

Linden Bridge School

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

Assurance visit

Information about this residential special school

This residential special school is an academy, for children with autism spectrum disorder and associated complex communication needs. 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, 37 children were using the residential provision over one or two nights during the school week.

Visit dates: 5 to 6 October 2020

Previous inspection date: 3 March 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Requires improvement to be good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

The residential provision was closed during the COVID-19 pandemic and reopened 10 days before the visit. The staff were in touch with children and their parents regularly during the time when the provision was closed. Staff provided learning resources and set the children targets to be completed in their family home environment. As a result, many children retained the skills they had learned previously.

The baseline assessment and tracker system that is used by the residential provision to monitor the progress of the children is individualised and follows a range of areas relating to the 'building bridges to independence' programme. Targets are informed by education, health and care plans and by achievable self-care goals.

The 'moving in' approach is effective in introducing the children to the residential provision at their own pace. An assessment process includes parents and professionals who are involved in the child's care. The information and views gathered inform the child's care plan, which is reviewed and updated with any changes. The staff have the necessary information available to them to care well for each child.

The staff work closely with the school to provide consistent care across both settings. For example, children who access specialist equipment or therapy programmes at school also receive this at the residential provision. The 24-hour curriculum ethos is achieved in practice.

The staff manage the children's needs well. Currently activities are within the residential houses or school grounds for the children's safety.

There are formal and informal systems for residential pupils to have a voice in the residential provision. Circle time, where children sit together when they arrive at the residential house, is effective in managing the transition from school to residential care. This is also an opportunity for children to communicate any worries.

The dining area has been refurbished and now has more of a family feel.

The safety of children

The improvement of the safeguarding culture of the school has been a focus for leaders and managers. They have reviewed safeguarding policies and procedures and ensure that these are consistent across the residential provision. The staff are up to date with training in child protection issues, and health and safety policies and procedures. An increase in the reporting of incidents of concern by staff

demonstrates their enhanced awareness. However, not all staff are aware of the various actions they should take if an allegation is made against another member of staff. The potential risk to children is reduced because staff are fully aware of the need to report any such matters to the Head Teacher.

All children have a 'safe from harm' document which outlines any risks relevant to the child. This is updated by staff when there is a change or when new risks emerge.

Children's safety is promoted through regular checks of the building and grounds. Fire drills are undertaken regularly to ensure that children know what action to take in the event of a fire.

Safer recruitment records include photographs of agency workers to ensure that the identity of the person working at the residential provision is known by staff and children.

Leaders and managers

Leaders and managers are effective in recognising and acting upon any concerns that are raised. The residential provision is led by a suitably experienced and qualified head of care who is assisted by a stable, committed staff team. The staff value the head of care and report feeling supported by her and senior managers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Senior managers have sought consultative support and appointed a new chair of governors who constructively challenges leaders and managers when necessary.

Handovers at the beginning and end of each day are helpful forums for communication between school and residential staff, to discuss any significant events that have occurred and to plan for the evening or the school day. Staff know the children well. However, evening plans and routines are not explicit enough to ensure that all staff, including, for instance, a newer member of staff, can easily understand the children's familiar routines.

Liaison with external services and professionals supports children's emotional and academic development. The staff work closely with parents to help the children to reintegrate into the residential provision. Children who need longer to settle back in are given more time.

The staff accessed a range of relevant online training while the residential provision was closed. In addition, they supported the children who were attending school and those who were at home. During this period, the children's emotional and physical well-being remained the focus of the leaders, managers and staff.

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

Recommendations

- Managers should ensure that the important aspects of children's evening routines are recorded.
- Managers should evaluate staff knowledge in relation to safeguarding practice to identify any areas of uncertainty or gaps in knowledge.

Residential special school details

Unique reference number: SC013884

Headteacher: Ms Rachel Watt

Inspector

Suzy Lemmy, Social Care Inspector

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