

# Pontville Residential School

Pontville School, Black Moss Lane, Ormskirk, Lancashire L39 4TW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Pontville is an independent school that specialises in supporting pupils with autism spectrum disorder, and speech, language and communication needs between the ages of five to 19 years. The school is situated in a residential area on the outskirts of Ormskirk. The residential provision can accommodate a maximum of 12 children. At the time of the inspection, four children were staying for four nights a week, Monday to Friday, during term time only.

The head of care has been in post for six years and has a relevant qualification as required by the national minimum standards.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

### Inspection dates: 22, 23 and 24 November 2022

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>outstanding</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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:** 16 November 2021

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children come to stay and leave the residential provision in a planned way. Prior to children coming to stay, numerous multi-disciplinary meetings are held to ensure that the team can meet the child's needs. The child's voice and their parents' views are fully explored. The admission process is considerate of the child's pace and often includes staying for tea, going out on activities with other children, and spending time with staff.

Staff ensure that children are well prepared to move into independence or to an adult provision. Planning starts the year before children are due to leave school. This gives sufficient time to overcome any obstacles. For example, one child has been able to explore several colleges before finding the right one for him. Further to this, the head of care was able to challenge a local authority on the suitability of a new placement identified for a child. The child now has an identified adult provision that can support him well.

The promotion of children's independence is integral to their experience in the residential provision. All parents spoken to said that they had seen a marked improvement in their child's independence skills. Staff take every opportunity to encourage and support these important skills in a fun and relaxed way.

The residential accommodation is of a very high standard. It is well decorated and maintained. Children have enjoyed helping to paint the kitchen. The addition of a new interactive sensory room has helped children with their anxieties and independence skills, and aids their learning. For example, children who have anxieties in crowds or need help with budgeting skills, can take a walk around a virtual supermarket. Children can experience what it is like being on an escalator or on an aeroplane for the first time. Children like their living accommodation and enjoy the time spent with their friends.

Children receive excellent individualised care and support to meet their changing needs. They very much enjoy staying at the residential provision, often waiting with anticipation to return after the school holidays. One child said, 'If everywhere was as good as it is here, all children would be happy. We like our staff, and they like us, so why would we want anything different.' Another child said, 'I love going home but I miss my friends and the activities we do in residential. The holidays are too long sometimes, and I am always eager to return.'

The staff are successful in building positive relationships with the children. As a result, children make exceptional progress as they learn to trust the staff and listen to the advice and guidance that they are given. As a result, children are making excellent progress in their health, education, independence and social skills, and with their behaviours.

Leaders and staff are highly ambitious for children. This means that children make exceptional progress towards achieving their education targets. The individual team around the child meet regularly to ensure that each child has the support that they need. Therefore, the team can react quickly to any changes. When children experience a decline in their emotional health, appropriate resources are accessed. This is supporting children to manage their emotions more effectively.

The children have a clear and strong voice at the school and are encouraged to voice their views, wishes and feelings. Children are very positive about the range of activities on offer, such as going swimming, attending boxing lessons, and trips to the beach. Some children volunteer at a local charity shop and are learning skills for future employment. In addition to this, the school has extensive grounds with a farm area, a forestry school, sports pitches and a gym. Children can access these areas of an evening, and often complete assessments, qualifications and certificates in these areas. This supports their education, life skills and employment opportunities.

The health arrangements for the children are excellent. Staff are highly effective at monitoring children's health needs and at ensuring that they have the appropriate support. Direct work with children's parents and carers ensures that staff gain a detailed knowledge of the children's medical conditions and medication requirements. Medicines are administered safely and robust processes are in place.

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

The children said that they feel safe, and reported that they can identify a trusted adult to talk to if they have any concerns. Several children who spoke to the inspectors said that the residential provision is a safe space and that their privacy is respected.

Exemplary safeguarding practice means that children have a strong sense of safety and well-being. Child protection procedures are known and understood by all staff. Regular training in safeguarding topics, such as radicalisation, internet safety and self-injurious behaviour, mean that staff remain up to date with safeguarding concerns, such as child sexual exploitation and criminal exploitation. Additional opportunities for learning and reflection are provided through weekly safeguarding 'on-the-spot questions' to staff and seven-minute bulletins on safeguarding topics during staff meetings. In addition to this, the designated safeguarding lead keeps up to date with any learning in the wider sector, such as serious case reviews, and uses this to update safeguarding policies and procedures. This awareness and ongoing staff development help to keep children safe.

Children know how to keep themselves safe. They talk knowledgeably about bullying, the forms this can take, and what to do if they are worried about anything. During discussions with the children, one child said, 'This is the best place I have ever attended. It is like a second family.'

Staff implement clear rules that the children understand and follow. Behaviour in the residential provision is exceptionally good. Staffing levels are high. Therefore, children are very well supervised. Children feel safe and secure. As a result, children have not been held through physical intervention for their or others' safety, and they have not been reported missing or absent from the residential setting.

Detailed risk management plans help staff to minimise risk and give staff clear information on de-escalation techniques that have been successful. Staff demonstrate a clear understanding of the plans and follow them to minimise risk. Children are fully included in identifying risks and what works for them and what does not. Staff regularly review the risk assessments and update them as required.

There have not been any safeguarding concerns to report. However, staff are familiar with the procedures they should follow if they have concerns for a child's welfare.

Extremely positive relationships between the staff and the children are at the heart of behaviour management strategies. Staff support children to develop a sense of safety, protection and trust in the staff. Individual behaviour management plans focus on proactive early intervention and de-escalation.

There have not been any new staff since the last inspection. The physical environment is safe and secure. Any matters relating to safety and maintenance are promptly addressed by the maintenance team.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

Leaders and managers are inspirational, enthusiastic, and want the very best for the children. They encourage challenge and welcome new ideas and views from a range of people. They have an ethos that no problem is insurmountable or dream too high to reach.

Leaders and managers have high expectations of their staff to improve the lives of the children they are caring for. Leaders have created a dynamic and inspirational environment, where children can grow and gain an extensive range of new skills. Ultimately, children receive the highest quality of care and support. They enjoy a seamless journey through school, residence and into adulthood.

Members of staff said that they feel valued and receive support from the senior management team and the head of care. Staff described the leaders as approachable, accessible and fair. Staff said that they regularly consult with each other through handovers, team meetings, supervision and reviews of practice. One staff member said, 'We do things well, but we are always reflecting, researching and looking at how we can do this better.'

Leaders and managers are passionate and highly committed to ensuring that the children have a very positive experience in the residential provision. Children are cared for by a stable staff team and receive consistent, child-centred care. Staff have

substantial, relevant experience and are highly effective in their roles. Board members are knowledgeable and passionate, providing exceptional support and appropriate challenge to the team.

Leaders have a strong understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service, and quickly address identified shortfalls. They strive to continually improve the service by using research and highly effective monitoring systems. For example, the head of care was aware of the new National Minimum Standards that came into force in September 2022. Her development plan reflects the new standards. She has already started to implement some of the changes. For example, she has identified a new independent person to undertake monthly visits to the residential provision. The independent person is currently receiving training around what is required in their role and what the expectations of the leaders and managers are.

Staff work in partnership with parents and external professionals. This means that children receive a well-organised package of care and education. Parents are very positive about the care that their children receive. They say that the residential provision provides huge benefits for their children. Parents' comments include:

- 'They know [name of child] well. Therefore, can meet his needs, offer and give extra support when necessary.'
- 'He [name of child] is blossoming into a kind, caring and considerate young man.'
- 'He [name of child] adores the staff, and the level of care and support they provide is exceptional.'
- 'They [staff] really understand my son's needs and meet them exceptionally well. I wish there was a guaranteed service like this for the future adult service he will need.'

A key strength of the residential provision is the vast array of multi-agency work that is carried out to support the children and their families. Professionals are complimentary about the staff and the work that they do to keep families together and ensure that children have the right support. The head of care challenges others effectively when they feel that a child is not getting the support that they need.

No recommendations or points for improvement were made at the last inspection.

## **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:** SC061727

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Justine Sims

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspectors**

Pam Nuckley, Social Care Regulatory Inspector (lead)  
Sarah Oldham, Social Care Regulatory Inspector (team)

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