

Lonsdale School

Brittain Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 8UT

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Lonsdale School is a local authority maintained residential special school for pupils who have a range of physical and neurological impairments. The school moved to new, purpose-built premises in January 2013 and is co-located with a secondary school in Stevenage. The school is funded for 88 places with up to 23 residential pupils, aged 11 to 18, at any one time. Groups of residential pupils stay each week, between Monday and

Thursday, from one to four nights. The focus of the residential provision is to develop the pupils' learning and independence. The last inspection of the residential provision took place in November 2017.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 February 2019

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: 14 November 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- The leadership of the residential provision is exceptional. The leadership team remains enthused about and committed to improving the children's experiences.
- Children have developed warm, positive relationships with a highly motivated, committed and dynamic staff team that knows and understands the children's individual needs.
- Staff overcome barriers to enable children to participate in exciting and stimulating activities. Children benefit from a wide range of experiences that they would not otherwise be able to access.
- Managers strive to continually develop the service to provide children with the highest-quality care.
- There is extensive tracking and analysis of the children's progress to understand the impact that the residential provision has on the children who stay at the school.
- The children are unquestionably at the centre of all practice at the school and in the residential setting.
- Excellent monitoring of practice continues to identify the strengths of the residential provision and areas for further development.
- Children make excellent social, emotional and educational progress because of the support and opportunities that they receive.
- The school and residential staff work hard to build and maintain open and honest communication with parents.
- The children clearly enjoy the residential experience and, as a result, have flourished.
- Staff understand individual children's communication needs. They give the children time and space to communicate their wishes and feelings.
- Children develop ability- and age-appropriate independence skills.
- Research-informed practice underpins continuing improvements to the quality of care and is shared with other schools.

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

Recommendations

- Record supervision sessions and keep the records on file.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Since the last inspection, the school has continued to develop its residential provision. Children make excellent progress because they stay in the residential provision. Year-on-year monitoring by the senior leaders shows that children who stay in the residential provision meet their social, emotional and behavioural targets. In 2017–2018, 96% of all residential pupils met their targets. Staying in residence contributes to improved school attendance for some children because travelling time to and from school is reduced.

The staff have an excellent understanding of the children's communication needs. They expertly give the children space and time to express themselves. Children are respectful of each other's communication needs and help and support each other.

The small staff team knows the children extremely well. The staff clearly enjoy being with the children. They provide the children with consistent care, which has enabled children to form strong, trusting relationships with them. The children spend quality time with staff, and there is genuine warmth in the relationships. Observations were made of children laughing and interacting with staff throughout the inspection.

Staff work exceptionally well with a multi-agency team of nurses, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and a school counsellor. Regularly reviewed and updated health and well-being plans and placement plans are informative and guide staff to care effectively for children who have complex needs. The children benefit immensely from the highly collaborative approach to meeting their care needs. Communication between staff, nurses and parents is excellent. A parent said, 'The staff or nurses always contact me if my child is feeling unwell just to put my mind at ease. They never mind me calling to check that things are OK.' Each child has a school-to-home book, which provides an additional communication method between parents and staff.

Parents said that the residential provision gives their children opportunities to learn independence skills and to have overnight stays with their friends, which they would not be able to experience otherwise. Children are able to transfer the skills that they learn in the residential provision, so that they can help with jobs at home. Seemingly small steps have a significant impact on children's development and sense of achievement. Children use the specially adapted independence flat to build on specific skills. Work surfaces, ovens and sinks can be adapted for children who use wheelchairs. Children are supported to plan menus, to shop and to cook. A parent said that her child has developed life skills that she can take with her when she moves into a more independent setting.

Staff work tirelessly to ensure that children have the best possible experiences. Children participate in a wide variety of activities in the residential provision and in

the local community, including clubs. These activities give children opportunities to develop their social skills and to build and maintain positive friendships with their peers. Recently, children were able to visit Watford Football Club to see them play Manchester City. Some children have recently been on a skiing trip abroad. The staff are in the process of planning a sports holiday to Majorca in June 2019. These trips are meticulously planned and give children new and exciting opportunities that they may not otherwise be able to experience. Children spoke about these trips with great excitement. Staff evaluate, with the children, the impact of activities to ensure that they are enjoyable and help children to develop their skills.

Children participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's (DoE) Award scheme. Some children went on a camping trip as part of the outdoor pursuits. They were involved in setting up tents and planning routes between sites. The children involved are very proud of their achievements and said that it was fun. Staff celebrated the bronze awards with trophies that were given to children at an award ceremony. Some children have started to work towards the silver DoE award. The children can see that the staff are very proud of their achievements.

Excellent community links have resulted in support from the Rotary Club, which has enabled the school to fund projects for the children. The school is working towards providing outdoor learning. Leaders and managers recognise the value of learning outside the classroom and strive to provide a broad range of learning experiences.

Mealtimes are sociable occasions. Children benefit from a wide choice of food. Meals are well balanced and healthy. Salad and fruit are always available. Staff support children who need help during mealtimes but encourage them to do as much for themselves as possible. Children have excellent table manners. They help each other, and they clear the table after each meal. Mealtimes are full of fun and laughter. Children use their specific form of communication to talk about their day and to plan their evenings.

Children are taught to be respectful of each other. They recognise each other's differences, learn to share and they support each other.

Children spoke confidently about being able to talk to staff if they are upset or worried. Communication books have photos of staff and symbols to indicate to staff when children are not happy. Information is presented in different communication styles in each residential flat to remind children how to make a complaint. Staff talk to children during residential meetings about how to complain. Children are able to express their views and to raise their concerns with confidence, regardless of their communication styles. Children's views are listened to and acted on by the staff.

Children are clearly at the centre of all practice in the residential provision. Each flat is decorated to a high standard and children have been involved in choosing the new sofas and furnishings for their individual flat, all of which are exceptionally well personalised.

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

The school has developed a comprehensive contingency plan, which covers emergencies and incidents. The plan gives clear and detailed guidance to staff so that children are protected in unforeseen circumstances. Due to the quality of the plan, another school in the area has adopted it.

The effective implementation of safeguarding policies, coupled with staff members' understanding of the importance of reporting concerns, means that the children are safe. The designated safeguarding lead works effectively with other agencies to ensure that information is passed on and actions are implemented. The designated safeguarding officer at the school and the safeguarding governor undertake annual audits. The reports of these audits are sent to the local safeguarding board. The robust scrutiny ensures that potential weaknesses are identified and acted on and that practice continuously improves.

All staff members have undertaken safeguarding training and benefit from regular refresher training. Staff have a good understanding of whistle-blowing procedures and the importance of ensuring that all staff practice in a way that safeguards children.

The children said that they feel safe. They could all name staff with whom they would speak if they are worried or upset. An independent visitor meets with the children regularly. Children know who he is and what his role is. There are photos of him in each flat, so that children understand that he is a safe adult to speak to. Parents said that their children are safe because of the staff members' vigilance.

Children do not go missing due to the high level of monitoring and the approach that staff take to help them to understand how to keep safe. Children said that they can visit the other flats to see their friends but must tell staff first because otherwise the staff might worry. Conversations with children during the inspection demonstrated that staff work hard to help children understand risks to their safety.

The children are very caring towards each other. Children who are more independent have a good understanding of other children's vulnerabilities and actively help them during mealtimes and activities. This caring attitude was observed throughout the inspection.

The staff understand that children need to have purposeful and meaningful experiences while learning to manage developmentally and taking age-appropriate risks. Because the staff are not risk averse, the children have opportunities to access a wide range of new and stimulating experiences in a safe environment. A parent said that it is important to them that their child is not wrapped in cotton wool but has new experiences that would not otherwise be possible.

The recruitment process is thorough and ensures that the staff are safe to work with

the children. If concerns about a staff member's practice arise, these are addressed with the individual concerned, either as part of their supervision or in a separate meeting. Staff are involved in recruitment, and children show potential new staff around. This gives good opportunities for staff and children to be part of the recruitment process.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

A cohesive leadership team runs the school. Senior managers at the school and in the residential provision provide highly effective and efficient leadership. They have created a culture of high aspiration for children and use a number of ways to measure success. Collectively, leaders and managers ensure that the children have the best possible experiences and outcomes. The residential and education staff have high aspirations for the children. Staff help children to overcome barriers to participation and to enjoy experiences that their mainstream peers can access.

The staff give exceptionally careful consideration to the arrangements for transitions. A panel consisting of a governor, nursing staff, senior staff and a representative from the local authority assesses residential applications to ensure that the child's needs can be met without compromising the care that the other children in the residential provision receive. Children's placement and health and well-being plans are reviewed regularly to ensure that their needs continue to be met well.

Senior managers continue to strive for improvement. They actively research effective approaches and incorporate these into practice at the school and in the residential provision. The headteacher is highly proactive. She shares new initiatives with other schools and implements good-practice approaches that she has identified at other services. Research is underway into analysing children's progress and relating the residential experience to improving outcomes for children.

The care that children receive is exceptional. The multi-agency teams work closely to meet the children's needs and enhance the children's progress. Staff understand that some children have more complex needs. Communication between the nursing staff, residential staff and parents is excellent.

The staff seek feedback from the children in a wide variety of ways. Regular, accessible questionnaires enable the children to contribute their views about the care that they receive. The governors' regular monitoring checks also provide children with opportunities to give their views. Feedback is collated and fed back to governors and senior managers, to inform improvements to the care provided.

Staff have an excellent understanding of the different communication methods and devices that the children use. Staff have held training events for professionals to help them learn and understand the children's methods of communication. The sharing of expertise in this way benefits the children. It helps to ensure that the people who work with the children increase their understanding of communication preferences and abilities, empowering children to have a voice that can be heard.

Governors undertake regular visits to review the quality of residential care. The visits include spending time with the children. The reports of these visits are highly informative and drive improvement. The governors have a range of experience and backgrounds, including experience of disability. Consequently, the quality of care is scrutinised and analysed from a number of perspectives to ensure that children receive the best care possible.

Since the last inspection, two senior staff from the residential setting have left. Residential staff said that, in agreement with senior managers, they have taken on more responsibility and consequently have increased autonomy in running the residential provision. Senior managers have been transparent, kept the residential staff updated and involved them in recruitment. Senior managers have analysed the impact on staff of potential restructuring, recognising that staff members' well-being is important given the responsibilities that they have for vulnerable children who have complex needs.

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: SC056425

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Inspector

Trish Palmer, social care inspector (lead)



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