

Radlett Lodge Schools

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. There are currently 53 pupils aged four to 19 on roll. The residential building, called The Lodge, is situated next to the school. Up to 12 pupils can reside at The Lodge on either a weekly, termly or flexi-boarding basis. There are currently 10 pupils resident. All children attending the school have a diagnosis of autistic spectrum disorder. The school was last inspected in October 2017.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 June 2018

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: 3 October 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- The residential experience is an integral part of school life. The staff come to know the children very well.
- The children receive a high standard of care.
- The children's ability to communicate their needs improves substantially.
- The children benefit from supportive and trusting relationships with the staff.
- The children benefit from the daily routine and structure.
- The children are encouraged to be themselves.
- The children learn new skills and learn to do more for themselves.
- The staff understand and are responsive to the unique needs of each child.
- Parents see and are extremely impressed by the progress that their child makes.
- The opportunities for the children to go out into the local community at the weekend are improving.
- Staff induction and training are very good and focus on the needs of the children.
- Working relationships with external agencies are transparent.
- Safeguarding practice is robust. The leadership team implements procedures effectively and is quick to act in the event of any concerns being raised.
- The residential service is well run. Senior leaders who are responsible for the residential provision work tremendously well together to prioritise the needs of the children.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- To complete the refurbishment of the final bathroom and re-establish use of the rear of the children's playground (Adventure Land).
- To consistently provide agency and bank staff with opportunities for effective supervision.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that the internal and external environments are arranged to meet the diverse needs of the children. In particular, that the final bathroom used by the children is refurbished and the outside area, called 'Adventure Land' is redeveloped.
- Ensure that supervision is consistently made available for bank and agency staff.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Boarding is an integral part of the school provision. Many of the children have been boarding for a number of years. The children flourish; for some, this is life changing. A parent said, 'My child is learning to use words and is starting to speak in sentences. This is something that I did not think could happen.'

Children's attendance at school is excellent. Data shows that children who board make more progress in social communication and emotional regulation. Parents and families are regular visitors to the school and are made to feel welcome by the staff. A parent said, 'The staff are constantly thinking of ways of helping my son. I feel that they know his character quite well.'

A culture of respect and positive regard permeates across the school. Skilled and patient staff have the children's well-being at the centre of their practice. A multi-disciplinary approach ensures consistency for the children. A team of waking-night staff led by a long-serving, experienced senior ensures that the children receive high-quality care and support throughout the night. This continuity of care helps to improve the quality of children's lives.

During waking hours, the children are cared for one to one. All of the children, including those who do not communicate verbally, receive significant help and support to help them to enjoy their day and to exercise personal choice. All of the children benefit from the broad range of activities available after school and at the weekends. Activities include arts and crafts, trampolining and sensory and soft play. Since the last inspection, the addition of a volunteer driver has helped to ensure that the children have the opportunity to go out on trips at the weekend, for example, to the park or for a meal. This ensures that the children experience diverse and interesting opportunities in the safety of the school and in the wider community.

The environment provides structure and the children benefit from the consistency of the daily routine. The children's care is reviewed on a regular basis, and the effect of the specialist help available for every child, such as speech and language therapy, is routinely monitored. These reviews ensure that the staff come to understand the unique and individual needs of each child and their preferred method of communication. Consequently, the staff are able to routinely evaluate and respond to individual children's developmental and ongoing support needs effectively.

The children's bedrooms are personalised to reflect each child's individual character. When possible, children are encouraged to bring personal items from home, which helps them to feel comfortable.

The children benefit from a varied, nutritious and healthy diet. The staff are responsive to each child's individual dietary requirements and ensure that any health requirements or parental requests are adhered to. When possible, the children are

encouraged to take an active role in meal planning and preparation. This supports inclusion and encourages children to be more independent.

The staff use pathway-planning documentation to assess, record and evaluate each child's ability. This approach sets the scene for promoting the children's independence and encouraging individual children to succeed. The staff actively support and encourage children to eat, dress and wash. This helps to improve the children's confidence and helps them to recognise their own potential in different settings. A parent said, 'I see huge changes in my child. When he comes home he can do more for himself. This is because of the support that he gets when he is at The Lodge.'

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

Children are protected and kept safe. The staff build good relationships with the children. The staff know the children well and are good at recognising and responding to any changes in individual children's mood or behaviour. The staff meaningfully seek the children's views and wishes using different resources such as electronic tablets and picture exchange systems. The established culture of encouraging the children to be themselves and to express themselves demonstrates that meaningful communication with the children is a dynamic process and firmly embedded into everyday practice.

Comprehensively crafted 'About Me' books, care plans and risk assessments clearly identify each child's unique strengths, vulnerabilities and sensory sensitivities. Staff work competently as a team to recognise the early signs of distress and are highly skilled in anticipating when children may benefit from tailored approaches, for example, to support the management of extreme behaviours. Staff work hard to ensure a low-arousal environment. This consistently helps children to manage everyday transitions and to reduce individual children's anxiety. The staff work closely with parents and other professionals, harnessing collective knowledge, skill and understanding to identify and implement strategies to keep the children safe.

Many individual staff are exceptionally skilled and highly creative in finding solutions to help the children to keep themselves safe from harming themselves and others. The environment is highly organised and structured. The children have access to a range of sensory toys and resources to help them with emotional regulation. The team leaders plan ahead and organise shifts in advance. Supported by the managers, this thoughtful preparation helps to ensure that there is a diverse range of activities and resources available to occupy the children. This helps the children to relax, laugh and have fun.

Occasions arise when the staff use physical intervention. Records show that the majority of children are not held and that staff competently manage behaviourally challenging incidents using their relationship with the child. The established practice of affording the children plenty of time and space helps the children to recover and

move forward with their day. Discussions with staff and sampling of records show that the vast majority of physical interventions rarely last for more than two minutes. Children are never held on the ground. All physical interventions are scrutinised and their effectiveness is evaluated by the behaviour support team that also takes turns working directly with children on shifts. This excellent analysis ensures that any emerging trends and patterns are identified quickly, enabling staff to review and make real-time adjustments to children's plans.

The staff work cohesively across the school day to support the children in managing ordinary transitions and to ensure that children benefit fully from the residential experience. The children do not go missing; nonetheless, the staff are clear about what they would need to do and whom they would contact should this happen. The senior managers share an on-call rota and are available to the staff 24 hours a day, seven days a week. An alarmed front door and an external perimeter fence provides the necessary additional security to ensure that children cannot leave the site without being heard.

Managers and leaders challenge one another's views and in doing so show that they place significant priority on the importance of robust safeguarding practices. The important messages from Keeping Children Safe in Education are embedded in practice. Staff are clear about the role of the designated lead for safeguarding, the reporting procedures and the whistle-blowing policy. Any information that suggests that staff may not be practising in accordance with the school's ethos results in a strong proactive response from managers to address and improve practice. The leaders are very clear about the role of the designated officer and work openly and transparently to ensure that information about any incidents of concern is shared quickly with the relevant agencies. This approach ensures that robust safeguarding practices are firmly rooted across the residential service.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The residential provision continues to meet the national minimum standards. The statement of principles provides good information about the aims and objectives of the school.

There have been some changes to the staff team. For example, the permanent head of care is on maternity leave. The staff are adjusting and are good at using social stories to communicate with the children about the changes.

The interim head of care has worked in the residential provision for many years. She has positive relationships with the children and is sensitive to their individual needs. She is appropriately qualified, knowledgeable and experienced. The interim head of care brings additional vigour and determination to the role and is professionally respected by those who work with her.

The leaders and managers work enthusiastically with external professionals, who say that communication is of a high standard. The managers are clear in their

expectations of the staff, who work to high standards to pursue bespoke and high-quality experiences for the children. The managers in the residential provision are mindful that to work effectively with the children the staff need to be supported. As a result, staff unanimously say that they receive good support from an approachable and caring management team.

The staff have confidence in their leaders. The experienced senior leadership team members collaborate effectively to prioritise the needs and well-being of the children. They share a good understanding of each individual child's personality and character, which helps them to plan ahead and ensure that the staff on shift have access to good support from one another.

The physical environment is maintained to a good standard. Any damage caused is repaired quickly by on-site maintenance support. The refurbishment of the last of the children's bathrooms is scheduled to be completed in the summer break 2018. The children have use of a large playground and some outdoor equipment, including swings. However, a significant section at the rear of the children's playground has been out of use since before the last inspection. This limits where staff can take children outside to play safely, which is relevant because the residential provision currently has younger children who are particularly active.

Many staff are qualified and hold the required level 3 diploma. Those who are not qualified are enrolled to undertake the course. The managers and leaders place emphasis on the importance of the staff induction process, which is thorough and child-centred and helps staff to understand their roles and responsibilities, particularly in respecting the children and keeping children safe.

Staff access a range of relevant and interesting training in areas that includes understanding autistic spectrum disorder and safeguarding. Appraisals take place annually, and the process encourages staff to consider areas for professional progression. Staff receive regular supervision. The interim head of care is keen to promote the practice of reflective supervision that encourages staff to take greater responsibility for their development. Supervision for bank and agency staff does take place but with less consistency. The agreed actions from the meetings are not consistently recorded. This does not ensure that every member of staff has appropriate opportunities to discuss the effect of their work.

A thorough approach to external monitoring helps the recently appointed interim head of care to identify and act on areas for development. Concerns and complaints from parents are taken very seriously. Written responses from the managers detailing the actions taken to put right any areas of concern raised help to provide reassurance. One parent said, 'If I have any issue about my son's care, I can call and speak to any of the managers, who put things right.'

A partnership approach to working with parents offers additional layers of support and protection for the children. Parent-network meetings provide creative

opportunities for parents to come together to talk with experienced professionals about autistic spectrum disorder, behaviour, communication and emotional regulation.

The feedback from parents and professionals included:

- 'Choosing The Lodge for my son was the best decision that I have ever made for him.'
- 'For us [parents], they are like a second family and we could not be without their support now.'
- 'They always seem to have our child's best interests at heart. His care is very individualised.'
- 'I have every confidence in the staff. I know that my son loves to stay there.'
- 'I have no doubt that the help that we get from the school helps to keep our family together.'

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: SC019505

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Jeremy Keeble

Type of school: residential special school

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Inspector

Rosie Davie: social care inspector (lead)



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