

Lexden Springs

Winstree Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 0PZ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Lexden Springs is a community special school. It is a day and residential special school, which caters for pupils with special educational needs, specifically severe learning difficulties, profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorders.

There are 220 pupils on roll. The total number of residential pupils is currently four. Residential pupils can board between Monday and Friday for up to four nights.

The residential provision comprises six purpose-built houses situated in the school grounds. The residential provision opened in October 2020.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 May 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: not applicable

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The residential provision opened in October 2020. In response to COVID-19 restrictions, the staff have taken a considered and flexible approach to supporting safe overnight stays for children. There are currently four children who stay once a week, in line with current government guidance.

The staff have managed the children's transitions to stay overnight well. Children receive a well-planned and warm welcome. The staff spend time with the children prior to their stays and carefully consider their individual needs. Adapted guides help the children to feel reassured and minimise potential anxieties about being away from home.

Children enjoy staying at the residential provision. The relationships between the staff and the children are strong, compassionate and established. The staff have natural and warm interactions with the children that help the children to feel at ease. Consequently, children develop the sense of security and stability that they need to make progress.

The staff are particularly creative in their approach to gaining children's views and helping them to communicate. Meaningful alternative communication methods are used to good effect. Because of the strength of these approaches, children can begin to express themselves, make themselves understood and make informed choices.

Effective communication and links with the school staff have ensured that the children make consistent progress towards their education targets. For some children, the residential provision has helped them to improve their school attendance. The active implementation and regular review of education and health plans have ensured seamless support during the children's stays.

The children make good progress with their independence and self-care skills. The staff help the children to develop these skills through using graduated levels of prompting. Highly individualised approaches are tailored to children's developmental stages and regularly adapted so that the children make progress that is significant for them. The staff offer children a wide range of stimulating activities that reflect the children's interests.

The accommodation is spacious and well appointed to meet children's recreational and leisure interests. A thoughtful approach to the layout of the houses has resulted in individual spaces which meet children's sensory needs. A live closed-circuit television monitoring system covers shared living areas. Although its use is highlighted in the statement of purpose, there is currently no policy to ensure that its continued use is proportionate and justified. This surveillance could intrude on children's privacy.

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

The children receive high levels of adult supervision. Most children have little understanding of hazards and environmental dangers, due to their learning difficulties and autism spectrum disorders.

The residential environment accommodates the children's specific individual needs and ensures their safety. The accommodation balances safety with children's freedom of movement. The outdoor play area includes a wide range of accessible outdoor play equipment and safety rubberised flooring.

The children's risk management plans outline particular risks and triggers that could lead to children's behaviour becoming unsafe. The plans provide a clear guide for the staff on how best to reduce and deflect incidents. The staff use risk assessments to enrich and widen children's experiences safely. The children's parents are included in the management of risk. Working closely with parents provides the children with consistency between home and school.

The implementation of proactive behaviour management strategies successfully reduces situations that can increase children's anxiety. The staff have a good awareness of potential triggers and combine this with effective, simple and personalised scripts. The staff's consistent approach helps to calm incidents and build the children's tolerance to change. As a result, incidents are significantly minimised.

The staff use social stories and symbols to help the children to understand about fire evacuation. Fire prevention equipment is all in place and checked by the local authority fire service. The staff and the children are familiar with fire safety procedures. However, the staff have not yet received fire training, although this has been booked to take place in May 2021.

Parents reported feeling confident that their children are safe at the school. Parents said that they are able to relax in the knowledge that children are safely supervised and well supported at all times. The children appeared relaxed and comfortable during their evenings, despite the presence of visitors. This indicates that children have developed a sense of security and familiarity in the short time that the provision has been open.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The purpose-built residential provision opened during the COVID-19 pandemic. The opening has been undertaken with methodical care and consideration to balance the children's needs with social distancing measures. The head of care and headteacher have worked together to continue to offer a reduced number of residential places throughout the first and second COVID-19 national lockdowns.

The head of residential care has the relevant experience for her role. She is qualified to level 4 and leads the staff team with diligence. Her commitment to enriching the children's experiences is evident in the quality of the care provided.

The staff said that they feel supported and have confidence in the head of care. A clear management structure sets out defined roles and promotes staff accountability.

The staff meet regularly as a team and prioritise the needs of the children. Open discussions about staff practice support a professional culture in which challenge is accepted.

There is a proactive and strong partnership with parents, who all provided positive feedback. One parent said, 'I could talk for hours. They have changed [his child's] life.' Another parent said, 'I have two boys who attend, and they think [the school] is amazing.'

There are two staff who have not had regular supervision or appraisal of their roles. This fails to ensure that staff have one-to-one support to reflect on their personal development and training needs.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. In particular, provide fire training for the staff. (NMS 7.1)
- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)

Recommendations

- The registered person should consider the use of surveillance equipment to ensure that it is proportionate and does not intrude unreasonably on children's privacy.

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: 2582228

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Simon Wall

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Deirdra Keating, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Mark Anderton, Social Care Inspector

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