

Linden Bridge School

Linden Bridge School, Grafton Road, Worcester Park, Surrey KT4 7JW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Linden Bridge School is a residential special school that provides day and residential provision for children and young people between four and 19 years of age who have a diagnosis on the autistic spectrum and/or complex social communication needs. Students aged 10 to 19 years are accommodated in flats on the first floor of an annex to the main school building. The maximum residential capacity is 16 places at any one time. This school was converted into an academy on 1 October 2017. It is part of the LIFT (Learning and Inspiration For Tomorrow) Multi-Academy Trust.

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 February 2018

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected Good

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: 31 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Leaders and managers are ambitious, creative, resilient, efficient, effective and inspirational.
- The residential provision is an integral part of the school's identity and is highly valued by all its stakeholders.
- The whole-school approach is highly effective in helping children and young people to learn and develop.
- Children and young people enjoy exceptionally positive experiences.
- Children and young people make positive progress in their lives.
- Children and young people receive high-quality support from caring, attentive and qualified staff.
- Staff understand children and young people exceptionally well.
- Staff are highly skilled in communicating with children and young people.
- Their feelings of safety enable children and young people to try new things and gain new skills.
- Staff are highly effective in helping children and young people to regulate their behaviours better.
- The school promotes children's and young people's independence effectively.
- This is a safe school. Excellent risk management practices have resulted in a low number of incidents of any kind.
- Residential care practices are excellent. Staff are reflective and thoughtful about their work. Their actions link mindfully with learning opportunities for children and young people.
- Monitoring is thorough and meaningfully supports the school's improvement agenda.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- The school did not conduct a fire drill in residential time during the spring term of 2017.

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

Recommendations

- Monitor the frequency of fire drills in residential time more closely so that any necessary actions are taken in a more timely manner.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

When children and young people stay overnight at this school, they have exceptionally positive experiences. In addition to having an enjoyable time, the residential provision helps them to make positive progress in their lives. There are many examples of this. One young person used to be a persistent school refuser while at another school. This school has had a transformative effect on his life. The young person attends this school regularly. He has made excellent progress in his learning and other aspects of his life. He is now showing higher functioning skills and is preparing to move to another school that is more suited to his capabilities. Records clearly show that the school's residential provision has made a strong contribution to this young person's exceptional progress.

All parents who contributed to the inspection talked positively about the residential provision. Several parents told the inspector that the residential provision helped their children to develop beyond their expectations. One parent described the change that they have seen in their child since using the residential provision by saying 'he is now a different child'. Parents talk about their children being calmer and more independent in many aspects of their lives. Highly challenging behaviours have stopped. One parent said that her son has a friend for the first time in his life. One young person, who used to have a highly restrictive diet, now enjoys eating a wide variety of food at the school and at his home. A more balanced nutritional intake is having a positive impact on his health and overall well-being.

All children and young people who contributed to the inspection said that they love staying at the school. The inspector observed them relating to each other and to staff members in positive ways. They were happy to spend time together taking part in various activities, such as making sushi, decorating drums, matching shapes, and talking about their experiences, views and feelings.

Children and young people receive excellent support from caring and attentive staff. Many parents told the inspector that they could not praise the residential staff enough for their work. One parent said about staff, 'They all care deeply about what they do and about the young people they care for.' Another parent said, 'Staff are extremely capable and caring. We are really touched by how they care for our son. They pay exceptional attention to all his needs. We are extremely impressed and very happy.'

The residential provision enhances children's and young people's life opportunities. Staff are highly skilled in enabling children and young people to participate in a wide range of activities. The residential building and the school as a whole are very well equipped to facilitate the development of children's and young people's interests and talents. Children and young people also access a variety of activities in the local community, such as horse riding, bowling, Jurassic golf and trampolining. Feelings of safety enable children and young people to try new things and gain new skills.

Staff understand children and young people exceptionally well. Staff are skilled in communicating with children and young people, regardless of the communication difficulties that they might experience. Staff enable children and young people to understand options and make positive choices. They enable children and young people to contribute to their care plans and to have some influence over what is happening in the residential provision. Children and young people see advocates who visit the school on a regular basis.

A sensitive and gradual introduction of children to the residential provision when they are in the secondary school ensures that they start using it with ease. This is particularly important as, for the great majority of children and young people, this is the first time that they are staying away from their families. Staying overnight at the school helps them to develop good sleeping patterns when sleeping on their own. The great majority of children and young people now sleep in their own bedrooms when they go back to their own family homes. This is great progress for them. It also demonstrates a positive impact on any underlying attachment issues that they have.

The whole-school approach is highly effective in helping children and young people to learn and develop. Teachers and residential staff work closely together to provide consistency of support. Residential staff and teachers across the school help children and young people to achieve commonly agreed targets and to develop skills, such as improving a capability to wait, take turns, and spend time in positive interactions with peers. Residential staff are deeply thoughtful about their work. They see their every action as a learning opportunity for a child or a young person. This is a hallmark of excellent residential care practice.

All parents who contributed to the inspection highlighted the independence work as one of the best things about the residential provision. A typical comment from a parent was, 'The residential department has been crucial in helping my son to develop social skills and life skills. It is invaluable in developing his independence.' During the inspection, a group of young people went out to a restaurant to mark the end of their residential time at the school. They chose a restaurant that served food from many international cuisines. Diversity was one of the most valuable things that they learned during their time at the school.

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

Children and young people say that they feel safe when they are at this residential school. They know that adults are there to support them and to protect them. They have become less anxious than they used to be. Their inner sense of security, safety and confidence has become stronger. With staff's help, children and young people have found strategies that help them to be calmer. 'Sitting still like a frog' is one example of a creative adaptation of a mindfulness technique for children and young people. Another example is using a 'zipped-in safe space' to give children and young people the confidence to find a way to regain self-control by themselves. Children and young people gain the freedom to choose when they are ready to leave this safe space and engage positively with others.

The school has gained the trust of parents. All parents who contributed to the inspection were confident that their children are safe when they stay overnight at this residential school.

Residential staff have a comprehensive awareness of safeguarding. This includes radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and female genital mutilation. Regular training updates on a range of safeguarding topics ensure that staff's knowledge remains up to date.

The head of residential care is the designated safeguarding lead for the whole school. He has received appropriate training for this role and is able to provide safeguarding training to staff. He brings to the residential provision safeguarding expertise that he has gained through dealing with safeguarding concerns across the school.

Appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place to promote children's and young people's welfare. Staff follow good safeguarding practices in their work.

The risk management practices in this residential special school are proactive and robust. This has resulted in a low number of incidents of any kind. Good planning and appropriate staffing levels have ensured that no child or young person went missing from the school. There have been no safeguarding referrals relating to children and young people who use the residential provision.

In particular, staff have been exceptionally effective in helping children and young people to better regulate their behaviours. For example, a young person stopped having any significant behavioural incidents at the school since using the residential provision. In another example, a young person who used to hit his peers has not hit anyone this school year. He started staying overnight at the school last year. The last time he hit somebody was in July 2017.

Staff make sure that children and young people are safe at all times. They use risk assessments effectively to promote children's and young people's development of life skills and increased independence.

Regular health and safety checks ensure that the school provides a safe physical environment. At the recent environmental inspection of the food provision, the school's kitchen was given the highest possible score.

Fire drills were conducted during the residential time in both the last school terms at a frequency that exceeds the national minimum standard. However, there was no residential fire drill in the spring term of 2017. This followed four full evacuations from the residential accommodation during the autumn term of 2016.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leadership of this residential special school is confident, ambitious, creative, resilient and inspirational. Their passion to support children and young people to have fulfilling lives underpins the school's ethos of high expectations. The focus is

always on what is the best for the children and young people. The governing body and other leaders and managers see the residential provision as an integral part of the school's identity and its immersive learning provision. When children are at secondary school, they are offered an opportunity to experience the residential provision.

This is the tenth consecutive outstanding overall inspection judgement for the residential provision. In this inspection year, leaders, managers and staff have delivered outstanding outcomes for children and young people in the face of significant changes. The challenges and insecurities that these changes have brought with them make the school's success in changing the lives of children and young people even more remarkable.

Leaders and managers have led stakeholders through the academisation process with great care. At the same time, a decreased budget forced the restructuring and a reduction in the residential places. Positive attitudes, engagement and open communication have helped the school community to become stronger through this difficult time.

The residential staff team has remained highly stable. The staff have been working together for many years. The most recent staff member joined the team almost five years ago. The team is highly cohesive and resilient. Staff told the inspector that the recent changes have helped them to find a strength that they didn't know they had. The process has brought them together even more in their joint effort to maintain, protect and continue to develop the excellent quality of support for children and young people. Communication and the integrated approach in the school have continued to improve. One staff member said that handovers before and after school are better than they have ever been.

Staff have continued to build on the excellence of their residential practices. In particular, the quality of the record-keeping has improved significantly in the last 12 months. Documents, such as children's and young people's care plans and risk assessments, have become more detailed and insightful. Children's and young people's contribution to those documents is more developed.

The embracing of technological developments has continued to have a positive impact on how staff monitor and demonstrate children's and young people's progress. For example, staff upload videos that show young people's increased life skills.

The head of care and his deputy ensure that the residential provision is managed efficiently and effectively. Staff develop their practices through good internal and external training opportunities. The training is tailored to the specific needs of staff members and the children and young people who they work with. For example, a staff member attended Makaton training to enable better communication with a young person who uses this sign language. The development and training needs of staff are discussed at their regular individual supervision meetings and through reviews of their performance. Team meetings provide opportunities for information sharing and reflection on practice. A staff member told the inspector that this

residential school is 'a lovely place to work'.

The head of care produces detailed half-termly monitoring reports. He ensures that any weak areas are addressed in a timely way and that the residential service continues to improve. He meets on a regular basis with leaders and managers for other children's and young people's services in the local area. They network, talk about concerns and share good practice.

The school is designated as a Teaching School / National Support School by the National College of Teaching and Leadership. Its leaders and managers are committed to disseminating their knowledge to others. They deliver school-to-school support, training and professional development and leadership programmes. They are keen to contribute to relevant research. They have taken part in the review that was carried out by the Council for Disabled Children on the request of the Department of Education. This positive approach to research and learning benefits the children and young people who stay in the residential provision.

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: SC013884

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Inspector

Seka Graovac, social care inspector (lead)



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