

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 seven children. At the time of the inspection, five children were staying for four nights a week, Monday to Friday, during term time only.

The head of care has been in post for seven 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: 18, 19 and 20 December 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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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: 22 November 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are thriving and happy because of the high-quality care and support that they receive. Each child receives a bespoke package of care that meets their diverse needs and this is helping them to make excellent progress across all areas of their development. A child said, 'I never thought I would be able to cope on my own, but I now believe that I can do this when I leave here.'

Staff spend time with children and know them well. There is a strong, positive culture in the staffing team. Staff are warm, nurturing and caring towards the children. Children interact with staff enthusiastically and spent time talking to them about their day. Children have a strong sense of belonging and are happy staying in the residence. A parent said, 'He [child] is making friends with his peers. He gets on well with them, they have all formed a lovely bond.'

Transition planning into and out of the residence is highly effective. Staff and leaders ensure that all transitions are carefully planned and that children are sensitively welcomed to the home and supported to move on. Leaders and staff advocate on behalf of children and ensure that their individual needs are appropriately identified and assessed. As a result, one child will now have access to a communication device to support him when he is working in the community.

The staff, managers, leaders, clinical team and other professionals work collaboratively to ensure that highly effective planning takes place. Each child has an individual care and support plan that links with their educational and health care plan and the actions noted in these. The children's support plans are regularly reviewed in consultation with the clinical team and education staff. This helps staff to set clear, achievable targets for children and they can monitor the progress children are making.

Parents and carers are extremely complimentary about the service and how the staff have helped their children to achieve their individual goals. This includes improving their anxieties and building their confidence and self-esteem.

Children said that they are fully consulted on all aspects of their care and the activities provided. They said that the activities are great fun. Children can invite their school friends into the setting, and their friends can stay for tea and/or join in an activity. Children are supported to take part in extracurricular activities, they are also supported to gain valuable work experience. One child is a volunteer in a charity shop and a café. This is helping him to develop his social skills, independence, life skills and overall confidence.

Children's attainment and enjoyment in school has improved significantly because of coming to stay at the residential provision. This is because they are benefiting greatly from the seamless 24-hour curriculum. Children can access areas of the school in the

evenings, such as the gym, music room and the interactive sensory room. This gives the children additional opportunities to practice and to have fun.

A key strength of the residential setting is the progress that children are making with regards to their emotional health and well-being. Children are able to explore their identity freely in a supportive and sensitive environment. Events, such as the 'Rainbow flag award', and attending local youth groups help children to understand and accept themselves and others.

Children are much more aware of the needs of others and show compassion for each other and for those who are in need. Recently, a child has been comforting another child who has gone through a similar life changing event. A parent said, 'Before coming to this school, my child struggled to show empathy towards others but he can now recognise when others need reassurance or support. This is amazing.' In addition, children have donated toys to a primary school that was destroyed by a fire.

Children are prepared for the future. Children are encouraged to complete household chores such as making their bed, keeping their bedroom tidy and, as they get older, preparing meals and snacks, and understanding financial aspects, such as paying bills. As a result, one child who professionals initially thought would need a full support package from adult services, has successfully moved into a semi-independent provision and is doing extremely well.

Partnership working with parents and carers is exceptional. Parents said that they know they can pick up the phone and someone will be there to support them and their child.

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

Children are protected from harm. Children said that they feel safe and secure in the residential provision. Parents say that the staff know their children extremely well and they are confident in the abilities of staff to keep their children safe. Children feel safe to talk to staff about any issues that are concerning them. For example, when they are struggling with their anxieties. Children know that the staff will listen to them and help them to get the support that they need.

Clinical leads, health professionals and parents speak highly of the residential provision and the action that staff take to keep children safe. There is an experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL) in post. She is proactive, resourceful, and innovative in her approach to safeguarding. She is supported by several deputy DSL's and shares her in-depth knowledge with other providers/schools.

Safeguarding is central to everything that the school and the residential staff do. Staff are trained in safeguarding, understanding child exploitation, e-safety, radicalisation and keeping children safe in education. These are refreshed regularly. In addition, the head of care keeps staff updated during safeguarding briefings in weekly staff meetings. This means that staff are aware of any changes to legislation and that they have the skills and knowledge to observe and identify any potential

concerns. Staff follow strict protocols and they are clear on their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, they take the right action to support children.

Children do not go missing from the residential provision. There have been no serious incidents or safeguarding concerns since the last inspection. Staff use their positive relationships with the children to de-escalate situations effectively. This means that children have a strong sense of safety and well-being.

Children's residential plans are child-focused and identify creative ways that children wish to be supported should they become distressed. The strategies are maintained and reviewed by all key people involved in the children's care across the school and the residential setting.

Staff understand children's experiences and use a trauma-informed approach to support the children. Staff are very aware of the individual vulnerabilities of the children that they care for and help children to understand safety issues and how to keep themselves safe. Furthermore, parents are also provided with tools and resources to support the management of online safety when the children are at home. This collaborative working is helping to keep children safe.

Children's behaviour is excellent. Staff have very positive relationships with the children, and this is supported by the clear rules and boundaries that are consistently applied. As result, positive behaviour is holistically promoted between the residential staff and school staff. This ensures that there is a strong sense of working together as one to support children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders, managers and staff are aspirational, confident and ambitious for children. They want every child to achieve to the best of their ability.

There is a board that has external oversight of the residential provision. The Regional Director of the board is ambitious for the setting. He meets regularly with the senior leadership team to discuss the quality of care and safeguarding practice. Different members of the board spend time in the school and in the residence, getting to know the staff and the children. Monitoring reports by the board are informative and give a critical oversight of all areas of practice.

Leaders and managers are aware of the strengths of the residential provision and the areas for development. Staff and children are consulted well on what they would like to see happen; their views are carefully considered and, where possible, acted on, such as having school friends staying for tea.

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

Parent's and children's views of the service are overwhelmingly positive. Children said that they enjoyed spending time with their friends, that they feel calmer because they come here, and that they enjoy the activities. One child said, 'I really missed being here in the summer holidays. I could not wait to come back.' Parents said that they are 'amazed' at the progress that their children are making and that they cannot thank the staff enough for all that they do for them and their children. They say that the residential provision provides huge benefits for their children.

Staff receive regular supervisions. They also have their performance appraised to develop their practice and skills further. Staff are encouraged to share knowledge and positive practice at team meetings. The staff are highly experienced, qualified and most have worked in the residential provision for a long time. This means that the children have been provided with stability and continuity of care.

The independent visitor's report provides a detailed evaluation of the quality of care in the residential provision. The independent visitor makes appropriate recommendations to drive improvements in the care and support provided to children. They spend quality time with the children and speaks at length with them about their experiences of the residential provision. As part of their visits, they regularly consult with the head of care, residential staff, health professionals and parents.

There were no breaches of the national minimum standards or points of improvement made at this 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

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Inspectors

Pam Nuckley, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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