

Lonsdale School

Brittain Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire SG2 8UT

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Lonsdale School is a local authority maintained residential special school for pupils with a range of physical and neurological impairments. The school is co-located with a secondary school in Stevenage. The school is funded for 112 pupils aged from 3 to 18. At the time of this inspection, there were no pupils accessing the residential provision. Residential pupils can stay between Monday and Thursday for between one and four nights.

The head of the residential provision has been in post since January 2023.

The inspector only inspected the residential provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 15 and 16 March 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children, taking into account	requires improvement to be good
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How well children are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	requires improvement to be good
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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: 10 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

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

At the time of this inspection, the school was unable to offer the service outlined in its statement of purpose. There is only one member of staff in the residential provision: a recently appointed manager. Due to staffing shortages, children have not attended the residential provision since November 2022. Since the last inspection, the residential provision has only been open for nine non-consecutive days. The limited operation of the residential provision means that there is little evidence of the difference it has made to children since the last inspection.

Children are upset about the closure. They say that they have not been consulted on the closure of the residential provision or on the plans for the provision's future. School staff and the chair of governors agree that there has been a failure to consult effectively with the children regarding this. Consequently, children have not been enabled to contribute their views on this important decision that will have a significant impact on their lives.

Children who have stayed in residential said that they enjoyed it. They said that they enjoy the time they have with friends. However, children also said that the activities were limited and did not include trips out. While a range of school-based activities were available, there has been little opportunity for children to participate in activities in the community.

Children who have attended the provision said that this has increased their independence. They cite this as a factor that should be considered when weighing up the future of the service.

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

Children who have attended the provision said that they felt safe in the care of staff. They said that staff helped them to feel safe and that staff were always available to them. Children said that they could talk to staff if they had any worries.

There have been no safeguarding concerns arising during residential time since the last inspection. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has responded promptly to safeguarding concerns relating to residential pupils that have occurred outside of residential time. The DSL has chased the outcome of referrals, as necessary.

Only one member of staff is currently employed to work in the residential provision. Appropriate checks have been carried out. The DSLs have had the necessary training and updates to carry out their roles.

Behaviour has been good in residential because it has been managed well. There has only been one behavioural incident during residential time since the last inspection.

While the actions taken were clearly proportionate to the behaviour presented, the action was not recognised as a physical intervention, despite it being one. The failure to categorise the intervention means that some details are missing in records.

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

A new head of care has been appointed. She has experience of working in similar schools and has started to familiarise herself with the relevant national minimum standards.

Senior leaders have high expectations of the service and the children. The decision to close the residential was based on the view that it would not be possible to provide a high-quality service. However, although the residential provision is currently closed, it has operated at various times since the last inspection. During this period, the school's leadership and management staff have not fulfilled their responsibilities consistently to ensure that the national minimum standards are met.

Leaders and managers have not ensured that monitoring by an independent person has taken place. Governors have not appointed a person to carry out this role. Consequently, despite the provision being open overnight on nine occasions since the last inspection, no independent person visits have taken place.

Leaders and managers have not identified discrepancies in the reports to the governors. Governors have not identified these discrepancies when reviewing the records. This has contributed to outdated information remaining in safeguarding policies.

Managers understand the needs of the children. They are aware of the progress that children can make.

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's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 2.4)
- The governing body, trustees or proprietor of the school appoint a representative who is independent of the leadership and management of the school to visit the residential provision six times, spread evenly, over the course of a school year and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. The representative is vetted in line with the school's safe recruitment policy, in accordance with the safer recruitment requirements set out in 'Keeping children safe in education 2022' and has the skills and authority to carry out this role effectively. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 3.1)
- Monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include: conversations with children, the senior management team and staff; conversations with social workers where relevant; conversations with parents/carers where relevant; checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, consequences, bullying, restraint (including restrictive interventions), risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children, including in relation to residential provision; evaluation of the quality of the provision and effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded; and assessment of the suitability and physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the residential provision and the external environment. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 3.2)
- Written reports of all monitoring visits are provided to the headteacher (or school equivalent) and where applicable the governing body, trust or proprietor. Reports are also provided to each member of that body (or the appropriate committee of that body) within two weeks and as written by the visitor without amendment or summary. The governing body, trustees or proprietor of the school should record a formal response to each written report. Monitoring reports and formal responses should be retained by the school and made available during an inspection and, on request, shared with any placing authorities and with the local authority where the school is located. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 3.3)
- Children are supported to participate in important decisions about their lives, using means appropriate to their level of understanding and provided with support where they have additional communication needs. The school does not assume that any child is unable to communicate their views. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 18.3)

- There are sufficient competent staff deployed appropriately, both as a staff group and on individual shifts, to fulfil the school's statement of purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the school. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', 25.1)

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that children participate in community-based activities during residential time.
- School leaders should ensure that policies and procedures are up to date.
- School leaders should ensure that any use of physical interventions is correctly categorised and recorded.

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: SC056425

Headteacher: Annemari Ottridge

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Inspector

Ashley Hinson, Social Care Inspector

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