

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

This residential special school is an academy, for children who have autism spectrum disorder and associated complex communication needs. At the time of this inspection, 140 children attend as day students. The residential accommodation is provided on the first floor of the main school building. It has capacity for 16 children. At the time of this inspection, 38 children were using the residential provision over one or two nights during the school week.

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 March 2020

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account requires improvement to be good

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of previous inspection: 26 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

There have been significant safeguarding concerns since the last inspection. The weaknesses identified are being addressed to fully support children's progress and experiences. New plans and approaches to reduce future risk are thorough, but are yet to be fully embedded into practice. In addition, there has been a prolonged absence of the headteacher, creating some instability across the school. There are no serious or widespread failures that result in children's welfare now not being safeguarded and promoted.

The residential provision provides a rewarding 24-hour curriculum. The activities are well planned and thoughtfully organised to meet the needs of each child. This enables them, according to their abilities, to be fully engaged in developing their targets and plans. Staff are painstaking in their patience and commitment to support the children to achieve.

Activities observed include making individual meals, arts and craft, and creative writing. Children learn essential independence skills, such as making their own beds, and personal care. Staff follow plans devised by multi-professional teams to improve children's physical health, such as specific eating plans. However, in the main school the dining tables are not appropriate for the needs of the children.

Children benefit from warm and nurturing relationships with staff. The children care about each other, and help and encourage their friends and peers. Children all talk positively about their residential experience, and were keen to show the inspector what they were working on. Most enjoy visits from Louie, the therapy dog. For those children who are less enthusiastic, he is helping to reduce their fear of dogs. Parents are positive about the residential provision, with one saying, 'The skills my son has learned at boarding exceed all expectations.'

Children are engaged in a range of social activities to complement their education. They are able to choose what they would like to do as part of the main group or within the smaller groups in each flat, such as bowling and trampolining. Children talked positively about their work experience at a local university. They do work supporting in younger classes, or in the local authority offices. Some have trained to become 'play champions' to support and encourage play at break times.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children have not been consistently safeguarded since the last inspection. Significant concerns regarding the safety of children and the management of child protection and safeguarding concerns have been identified as a result of management investigations at the school. These include not reporting incidents of concern to the

designated officer in the local authority and continued poor recruitment practice. These concerns were also noted at the last inspection. Although none of the incidents of concern have taken place during residential time or involved residential staff, the policies, procedures and leaders are the same across the school and therefore these shortfalls have the potential to impact on residential safeguarding practice.

A great deal of work has been done by the senior leaders to promote safeguarding across the school and to recreate a safeguarding culture and ethos. Leaders have worked tirelessly for several months to review processes and procedures to ensure that similar concerns do not happen again in the future. This has been an extensive piece of work, with support from the local authority safeguarding team and appropriate consultants. Through this period, the designated safeguarding lead demonstrated that she is knowledgeable and proficient in her role.

The new approaches are yet to be fully embedded into practice, due to the protracted nature of the concerns uncovered. The safeguarding governor is settling into her role. She is promoting a culture where staff are able to question and challenge care practice in order to promote the welfare of children.

Children are now being protected from harm with greater effect. Strong joint working between the safeguarding team members ensures that children at risk are identified, and procedures are followed to protect them from harm. Strong links with safeguarding professionals in the local authority have led to swift referral to relevant safeguarding professionals as needed. The school is well represented in meetings and contributes to plans for children who are at risk.

Children are confident in the residential provision and in the school. They all identify the staff they would go to if upset or worried. A member of staff was observed managing the anxiety of a child on her first stay with kindness and skill. There is a strong safeguarding culture among the small residential staff team. All its members are clear about their responsibilities to report concerns, and, if required, how to report concerns outside of the school.

Children have access to mobile phones and other internet-accessible devices. The residential provision accesses sessions on internet safety from a national charity, and the school has provided parental internet safety courses. Children were able to describe how to keep safe online. Children are further supported to keep safe through a service providing experiential and realistic scenarios of transport and fire safety, among others.

Children are protected from avoidable risk through safer recruitment and improved health and safety oversight. All personnel files have been reviewed to ensure that all staff have been subject to relevant pre-employment checks. Any gaps have been followed up through seeking the missing documents, or through risk assessment dependant on the length of service in the school. However, when the school uses

agency staff, they do not always have a photograph of the agency member of staff prior to them arriving at the school.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The headteacher has been absent from the school for several months over two periods. The acting headteacher and senior leadership team have worked tirelessly to maintain consistency in the school in her absence.

The academy trust has employed consultants in key areas to improve practice. The plans and responses by the chief executive officer appear to be targeted and appropriate to rectify all the concerns identified.

A significant concern is that none of the issues noted at this or the previous inspection had been noticed by the school's local governors. This lack of oversight calls into question the effectiveness of the governance of the school in relation to quality assuring residential care practice and, when necessary, providing constructive challenge to the leadership team.

The leadership of the residential provision is particularly strong. The head of care is aware of the progress of all the children who access the service. Children's care plans include their voice, in a different font, making it clear they have been involved. Tasks are broken down into what the child can do and what they need to do, and how to support them to do this further and improve.

The head of care half-termly reports are highly detailed and reflective, utilising the feedback from the independent visitor. She is constantly seeking to drive the service forwards. The reports focus on the cultural activities and projects for the term, such as Halloween, Christmas and Chinese New Year. Records and plans are reviewed for quality and accuracy. Plans for the upcoming term are included, with evaluation and reflections on the last term. These plans help add an extra layer of scrutiny and evaluation of the quality of the service provided.

Staff said they are well supported by the head of care, who 'would do anything' to support them. They know she is always appreciative of what they do. Staff benefit from a variety of relevant training opportunities. They also have access to specific training they are interested in, such as diet and eating, and mental health.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 11.1 The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 13.1 The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and takes appropriate action where necessary.

Recommendations

- Provide dining furniture that meets children's needs.
- Ensure that employment agencies provide a photograph of the staff member, ahead of their arrival.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Rachel Watt – absent
Marie O'Rourke – acting headteacher

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspector

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector

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