

Linden Bridge School

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 part of a multi-academy trust, 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, a total of 35 children were using the residential provision. Each child stays for two nights during the school week.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 May 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

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 March 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Pupils make good progress and have positive experiences when they stay overnight at this school. The staff skilfully develop their relationships with pupils from the moment a boarding placement is agreed. Staff consult the pupil, their parents and any wider professional network to find out as much as possible about how they can help them to settle easily and well. One group of pupils gave scores of between 7 and 16 out of 10 for how they are cared for by the residential staff.

Pupils, parents and professionals say that pupils have fun when they stay overnight. They also stated that residential staff are adept at helping the pupils to develop their self-help skills and improving their ability to manage their emotions. A parent said: 'My child loves going out camping, and boarding has helped him to be able to sleep somewhere other than at home.'

Activities support pupils to have fun and develop interests. The activities are thoughtfully designed to link with the pupils' individual goals and learning targets. Children say that the activities and their ability to be with friends are the best thing about staying overnight at the school. While the pandemic has decreased the opportunities for outside activities, the staff make good choices to ensure that activities reflect children's interests, such as swimming, and support their independence skills, such as road safety.

The staff consistently support pupils to make individual progress, of which parents and pupils are rightly proud. One parent said that she was 'amazed' at what her child can do now compared to when he started at the school. Some things that her child does now are things that she thought he would never do.

The staff develop, and maintain, positive relationships with parents. Parents say that the residential staff support them well. A parent reported in an Ofsted questionnaire: 'Linden Bridge has been the most positive experience for my son and our family. The communication between school and families is fantastic and we very much feel part of their community.'

The pupils make their views known and the staff act on their views appropriately. Pupils often make suggestions about activities, meals or items they want in the residential houses. The staff generally consider and understand the importance of pupils' right to confidentiality and privacy. Nevertheless, this is not evident in all practice. For example, guidance to help one child at night with his bedtime routine remains on display when another child stays in the bedroom.

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

Leaders, managers and staff support pupils to be safe at the school and in the community. They continually consider improvements to their practice and this helps to create an open and questioning safeguarding culture within the school. Pupils say that they feel safe at the school. Parents and professionals speak highly of what the staff do to keep pupils safe and how they help pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. One professional noted how the staff quickly identified growing safeguarding concerns and assisted in preventing these concerns from escalating.

The safeguarding team has developed good systems to review, monitor and develop safeguarding practice. Actions taken about safeguarding concerns are recorded and regularly reviewed appropriately. Staff identify concerns early and refer these to the local authority early help services. This helps to prevent these concerns from escalating. In response to shortfalls identified at the last inspection, leaders and managers have reviewed the staff's safeguarding knowledge and any identified gaps have been met.

All residential staff place an emphasis on helping pupils to reduce concerning behaviours. This emphasis has led to few incidents occurring, no pupils going missing and, ultimately, happier children who successfully develop and engage in their learning.

Well-organised, up-to-date and clear risk assessments provide staff with good guidance on how to respond to individual pupils. The staff have a caring and sensitive approach to pupils experiencing difficulties. This approach helps pupils to manage their emotions more confidently and be able to talk about difficult issues more readily and clearly. One pupil has managed to be able to wait for an appropriate time and space to talk about personal issues, where previously he could not. This change is helping him to develop his understanding of when it is, and is not, right to explore personal issues safely.

The quality of recruitment practice is variable. One recruitment record for a member of staff who was employed to work directly with pupils demonstrated appropriate levels of checking safeguarding knowledge and understanding, from their application through to probation. However, the emphasis on checks of an auxiliary staff member's safeguarding knowledge was less well explored and had a narrow focus on how well they would carry out their work tasks.

One change to the recruitment processes has recently been made. Following a recruitment decision, the recruiters attend a challenge meeting with the school's human resources officer before a final decision is made. This is an extra layer of scrutiny to improve the quality of recruitment decisions. However, this addition does not demonstrate that an applicant's ability to safeguard is firmly embedded in all stages of recruitment and probation.

Health and safety are areas which the current leaders and managers are reviewing. They are rectifying any deficiency that they identify. For example, leaders recently completed a fire safety risk assessment and they are taking action to resolve any issues identified. Nevertheless, the staff do not know the school's CCTV policy well. When the CCTV footage was accessed, records were not made in accordance with the school's CCTV policy. There is no named person responsible for reviewing the policy, its practice and usage. This creates some vulnerability in the school's systems, which are designed to ensure the need to keep children safe does not unnecessarily impinge on their rights to privacy.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There have been several changes to the senior leadership team in the last two years. The organisation which operates the school has changed twice and this has changed the school's senior management oversight arrangements. Several management changes are occurring, and the school has had to cope with several staffing challenges brought on by the pandemic.

Throughout this period however, the leadership and management team of the boarding provision has remained stable. The residential management team has provided, and continues to provide, clear guidance and direction for the staff team.

The staff receive regular supervision and say that they can speak about any concerns that they have. The head of care's monitoring systems are well organised and result in any concerns identified being quickly rectified. No agency staff have been used recently and staff are deployed effectively to ensure that pupils' needs can be met and that they experience consistent care from staff who know them well.

Staff training is well considered and delivered. Leaders and managers use a variety of means to support staff development and training. However, not all the development opportunities are recorded, such as the staff having forest skills training during a team meeting. This is a missed opportunity to record all of the staff development which occurs.

Leaders and managers build very effective relationships with external professionals, who are complimentary about how the residential staff work with them. One professional said that he always receives good, succinct information about how the pupil he works with is doing when he stays overnight.

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

Recommendations

- The confidentiality and rights of children are appropriately respected.
- Leaders and managers should review whether an assessment of a person's safeguarding knowledge and practice is always completed at all stages of the school's recruitment and probation procedures.
- Leaders and managers should check that all staff know the school's CCTV policy.
- Leaders and managers should record all the development and training events which they provide for residential staff.

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

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Inspector

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector

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