



Lonsdale School

Inspection Report

Unique Reference Number 117679
LEA HERTFORDSHIRE LEA
Inspection number 280130
Inspection dates 3 May 2006 to 4 May 2006
Reporting inspector Mr. Steven Parker LI

This inspection was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Special	School address	Webb Rise
School category	Community		SG1 5QU
Age range of pupils	3 to 18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Telephone number	01438 357631
Number on roll	80	Fax number	01438 742583
Appropriate authority	The governing body	Chair of governors	Mr. David Evans
Date of previous inspection	12 June 2000	Headteacher	Mrs. Maria White

Age group 3 to 18	Inspection dates 3 May 2006 - 4 May 2006	Inspection number 280130
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

Lonsdale is an all-age special school for pupils with physical and neurological impairments, some of whom have additional sensory difficulties. It has an integral residential department that provides two nights a week residential experience for around two thirds of its pupils. Pupils come from the whole of Hertfordshire and their backgrounds reflect the diversity of this community. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds or who have English as an additional language. There are nearly twice as many boys as girls.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Lonsdale is a good school, where excellent care, guidance and support enable pupils to become confident, independent young people whose attitudes and behaviour are exemplary. The quality of teaching is good. This helps pupils to make good progress, from a solid start in the Foundation Stage, and achieve well. Many pupils gain creditable passes in GCSE and other certificated courses by the time they leave, although progress slows a little towards the end of Key Stage 4 and into post-16. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils ensure that pupils feel safe and secure, able to develop a sensible approach to staying healthy and encouraged to take a full part in the school community. Attendance is, as a result, unusually high for such a school. The curriculum is satisfactory overall. Good provision is made for supporting the development of pupils' communication and physical capabilities, with the very well planned support of a committed team of therapists and medical staff. The school recognises that more opportunities need to be developed for older pupils to participate in vocational and academic courses, work experience and wider involvement in a mainstream educational environment in other schools and colleges. This is a major reason for the post-16 provision being less effective. The headteacher's outstanding leadership has ensured that the school has continued to improve. She has been much helped in this work by her leadership team colleagues and a good governing body which strikes the right balance between support and challenge. The school knows itself well through comprehensive monitoring activity, and inspectors agree with nearly all its judgements about effectiveness. It does not, however, set whole-school targets across a range of outcomes against which progress can be regularly evaluated. Lonsdale has nurtured and sustained highly successful partnerships with parents and other services and agencies. It has strong capacity for further improvement and provides good value for money.

Effectiveness and efficiency of the sixth form

Grade: 3

Effectiveness and efficiency of boarding provision

Grade: 2

Boarding provision is good and meets the National Minimum Standards. This impacts positively on pupils' personal development in particular. The school provides a high standard of care for the pupils who board, a judgement confirmed by the most recent Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The school is already working to meet the few recommendations made in this report. School and residential staff work well in partnership and both groups contribute effectively to pupils' targets in their individual education plans (IEPs) and annual reviews. Pupils' homework set by teachers is well supported by residential staff and information and communication technology (ICT) resources have been extended so that pupils now have access to laptops. Assessment of pupils' personal needs and development is good. Pupils' achievements are soon to be recognised through the residence's newly developed award. There are

good opportunities to share information both formally and informally with teaching and therapy staff, and care staff know pupils and their needs very well.

What the school should do to improve further

- Extend the range of opportunities at Key Stage 4 and post-16 for work experience, vocational and academic courses and provide greater opportunities for students to learn in the community. - Establish a system for setting and evaluating progress against whole school targets.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Most pupils achieve well. Standards are weak when children first enter the school, because of their particular impairments, but they get off to a good start at the nursery stage and into Key Stage 1. They successfully learn the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT, so that they can benefit from all the other opportunities they are offered across the curriculum. Their improvements in communication skills and personal development are particularly impressive as a result of the highly focused attention they receive in these aspects of their learning. Pupils' progress in their academic skills continues to be good right through Key Stages 2 and 3 and pupils with different needs all achieve equally well. This progress slows a little towards the end of Key Stage 4 and into post-16 because of some inadequacies in the curriculum. Pupils do, however, achieve some good passes in a range of GCSE and other courses by the age of 16. The achievement of post-16 pupils is satisfactory overall. Staff are ambitious for pupils to succeed and set challenging but achievable targets for their IEPs, usually in negotiation with older pupils. All targets are properly informed by teachers' good knowledge of how well pupils are doing.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Pupils' personal development is good and the school recognises the importance helping pupils to improve their self-esteem, doing so at every opportunity. By the time they leave school, pupils have become confident young adults able to express an opinion. They are very happy in school and enjoy lessons immensely. They behave exceptionally well in lessons and around the school and their attitudes are outstanding. They are highly appreciative of the support they are given, but are quite capable of expressing how things can be made even better. Their attendance at school is excellent, despite many having complex medical conditions. Pupils get on exceptionally well with one another. They feel safe, and most pupils understand the importance of making healthy choices. Pupils make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. They readily embrace opportunities to take responsibility, for instance as representatives on the school council, where they are involved actively in making decisions, and in fundraising. The good progress that they make in developing basic

skills and the development of a wide range of personal qualities ensure their sound economic understanding. The development of personal and social skills, which is very well supported in school, is not always able to be reinforced in the wider community, and the range of opportunities for this has typically been limited because of the challenge of meeting pupils' particular needs in other settings. The headteacher is, however, committed to improving this situation wherever possible, whilst recognising the continuing constraints.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The quality of teaching and learning is good overall and sometimes excellent. There is very good teamwork between teachers, their learning support assistants and a large team of other professionals, who all work in very effective partnership to support pupils' successful learning and manage their diverse physical, sensory and emotional needs. The school is particularly successful at meeting pupils' communication needs. Good quality materials and support enable pupils to contribute very effectively to lessons through the use of alternative ways of communicating. These include signs, symbols and electronic aids. Computers are used well to enable pupils to access activities, despite their often profound physical difficulties. The school maintains good records showing how well pupils learn and the progress they make over time. In the majority of lessons, effective planning takes full account of this information. Right across the school, relationships between staff and pupils are exemplary, and pupils' contributions to lessons are highly valued, because all staff take every opportunity to recognise and celebrate their efforts and successes.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Opportunities provided for pupils to learn and make progress are satisfactory overall, and the school allocates pupils to different groups very sensitively to ensure that the level of challenge is appropriate. The range of subjects on offer in Key Stages 1 to 4 meets national requirements and generally meets pupils' needs. The curriculum for Nursery pupils is planned well in relation to national guidance. Reception children are taught alongside Years 1 and 2 and their needs are met effectively. Whilst planning for these children is based upon the National Curriculum, its focus in the Foundation Stage does not take sufficient account of the need to provide opportunities for children to plan and initiate activities themselves through play activity. The range of qualifications open to pupils at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory and matches the needs of learners. The course content for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is good, although insufficient time is allocated to this important subject on the timetable. The number of courses offered has been extended since the last inspection. Some vocational courses are available, but the school is looking to extend these opportunities, using community resources. However, at both Key Stage 4 and

post-16 there is little scope for pupils to take courses at college and very little work experience has been arranged. This is partly due to the complex nature of pupils' needs and the limited availability of placements in the community. A wealth of enrichment opportunities arranged by the school contributes well to pupils' academic achievement and personal development. There is a good range of activities for pupils to take part in at lunchtimes, in the residential department, where take up of places is high, and when pupils go off site for weekends away.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Pupils are exceptionally well cared for. High levels of dedication by staff in meeting pupils' personal needs are very apparent. Staff knowledge of pupils' needs is highly detailed and thorough. A particular and exceptional strength is the way in which staff, including those in the residential department, provide high quality personal support and guidance for pupils. This is borne out by their excellent medical and physical care, their very good positioning in lessons and the way pupils are able to access learning through a range of different approaches. Pupils trust the staff implicitly to provide the emotional and physical support that they need. All adults encourage pupils to be as independent as possible and guide them effectively in making decisions for themselves. The school is highly effective in promoting very positive behaviour and in creating an atmosphere in which pupils care for one another. Arrangements for protecting pupils and ensuring their health and safety are secure. The school works very closely with therapists and outside agencies to the benefit of individual pupils. The school also provides parents with valuable and much appreciated support.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

Grade for sixth form: 3

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher's outstanding leadership by example, through her highly child-centred approach, has ensured that the school has continued to improve and innovate. She is well supported by her multi-professional leadership team, who share management responsibilities very effectively across all aspects of the school's work. This has meant that many improvements have been effected since the last inspection, for example to accommodation and the outside environment, the curriculum and partnership working with therapists and other agencies. Although some significant progress has been made in relation to the post-16 recommendations, there remain a number of issues still to deal with, most notably in the curriculum. Thoughtful approaches to recruitment, induction and training, together with a supportive model of performance management for all staff, all recognised in the continuing award of Investors in People status, have resulted in the development of a highly effective multi-professional team. This ensures that the school has a strong capacity to improve further. Day-to-day organisation is very efficient, and careful

management of the budget ensures that learning resources continue to improve. The school has accumulated a significant planned reserve which will enable it to enhance provision further, most especially for developing older pupils' independence skills. Whilst the school fully achieves its aim to be an inclusive community, it recognises the need to continue to explore ways in which pupils can practise and enhance their skills, capabilities and confidence in the wider community. Governors provide good support and have become much more effective at holding the school to account through asking challenging questions. They are well informed by a regular stream of information about the school. This is because managers have a clear picture of many aspects of the school's work, from the views of parents, pupils and other stakeholders, and through comprehensive monitoring and evaluative use of the information they gather in this way. There is, however, a statutory requirement to set whole-school targets against which overall performance can be measured. The school does not do this. It does, however, have a well structured approach to planning improvements on the basis of its self-knowledge.

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Inspection judgements

<i>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate</i>	School Overall	16-19
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	3
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	2	3
The quality and standards in foundation stage	2	NA
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	Yes	Yes
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	2
The behaviour of learners	1	1
The attendance of learners	1	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3	3
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1	2
How effectively performance is monitored, evaluated and improved to meet challenging targets, through quality assurance and self-review	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	2	2
How effectively and efficiently resources are deployed to achieve value for money	2	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	2
The adequacy and suitability of staff to ensure that learners are protected	Yes	Yes

The extent to which schools enable learners to be healthy	
Learners are encouraged and enabled to eat and drink healthily	Yes
Learners are encouraged and enabled to take regular exercise	Yes
Learners are discouraged from smoking and substance abuse	Yes
Learners are educated about sexual health	Yes
The extent to which providers ensure that learners stay safe	
Procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements	Yes
Risk assessment procedures and related staff training are in place	Yes
Action is taken to reduce anti-social behaviour, such as bullying and racism	Yes
Learners are taught about key risks and how to deal with them	Yes
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution	
Learners are helped to develop stable, positive relationships	Yes
Learners, individually and collectively, participate in making decisions that affect them	Yes
Learners are encouraged to initiate, participate in and manage activities in school and the wider community	Yes
The extent to which schools enable learners to achieve economic well-being	
There is provision to promote learners' basic skills	Yes
Learners have opportunities to develop enterprise skills and work in teams	Yes
Careers education and guidance is provided to all learners in key stage 3 and 4 and the sixth form	Yes
Education for all learners aged 14–19 provides an understanding of employment and the economy	Yes

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

As you know, I visited your school recently with a colleague to find out how well you are getting on. Thank you for making us feel so welcome, showing us around your school, including the residential department, and talking to us so confidently. It was particularly helpful to hear about how much you appreciate the very good support and encouragement you get from all the adults on the staff. There were lots of things we liked about your school: - It is a very happy place. - You enjoy it so much that your attendance is excellent. - You behave extremely well and are very kind to each other. - Your teachers are good at planning work that is just right for your needs, so that you learn successfully and make good progress. - Your headteacher runs the school very well and helps all the different staff to work really well together. - Your parents and carers are right to think that you go to a good school. You have every reason to be proud of it. We thought your school could be even better if: - Older pupils had more opportunities to study practical subjects, go on work experience and attend mainstream schools and colleges. - Better ways were found to show how well the school is doing.