

Pontville Residential School

Pontville School, Black Moss Lane, Ormskirk, Lancashire L39 4TW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Pontville is a residential and day special school for boys and girls aged 5 to 19 who have social communication difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Disorders and associated challenging behaviours. The school is situated in a residential area on the outskirts of Ormskirk. Children who attend the school have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The residential provision can accommodate a maximum of 11 children. At the time of the inspection, four children were staying between two and four nights a week, Monday to Friday, during term time only. The residential provision was last inspected in December 2016.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 September 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 6 December 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Experienced staff are highly responsive to young people's individual needs. Through respectful and nurturing relationships, and consistent and sensitive care, young people learn to trust staff and develop a sense of stability, safety and protection.
- Young people are making significant progress in their behaviour, social skills, independence, self-confidence and self-esteem. Improvements in their emotional health have a positive impact on their academic progress.
- Barriers to learning are creatively addressed and successfully removed, providing the young people with a wide range of opportunities, particularly in the new 16-19 vocational centre.
- Thorough planning arrangements for young people who are due to move on from the school commence well in advance of the necessary date, which helps to successfully prepare young people for the next stage of their lives.
- Safeguarding arrangements are thoroughly effective and embedded throughout the school.
- There is outstanding partnership working with parents, who highly value the school and the staff.
- A dynamic and inspirational leadership team leads the school and continually strives for improvement.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- The independent person should be independent of the school and, therefore, should not be employed in any way within the organisation in a role that may cause conflict.
- Monitoring visits to the school by the independent person should be spent with young people in the residential units during an evening.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

This is an outstanding service because residential pupils make exceptional progress in all areas of their development as a direct result of their experiences at this school. One parent said, 'The school has turned her [child's] life around. No other school can meet his needs.' Leaders, managers and staff have a strong commitment to continued improvement, which is focused on the needs of young people. The staff help the residential pupils to manage their feelings and self-regulate the behaviours that created previous barriers to learning. This approach is extended to the pupils' home lives. Staff support the parents by providing them with advice and guidance. The whole-school approach includes highly effective partnership working with parents, an in-house clinical team and external agencies. Together with rigorous monitoring activities, this approach consistently secures exceptionally positive experiences for residential pupils. Consequently, young people blossom and thrive from their positive experiences at this school and make outstanding progress.

The rapid progress made by residential pupils is directly linked to the detailed and thorough admissions procedures. The school fully understands its own areas of expertise and offers placements based on thoughtful consideration of how well individual needs can be met. Consequently, groups of residential pupils staying together in their own living environments are well matched. Friendships are nurtured and enabled. Residential pupils learn to live alongside each other. Valuable life lessons about tolerating and, eventually, embracing each other's differences are learnt. One residential pupil commented, 'I've made good friends here.' A member of staff said, 'We have great debates in an evening, but it is plain to see how well they get on.'

Staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of the unique needs, characteristics and personalities of the residential pupils. This is further enhanced by the operation of a well-run key-working system. Residential pupils spend regular and good-quality time with their key workers. Trusting relationships develop, and this enables residential pupils to feel more secure in their surroundings. Pupils grow in confidence and self-worth. They become more at ease in a world that is sometimes confusing for them. Staff demonstrate patience, tolerance and empathy through their daily care practices. One member of staff explained, 'When the environment is difficult or scary, it is sometimes impossible for [child] to cope. It is my job to help them to develop good coping skills and not to be so worried.'

Residential pupils are empowered to make a positive contribution to their residential and school lives. This level of positive engagement enables young people to develop their self-esteem and to gain increased confidence. Consequently, residential pupils overcome barriers that have previously hindered their learning and attainment. Young people are given excellent opportunities to build social networks, including being previously involved in residential experiences and various community-based activities. These activities have recently included trips out for trampolining, meals,

including the popular 'curry club', and meditation, all of which give residential pupils a real sense of community engagement.

One parent refers fondly to the provision as 'a home from home'. Residential pupils say that they love staying overnight and get upset when it's the holiday period. This was evident at the inspection from the pupils' verbal feedback and facial expressions, including non-verbal clues and other non-verbal behaviours.

Developing residential pupils' independence skills is a priority as they move through the school towards the next stage of their lives. Staff design specific programmes to advance young people's practical daily living skills so that they can successfully look after themselves. There is also a focus on increasing young people's knowledge of how to access facilities and services that they will need as young adults. Planning for young people leaving the school begins well in advance to support their successful transition.

The welfare of the residential pupils is at the heart of practice. Staff protect young people, promote their well-being and implement individualised approaches to advance each young person's development. Strong, effective leadership and management and the commitment of the experienced staff team ensure that residential pupils' needs are met.

The school sits in extensive grounds with a smallholding of pigs, small animals and ponies. There is a new sensory garden, forest school area and large grassed areas. Mature trees and walkways provide an idyllic setting and a feeling of tranquillity. The gardens and grounds are well maintained. This enables the residential pupils to enjoy space away from others and experience the beauty of nature.

The residential accommodation is purpose-built, comfortable and extremely clean. The residential pupils feel relaxed and safe. Privacy and dignity is promoted, with all residential pupils having individual bedrooms. One young person said, 'I like my bedroom, I even have my own bathroom.' There are facilities for young people to keep their possessions safe. A previous recommendation to modernise one of the residential units so that it meets the same standards as the other residential units has now been implemented.

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

Residential pupils' safety and well-being are given high priority by care staff. Internal and external monitoring systems show that young people feel and are safe. Professionals and parents express a high level of confidence in the school's ability to keep the residential pupils safe. All members of staff are very well informed about how to keep young people safe through regular training and well-established procedures and policies. Visitors are equally well informed of the school's child protection procedures through an informative leaflet, which is given to them at school reception at the point of signing in. The residential pupils are also given access to an independent person whom they can contact directly if they have any

concerns. All these steps promote the safety and welfare of the residential pupils and ensure that young people are protected from abuse.

The independent person works as a care member of staff within another part of the organisation. While he has a good rapport with the residential pupils, the school understood that the independent person should be totally detached from the school and organisation and had begun the process to rectify this during the inspection.

When safeguarding incidents occur, clear partnership working is implemented. Every aspect of the procedure is understood, and clear discussions are made to protect the residential pupils. Timely and appropriate decisions are made about whether to consult or refer to local authority children's services. When concerns are raised about potentially unsafe adults, referrals and consultation with the designated officer for the local authority continue to be appropriate. This is an area in which the school excels. Safe working practices are embedded, because all staff understand their own and others' safeguarding responsibilities.

All staff are suitably trained in de-escalation and physical intervention techniques. This results in appropriate individually tailored guidance for staff to implement. Consequently, the actual use of physical intervention is rare, because staff intervene quickly to distract and alleviate potentially difficult situations. Despite such success, senior leaders have continued to seek to improve practice by reviewing and updating the organisation's de-escalation and physical intervention techniques. A new approach has recently been introduced and staff spoke positively about the new system.

Behaviour management and risk management practices are dynamic and highly effective. These practices minimise the risks and promote residential pupils' safer behaviours. Young people have a varied range of complex needs which require a number of different specialist approaches. These include specific health requirements, behavioural characteristics associated with young people's diagnosed disabilities, and bespoke communication needs. Care staff understand fully the residential pupils' unique conditions and behaviours.

Staff actively manage incidents of bullying and provide effective support for the perpetrator and the victim in every occurrence. Specific support helps residential pupils understand the impact of their behaviour on others. Staff continuously emphasise the importance of appropriate social interactions; this assists residential pupils to develop social skills and an understanding of the importance of respect and tolerance.

Following a recommendation made at the previous inspection, staff recruitment procedures have been tightened further. As a result, residential pupils are protected from potentially unsuitable adults.

The school's environment is safe and well managed. Staff understand that health and safety considerations are of paramount importance for ensuring young people's safety.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The school's residential success emanates from the top. The headteacher and head of care share a very clear vision for the residential facility, in which residential pupils are their top priority. The head of care is passionate, experienced and committed to ensuring that young people get the most from their residential experience. Experienced school leaders and senior managers support the head of care in her role. She, in turn, supports a committed, dedicated and stable team. New staff are carefully selected to ensure that high-quality practice is maintained. Every member of staff at this school embraces the school's ethos that places the residential pupils' welfare first and foremost. Regular appraisals and termly supervisions are recorded.

School leaders and the head of care work together in their shared aspiration to make sure that the residential service continues to evolve. The senior leadership team is committed to achieving and maintaining a high-quality residential provision that enables young people to thrive educationally, socially and physically. Care staff are qualified and receive high levels of relevant training to meet residential pupils' complex needs.

The school's leaders and managers use research to help them to improve practice. This includes research on autistic spectrum disorder and studies that support the benefits of residential care. As a result, the school keeps up to date with practice and national guidance.

Complaints procedures are clear and transparent, and parents are encouraged to use a range of methods to communicate with the school and to express their views and opinions. Furthermore, a full range of statutory and complementary policies and procedures are in place to support residential pupils' development, and these are accessible on the school's website.

Monitoring systems are effective. Continuous oversight by managers is an integral part of the drive to maintain high standards and improve opportunities for residential pupils to succeed and achieve. However, the monitoring visitor does not always have the opportunity to spend valuable time with the young people on the residential unit. This had already been identified as an area of development and that the monitoring visitor is keen to implement at his next visit and going forward.

The school has a strong and established parent partnership. The parents spoken to are exceptionally positive about, and highly commend, the school. They say that the school has been life changing. A parent said, 'Communication is excellent.' Another parent described the school as 'a life changer'. Parents say that the residential pupils' academic and social progress has been remarkable. This has had a positive effect on rebuilding family relationships.

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

Social care unique reference number: SC061727

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mrs Justine Sims

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 01695 578734

Inspector(s)

Elaine Clare, social care inspector (lead)
Sarah Oldham, social care inspector



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