parents as quickly as possible. The vast majority of parents speak highly and with confidence of the endeavours made by the staff to ensure that they remain included and as involved as possible in their child's care. One parent said, 'We really cannot fault them [staff]. They have thought of everything.'

Parents and carers are made most welcome when they come to visit their child. Overall, the arrangements and systems for feedback about each child's and young person's progress give parents confidence. One parent said, 'I don't go home and worry about him.' When parents are dissatisfied, the senior leaders take this very seriously and dedicate time and resources to look into and provide feedback about queries raised.

The residential team leaders and residential managers are hands-on. They are quickly able to identify any changes in children's and young people's mood or behaviour. The senior leaders, managers and the staff encourage the children and young people to make known their views and wishes using a range of methods. The school council meets termly with representatives from the school's leadership team. There is representation on the school council from some of the residential children and young people. This provides an opportunity for children and young people to make suggestions and to influence the residential provision in the home.

At the weekend, because there are less children and young people, the residential arrangements are more flexible. The children and young people are encouraged to exercise more choice, and they are encouraged to participate in food planning and preparation when this is possible. The staff are encouraged to eat with the children and young people, and the managers emphasise the importance of this role modelling. This helps the children and young people to improve their social skills, and it helps to create a more homely atmosphere. Occasionally, the children go out into the community to have a meal.

The quality and strength of the school curriculum means that the children access and benefit from a range of exciting and fun activities throughout the school week, such as sailing, swimming and cultural visits. The school has an allotment that provides children with the opportunity to sell products at a local market.

The residential staff use pathway planning documents to record the areas in which the children and young people are socially competent. Examples include using cutlery to eat a meal, or choosing clothing and getting dressed. The staff pinpoint the areas to work on with each individual to enable them to develop more independence. One

member of staff said, 'To others the progress may seem small, but for these children, if we can teach them to achieve one small thing, like getting dressed, that is huge achievement for that individual.'

There is a structured and purposeful approach to the residential evenings. The team leaders thoughtfully plan ahead and organise events for the children and young people to take part in. The children and young people sometimes require a lot of encouragement to get involved in planned activities, so the staff use pictures and prompts to help them to participate. For some of the children and young people, being in a room with others to listen and watch them play is a huge achievement. The residential staff recognise that inclusion and participation comes in various forms. Activities often have a sensory component. This helps the children and young people who want to, to get fully involved in games such as bubbles, jumping on the trampoline, chase and storytelling. The children and young people who cannot or do not want to be involved in planned activities can access the gym and play equipment in the school grounds. The school has a small soft play and a sensory room that the children and young people can access at any time during evenings or weekends. This helps to keep them healthy, busy and active.

In recent months, a combination of different issues, including a lack of car drivers, has meant that the 38-weekly and 43-weekly boarders have not been out and away from the school grounds nearly as much as they had previously. During the evenings, and particularly at the weekends, there are fewer trips out into the local community. This does not provide children and young people with an expansive range of leisure and social opportunities and out-of-school fun experiences during their residential time.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

The safety of the children and young people and safeguarding practices are a priority. A new electronic system for all visitors to have their photograph taken and to sign in and out at the main reception or at the residential provision helps the children to tell at a glance if an adult is working at the school or is a guest. In feedback to the school, one parent described safeguarding practice as 'excellent'.

Bespoke highly individualised risk assessments and newly introduced care plans highlight the unique social, health, cultural, communication and behavioural characteristics of each child and young person. Parents and carers receive a copy of their child's care plan. Children and young people and their parents are invited to add information to the plans. The staff see the child or young person as a whole person and they understand the parent's wishes about their child's care. One social worker said, 'The staff have gone over and above to help and support our child.'

There are relatively few accidents; however, when they do occur, the staff inform the parents as quickly as possible and work with them to review existing strategies to make things safer at the residential provision. One parent said, 'It is those little things that are so very important that they get right.'

Any hint or suggestion of bullying is identified and addressed immediately. Records

show that incidents of bullying are few. The staff take action quickly and proactively to meet with the children and young people when the staff are concerned about the impact of an individual's behaviour on others. There have been no recorded incidents of bullying at the residential provision since before the last inspection.

Children and young people do not go missing or leave the campus without permission. A fob entry and exit system and a perimeter fence provide the necessary physical barriers to secure the children's and young people's safety in the school grounds. It is very unlikely that a child or young person could leave the campus without an adult becoming aware of this and taking action to keep them safe.

The residential staff use walkie-talkies to share information and to call for assistance when needed. They work hard to manage challenging behaviour. The staff are proactive. They provide the children and young people who have sensory processing issues, or are sensitive to noise, with ear defenders. This helps the children and young people to manage more successfully during busier periods of the day. The staff use a range of low-arousal techniques and strategies to help the children and young people to regulate their arousal levels, which help to de-escalate behaviour.

The information and data from every physical intervention is scrutinised and analysed to help the senior leaders to understand children's behavioural triggers and staff members' rationale for intervening. The staff who are involved in physical intervention are encouraged to meet with colleagues after the event to reflect on their practice. Restraints are short in duration. The number of interventions had increased for a period of time. The rise related to one particular child who has now left. The number of interventions has since reduced. Restraint techniques are used as a last resort and to protect children and young people from harm. The multi-disciplinary staff work together to identify alternative strategies to manage challenging behaviour in a positive and respectful way.

Child protection concerns are recorded in an efficient and chronological manner. The designated officer has every confidence in the school. He said, 'Every contact I have had with them [staff] has been positive in terms of allegation management.' The deputy principal for care is the designated lead for safeguarding. She oversees the well-organised and effective systems and structure for staff induction and training in relation to safeguarding and whistle-blowing. A two-week induction programme ensures that the staff know what action to take in the event of becoming concerned about any colleague's behaviours. The staff say that they feel confident that their managers and leaders will competently respond to any issues that they raise. Staff are familiar with recent practice guidance, such as Keeping Children Safe in Education. Termly training opportunities for the residential and school staff help to reiterate to staff their responsibilities to keep the children and young people safe at all times.

All of the children and young people benefit from having a team of professionally competent adults around them. These adults come to know and understand the children and young people well and notice and respond to any small behavioural changes. When changes in behaviour are noted, they are discussed with the parents and the wider staff team to help to identify possible causes and solutions. This

practice helps to keep the children and young people safe from harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The managers and leaders of the residential provision work together competently to drive improvement. They share a passion and commitment for providing child-centred care. They have belief in the children and young people and they have high expectations of every child and young person and member of the staff team.

The head of care has been in post for many years and holds a relevant level 5 qualification. She continues to work effectively alongside the residential service manager, and together they provide continuity for the children and young people and strong and supportive leadership to the residential staff. Both the head of care and the residential service manager know exactly what is happening on a day-to-day basis for the children and young people. They participate and help with shifts, including at the weekends. This helps them to monitor the quality of care provided, to model expected practice and to ensure that the standards of care remain high. The head of care meets regularly with the school principal and deputy principal for care and, as a result, the senior leadership team maintains an up-to-date understanding of each child's and young person's care and support needs.

The leaders and managers are highly motivated to establish and maintain respectful and effective working relationships with placing local authorities. As a result, there have been no complaints from social workers. There are very few complaints from parents because there is regular communication with them.

The senior leaders keep Ofsted informed of any significant incidents. The leaders and managers seek feedback from parents using questionnaires and they invite parents into school to meet with them. The leaders and managers respond quickly should parents raise a query or issue. This approach helps to reassure many parents. When parents do complain, the leaders and managers are responsive and take issues very seriously. The leaders and managers undertake investigations to help them to understand how to take action to make improvements. One parent said, 'We cannot praise what all of the managers do highly enough.'

Staff vetting and recruitment is robust and designed to ensure that only appropriate adults work with the children and young people. A large team of residential workers is required to work with the children across the week and there are some vacancies. The senior leaders and trustees are working to find solutions to staff retention. Evening and weekend shifts include a small number of agency staff. The managers aim to provide as much continuity as possible and so use the same agency staff again and again, which reduces the impact on the children and young people.

All of the staff, including agency, receive half termly supervision and yearly appraisals from their managers. Supervision focuses on solutions to improve the quality of children's and young people's experiences. Discussions relate to practice and identify ways to enhance the staff members' knowledge, skills and professional development. The school has a strong and continuous approach to learning and staff training. Many

of the residential staff have completed a relevant level 3 qualification, and those who have been in post for over three months have enrolled on the course. All of the staff complete core training, including understanding autistic spectrum disorders, safeguarding, and equality and diversity. Some of the managers deliver in-house training in areas such as the 'Prevent' duty and managing challenging behaviour. All of the staff can access a wide range of online and face-to-face training, which helps to ensure that they acquire new skills and increase their confidence in their work with the children and young people.

The independent visitor has a breadth of experience of working with children and young people who have autistic spectrum disorders. Termly visits to the residential home by the visitor and one of the trustees provide some objective oversight and feedback to managers about the quality of the residential care provided to the children and young people.

Two of the three areas identified for improvement at the last inspection have been addressed. The agency staff have access to supervision, and they receive induction and training. Their practice is overseen and monitored to ensure that they understand the ethos of the residential setting. One agency member of staff said, 'I love to come to work here with the children.' Some significant progress has been made on the refurbishment of the children's and young people's bathrooms. However, the refurbishment programme has not been completed for each of the bathrooms.

Many of the children and young people board at the residential provision for a number of years and come to see this as a home from home. The head of care reminds the staff that it is their collective responsibility to ensure that the outcomes for every child and young person are as good as they can be. Feedback from one parent captures this, when they say, 'We were reluctant for our child to board, but it was absolutely the right decision. Our only regret is that he can't stay longer. We are rather worried about the provision he will receive when it is time for him to leave.'

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

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