

# Larwood School

Larwood School, Webb Rise, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG1 5QU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Larwood School is a special primary school situated in a residential area of Stevenage. It has boarding places for 12 children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Residential pupils are accommodated in two boarding houses that are adjoined to the school premises. Boarding nights are Monday to Thursday with residential pupils staying between one and three nights. The children who board mainly come from the Hertfordshire area, as this is the only special primary boarding school in the county.

**Inspection dates:** 9 to 11 January 2018

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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:** 28 February 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children have the opportunity to succeed both academically and socially in this provision. They make significant progress when using the residential setting.
- The senior management and the staff consistently strive to improve the residential experience for the children, based on their individual needs. Parents, carers and professionals are extremely positive about the impact that the provision has for the children.
- The leaders, managers and the staff demonstrate a strong knowledge base, which ensures a seamless approach to the high-quality care and experiences for the children.
- Safeguarding of the children underpins everything that the staff do. Training is of a high quality, and the staff have excellent knowledge of reporting and recording any concerns.
- The children understand the importance of treating everyone with dignity and respect. This runs through the ethos of the whole school.
- The staff recognise the importance of celebrating the children's achievements and, because of this, the children flourish.
- Through observations and speaking to the children, they clearly enjoy their time in residential unit, and feel safe. All the children can name members of staff that they would speak to if they were worried or upset.
- The children are given the opportunity to play and be children. This is achieved by the staff treating them in a nurturing, but not risk-averse, way.
- The staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of the individual needs of each child. They work consistently to support the children to reflect on their behaviours, and how they can work towards changing them.
- The children are clearly at the centre of practice. Staff focus on the needs and wishes of each individual child.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

The children make excellent progress socially, emotionally and academically during their time as residential pupils. They are encouraged to build and maintain positive relationships with their peers which leads to children building, and keeping, friendships outside of the residential provision, thus giving them the same opportunities as their peers. A parent commented that her child had made good friends and has stayed in touch with a child that has moved on.

The residential accommodation has a warm, nurturing feel. There is a wide variety of games, books, DVDs and computer games for the children to enjoy during their stay. The children have the opportunity to play outside using the school equipment, or to use the hall to play games, and spend time running around expelling their energy. The children clearly want, and enjoy, the staff to join in with their play. A parent commented that her child is always busy. He is given options and enjoys the choice. The children are supported to personalise their bedrooms. They can choose a feature wall and poster, and they can bring items from home. The children feel safe, and have a sense of belonging. They know that their bedroom is their private space, and no other children can use this.

The children continue to visit a local home for the elderly, which clearly benefits the children and the older people in the care home. The manager of the care home commented that the residents look forward to the children visiting. The elderly residents discuss their past, and the children tell them what they have been doing at school. The residents of the care home play card games with the children, and the staff from the care home have fed back the positive interactions between the children and elderly residents. The staff have thought about the benefits of the children spending time with grandparent figures, which helps to develop their social awareness.

During school times the children have a well-established point system. When children achieve at least 90% of their possible points, and maintain this for at least six weeks in a row, they receive a coloured shirt that is appropriate to their age. The children aspire to having a coloured shirt and are extremely proud when they achieve this. This is presented to them by the headteacher in a school assembly. The children who also achieve, or do something to be proud of, have their photo taken, which is put up in the reception area, with a write-up of what they have done. The staff value the children's individual achievements, and celebrate these with them in a way which is meaningful to the children.

Education staff give an individual handover of each child to the staff at the end of each day. The staff are clear with the children that, if they have had a bad day at school, going into the residential unit is a fresh start. Staff were observed during the inspection to help and support a child to settle quickly after a bad day at school.

The children are supported to complete their homework after their evening activity. This is completed on a one-to-one basis and is part of the well-embedded routine. The children were observed reading and completing spellings with staff. The support that the staff give the children enables them to improve their academic levels.

The children's time is well structured. A highly effective, experienced and stable staff team works in the residential setting. Staff are accomplished at recognising and understanding children's patterns of behaviours, and can defuse and deflect incidents before they happen. All of the children spoken to said that they feel happy and safe in the school and in the residential provision. They have built trusting, dependable relationships with the highly dedicated and motivated staff team. Bullying is not an identified issue. The staff are quick to recognise and respond to any potential difficulties in peer relationships, and respond proactively, thus preventing any escalation.

The staff understand the need for the children to have routines, which include life skills. Each child has an individual target which staff print and put in their rooms so that the children can see how they are progressing. The children have flourished because they have had the opportunity to develop independent and social skills. A parent commented that her child is learning so much. His life skills have significantly improved; he continues to learn, and takes these new skills when he goes home. For example, when he is at home, he makes his bed and helps get his brother's breakfast when he gets his own.

The children's individual progress is exceptional. The children learn how to regulate their own behaviours, and use techniques to calm themselves. The staff are using a five-point scale with the children. Each child has an individual programme where they are able to show the staff what level of frustration they are at, and what actions they are going to take in order to help regulate their behaviours. This might include going to their room, speaking to a certain member of staff, or phoning home. The staff report that these techniques have been very successful and the level of incidents has dramatically reduced, as the children feel safe in learning to regulate their behaviours.

Leaders and managers have developed a monitoring system which incorporates both the school and residential provision, and incorporates all aspects of a child's school life in order to ensure that the children are progressing. The staff are able to work together to identify patterns and trends, and where extra support is needed on an individual basis.

Senior managers continue to ensure that they are abreast of developments in research, and share this knowledge with the staff in order to enhance the experiences and progress of children. The school works with several other residential schools to share best practice and improve their own standards. The headteacher provides whole school training for residential and school staff in order to develop consistent practice across the disciplines and to ensure that practice is continually evolving. The staff appraise training using an anonymous online system. The headteacher then regularly evaluates the feedback to inform the comprehensive training plan, ensuring that staff are getting high-quality training which is meaningful and meets

their needs.

The staff understand that transitions for children coming into residential can be difficult. The children have at least a term in the school before moving to residential. This practice means that the staff in school and the residential unit can get to know the child and gives time for information to be gathered from the parents. During the inspection, a child was having his first overnight in residential. Another child was observed helping the child put things away in his bedroom and explaining about the routine. The child was also heard telling the new child that there are always staff to talk to, even in the middle of the night. This shows that children have empathy with each other and that the 'be kind to each other' ethos of the school is prevalent. There was good evidence seen of how the child was supported to settle by the staff.

There are regular visits from the independent person who completes a report at the end of each visit. He spends time with the children during activities in order to gain their views. All of the children spoken to could name him and said that they can talk to him. There are posters around the residential provision with his photo and contact number should the children want to get in touch with him.

The school governors complete regular monitoring checks and the children are consulted as part of this process. The children are consulted in a wide variety of ways, including conversations with staff, governors and the independent person, as well as at house meetings and in surveys. The implementation of the headteacher and head of care completing recorded interviews with the children has expanded. These recorded interviews give the children the best opportunity to share their views and give great insight into how children feel. For example, a child commented that she felt safe because she knows that the staff lock the doors so no one can get in. These are meaningful to the children and a joy to watch as the children are encouraged to share their views and experiences.

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

The safeguarding of children is a high priority in the school and residential provision. Staff report concerns to the designated safeguarding officer in the school. The headteacher is extremely proactive in challenging decisions made by professionals that he feels are not in the best interest of, or safeguard, the child. There was good evidence of the headteacher working with a social worker and team manager to ensure that a child was transitioned into a foster placement in a calm and safe way while supported by staff. The social worker commented that the staff went above and beyond to support the child with his transition into foster care even though it was during the summer holidays.

The staff understand that they have a duty to safeguard and they are aware of procedures and protocols. Safeguarding training is updated annually. The well-established staff team fully understands the children's individual needs and behaviours. Staff are in tune with the children, and recognise any changes in their presentation which may require staff to take further action to ensure the child's safety. The governor responsible for safeguarding works meticulously with the

headteacher. They review the policies and procedures frequently, and complete a safeguarding audit, which is fed back at the governors' meetings so that they are aware of any potential risks.

The children engage exceptionally well with a consistent staff team about all aspects of their safety. The staff skilfully implement boundaries and structure to the children's daily routine. The children quickly feel secure in the staff's abilities, enabling them to build good, trusting relationships and share their feelings openly. Parents, carers and professionals spoken with during this inspection were all complimentary. One carer said, 'My experience is all thumbs up. Friendly and open staff who do an excellent job. Contact and communication is very good. I am very happy with them. They do a sterling job and deal with difficult behaviour very well.'

The children are supported to complete an anxiety sheet. This gives the staff an insight into what can make it difficult for the children to manage their behaviours. The children complete a 'who I would like to talk to' form. This comprises a list of staff across the school and residential that the children would want to talk to if they were upset or worried. This practice shows that the staff understand that the children have different relationships with staff, and ensures that the children have a wide variety of trusting adults to speak to who can be identified.

The children report that they are listened to and really like the staff. This is due to them having such strong relationships with the staff. A social worker said, 'Staff know the children inside out, what works best for each of the children. I am very happy with the staff, they will do anything to help and support.'

The staff are very knowledgeable of any risks associated with each individual child. There have been no missing or self-harming incidents since the last inspection. Staff understand the triggers to look for and are successful in implementing de-escalating techniques. This ensures that all staff are aware of any new developments in the child's life which may impact on their presenting behaviour.

The staff email parents at the end of the week to inform them of their child's stay. Parents are expected to email the school on a Monday morning to inform them of the child's weekend and any issues that may carry on into the school. By having this information, staff can put in place strategies and be available if the child may wish to speak to them when they come into school. This practice shows that staff are proactive in being able to support children before a potential crisis could emerge.

All of the children attend the school for at least one term prior to being admitted to the residential provision. This ensures that the children can be observed interacting together and aids appropriate matching. The staff complete good-quality individual behaviour plans and risk assessments. These provide the staff with the necessary strategies to minimise any potential dangers and support the children to have a fun and pleasant experience.

There is a comprehensive risk assessment for sleeping arrangements in the residential provision. Some of the children share a bedroom at their request. The staff complete a risk assessments to ensure that the children are safe, and that a

contingency plan is in place should the children have a falling out and prefer not to share a bedroom. This planning further safeguards the children. Risk assessments are updated annually and are detailed and comprehensive.

The children are taught to be polite and kind to one another by staff, who act as positive role models. During this inspection, staff consistently praised the children when they were helpful and challenged any unwanted behaviour. The children learn valuable social skills and gain the ability to reflect. They quickly learn to treat others as they wish to be treated themselves.

The staff are fully aware of any risks associated with each individual child. Consistent and informative handovers from the boarding staff to teaching staff ensure that all the staff who care for a child in the school are aware of any new developments in the child's life which may impact on their presenting behaviour. The staff understand the triggers to look for and are skilful in de-escalating techniques to reduce the need for physical interventions.

Physical interventions are used as a last resort and always only used to safeguard and protect. A review of the records shows that the incidents are recorded thoroughly, and overseen to ensure that they are in accordance with legislation. Children's views are sought and staff are debriefed. This supports the children in learning how to manage their behaviours and to talk through with staff what they may do differently in the future.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The residential provision is exceptionally well run by a highly skilled and dedicated staff team. There is an established ethos and culture of collaborative working that supports children to progress in the school and the residential unit. The school enables the children to work towards their maximum potential through the support that they receive.

At the last inspection, the staff had begun to use a monitoring system for each child, meaning that they could add information throughout the day. The system keeps all of the staff updated regarding any challenging behaviours or concerns, as well as the positive issues for the individual child. The new system has progressed significantly over the past year and covers all aspects of the child's time at school and in the residential unit. The staff report that they find this a valuable way of communicating between each other and for monitoring the children's behaviours, triggers and progress.

The staff seek feedback from the children using a wide variety of tools. For example, feedback is sought through house meetings, questionnaires, from governors and the independent visitor and through conversations with staff. The headteacher and head of care complete video interviews with the children on an individual basis to give the children the opportunity to express themselves in a way which is comfortable to them. These are then used to action the children's wishes and feelings. A range of these videos were seen during the inspection. The children

were very animated and clearly enjoyed being interviewed and were a joy to watch. The head of care commented that these video interviews have been very successful in gaining, and being able to act on, children's wishes and feelings.

The headteacher and head of care continue to complete observations on staff in both school and in the residential unit and use these observations to develop and share good practice. iPads are used to observe teaching and pupil response. This enables the headteacher to put in extra support for the child if needed and to look at their learning needs. The staff have worked proactively with this approach.

The school and residential staff work closely together to support the children's individual needs and this continues to improve. Monitoring systems are more robust and incorporate the school and the residential unit. Through the new monitoring systems, it is evident that the children using the residential provision have improved both academically and socially.

The staff receive regular supervision, which is recorded and signed by staff. There are clear discussions regarding the children, practice, training, and staff development. The deputy for residential is being mentored by the head of care to be able to run the residential provision should there be a need, and as part of her own development. The deputy for residential has already undertaken the level 5 diploma in children and young people. This practice shows that the school understands the importance of having appropriately qualified staff working with the children.

Parents say that communication between them, the school and residential is excellent, and that they are kept fully updated regarding any issues in relation to their child. One parent commented that, if their child is struggling or has an incident, he is given the opportunity to phone home, which helps him calm down. Another parent commented that her child wants to stay in the residential provision for ever.

The staff are clearly proud of their school and residential provision and this is replicated by the children. The children are courteous and polite to visitors, and are eager to help show them around. The reception area is bright and welcoming, which puts children, parents and children at ease when they enter the school.

## **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:** SC056394

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Sean Trimble

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspector(s)**

Trish Palmer, social care inspector (lead)  
Lynne Drage, social care inspector



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