

Lonsdale School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	117679
Local Authority	Hertfordshire
Inspection number	326661
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Margaret Goodchild

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

The registered childcare, managed by the governing body, was inspected under section 49 of the Childcare Act 2006.

Boarding provision
Social care URN
Social care inspector

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	3–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	81
Sixth form	16
Government funded early education provision for children aged 3 to the end of the EYFS	0
Childcare provision for children aged 0 to 3 years	0
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Helen Hambury
Headteacher	Mrs Maria White

Age group	3–18
Inspection dates	6–7 May 2009
Inspection number	326661

Date of previous school inspection	3 May 2006
Date of previous funded early education inspection	Not previously inspected
Date of previous childcare inspection	Not previously inspected
School address	Webb Rise Stevenage Hertfordshire SG1 5QU
Telephone number	01438 357631
Fax number	01438 742583

Age group	3-18
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Inspection dates	6-7 May 2009
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two additional inspectors.

Description of the school

This is a school for pupils with statements of special educational needs for physical disabilities and neurological impairment, some of whom have additional sensory difficulties. Pupils come from the whole of Hertfordshire and their backgrounds reflect the social diversity of this county. There are very few pupils of minority ethnic heritage and a small number of these pupils are currently learning English as an additional language. The school has an integral boarding department with 26 beds, enabling over 50 pupils from Year 6 onwards to stay for two nights a week. The school refers to this provision as its 'residential department' because it feels it offers a distinct type of residential opportunity that does not come under the broader auspices of 'boarding.' The Early Years Foundation Stage is made up of two children in the Nursery Year and one in the Reception Year. Lonsdale is due to relocate to new premises in 2012 as part of the Building Schools for the Future initiative when it will share a site with a local secondary school. The two schools have formed a federation to support the planning process.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

This is a good school, where outstanding care, guidance and support enable pupils to become confident, independent young people with extremely positive attitudes. Parents express a high level of satisfaction with the school's work. One parent, whose comments were typical of many, said, 'Lonsdale is a great school, like an extended family with happy pupils and dedicated, hardworking staff'. Pupils are equally pleased with their school. They say that the school is 'brilliant', that the staff 'are nice' and 'everyone is friendly', and they appreciate in particular the way the school recognises and responds to everyone's different needs.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants work very closely with a range of visiting therapists and on-site nursing staff to support pupils' individual physical and medical needs. Pupils' personal development is outstanding, and their exceptional enjoyment of school is reflected in their outstanding behaviour and attendance. The important personal qualities that pupils develop and their good progress in acquiring basic skills ensure that they are well prepared for the future.

Pupils' difficulties mean that most reach standards that are very low compared with their mainstream peers. Nevertheless, pupils achieve well in response to good teaching and a curriculum that reflects their learning needs. They make satisfactory progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage and all groups of pupils make good progress from Key Stage 1 onwards.

The school has worked intensively to improve its assessment systems and now has more accurate assessment data from which to track pupils' progress, set targets and evaluate its effectiveness. Senior leaders recognise, however, that there is still variation in the accuracy of teachers' assessment and more work is planned to ensure teachers know how to assess accurately. Whilst good overall, there is also some variation in the quality of teaching, particularly in the way teachers plan their lessons.

The school is led and managed well. The headteacher fulfils her role very well and senior leaders are highly reflective. There is a strong commitment to making the school as good as possible, and improvement since the last inspection has been good. The school is well placed to improve further. Senior leaders gather a great deal of information about the school's work and individual teachers receive very detailed guidance about how to improve their lessons. However, this process and information from rigorous monitoring is not always used as sharply or strategically as it could be to ensure all staff are focused on what they need to do to help make the school outstanding. The school has not been able to recruit a manager with specialist knowledge of primary and early years' education. The result of this is particularly evident in the Early Years Foundation Stage, where the current arrangements are not entirely effective. Provision for children in the Nursery and Reception Years is, therefore, only satisfactory whereas that in the rest of the school is good with some outstanding features.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

The sixth form has a college atmosphere which supports students very well as they make the transition towards adulthood. Personal development is outstanding and students are cared for exceptionally well. They grow in self-awareness and independence in response to increased opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. The staff plan and discuss individual programmes leading towards qualifications with the students to ensure they are relevant to

their interests and needs. Key skills are taught on an individualised basis and students achieve well. Teaching is good overall and at times outstanding. The Young Enterprise initiative is a strength, providing students with the opportunity to run a range of projects and develop important skills. Students have some opportunities to undertake work experience but the school has had difficulty finding enough suitable placements. This limits the range of opportunities open to some students who would benefit from finding out more about the world of work at first hand.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Grade: 3

Long-term planning reflects Early Years Foundation Stage guidance well. Short-term plans focus well on literacy and numeracy but activities in other areas are not always planned as well as they could be to promote the next steps in children's learning. The school is at an early stage in bringing its assessment arrangements in line with Early Years Foundation Stage guidance. Some observation takes place but it is not yet systematic enough or consistently recorded to form a coherent record of each child's progress. Teaching is satisfactory and children are making sound progress in their communication skills and in developing skills such as counting and finding information in pictures. They are well cared for and their personal and social development is good. Children have some access to an outdoor area but the use of this is not an integral part of curriculum planning. They do, however, have good opportunities to go on visits, for example, to a farm or the zoo. Partnership with parents is satisfactory. Staff conduct home visits before children are admitted and home-school diaries keep parents informed about what their children have been doing. Parents are less well informed about how they might support their children's development at home. Leadership and management are satisfactory: the teacher who oversees the Early Years Foundation Stage has begun to develop her awareness of how to improve provision. This is made more difficult, however, because the Nursery class is some distance from her own Key Stage 1 classroom and she sees the children for only part of their time in school.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The school makes outstanding provision for pupils to spend part of their week in residence. Pupils speak very highly of this experience and say that they love staying overnight and mixing with their friends and the care staff. The residential provision is extremely well organised and is integral to the work of the school. The standard of care is exceptionally high, and school and residential staff work very well together. Time spent in residence makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development and to promoting their independence skills. The school has made good improvement in addressing the recommendations made during the inspection of the residential provision in October 2008, when most aspects of provision were found to be outstanding.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage, particularly through strengthening leadership and management and establishing a comprehensive assessment system.
- Use the findings from monitoring even more strategically, especially to bring all teaching up to at least a good level and ensure greater consistency in lesson planning and assessment.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

After a satisfactory start in the Early Years Foundation Stage, children make good progress as they move through the school to meet challenging targets. The outstanding provision of electronic and other communication aids supports the development of pupils' communication skills exceptionally well. More able pupils make very good progress in reading and the use of symbols supports those who are not able to record their ideas in writing. In mathematics, there is good emphasis on applied skills so that pupils learn, for example, about how to solve problems and manage their money. Information and communication technology (ICT) equipment has been upgraded and supports pupils' learning well with the potential for this to become even better as every pupil will soon have a computer for their personal use. Pupils have good opportunities to gain accredited qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4 and at post-16, and they move on to a broad range of college placements when they leave.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils very much enjoy coming to school. They are happy and say that they feel very safe. They readily engage in physical activities and show a high level of awareness of healthy living. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils develop an exceptionally mature attitude and show sensitive understanding for the wide ranging needs of their peers. Pupils contribute well to the community as a whole and their input to the school community is outstanding. They know that their views are listened to, for example, as members of the school council and through their involvement in interviewing prospective members of staff. The school has gained the Eco Silver Award and the active involvement of the Green Beans group in promoting ecological awareness in the school and the locality meant that the school gained a local 'So Green' award; it is working towards the Green Flag award. Fundraising by classes has extended from local to national charities, and pupils have in the past collected money for children overseas though there are currently no international links.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

The inspection confirms the school's own judgement that teaching is good overall, with a significant amount of outstanding teaching but some that is only satisfactory. Teachers use a range of technological aids to very good effect to support the development of pupils' communication skills. Teachers generally have high expectations and use practical resources and pictures well to make learning accessible. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to pupils' learning, and in the best lessons teachers and teaching assistants work together exceptionally well. Planning and accuracy of assessment is good in most lessons but on those occasions where teaching is only satisfactory, work is not always matched as closely as it should be to the needs of individual pupils so that tasks are either a bit too easy or too difficult for some pupils. This is usually because planning does not include sharply defined learning objectives linked to the next steps for individual pupils. Homework makes a good contribution to pupils' learning.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The curriculum is matched well to pupils' learning needs and interests, especially through the careful grouping of pupils. The school has made good progress in adapting learning opportunities more closely to the needs of individual pupils and making activities more relevant. Communication skills are promoted exceptionally well and provision for literary, numeracy and ICT is good. The curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 is increasingly topic based, and the more flexible nature of the curriculum means that issues arising can be incorporated into each pupil's individual programme. Outstanding emphasis is placed on developing skills for independent living. Experiences during the time pupils spend in residence contribute significantly to the outstanding personal, social and health education programme. The school has gained Active Mark and Sports Mark awards and is closely involved with local schools in a sports partnership as well as having its own specialist sports co-ordinator. Through this, some pupils have become junior sports leaders and young sports coaches, and organised activities in other schools. The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory and that in the sixth form is good. The school is working to extend the range of opportunities for pupils to take part in work experience and to develop their vocational skills at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

Pupils' excellent relationships with the staff, together with the high standards of pastoral care, make their experience of school exceptionally positive. Staff have a very thorough knowledge of each pupil's needs and provide excellent medical and physical care. The provision of a visiting counsellor supports pupils with emotional difficulties very well and extends the school's own support to families. The school is highly effective in promoting outstanding behaviour and creating an atmosphere where individuals are valued. Rigorous systems ensure pupils are protected and safeguarded. Pupils' personal development is monitored extremely thoroughly; the tracking of their academic progress has improved recently and is good. Wherever possible, pupils are involved in reviewing their own progress and in target setting. Partnership with parents is good: they are kept well informed and the school is working to involve them even more closely in their children's development.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

There have been staffing changes in the senior leadership team since the last inspection which have slowed development slightly, but members of the senior leadership team work together very well. Expectations are very high and monitoring is extremely rigorous. The school has accurately identified the need to use the information gained from monitoring to help further improve teaching and assessment. Subject leadership is good and staff at all levels are becoming increasingly involved in data analysis. Self-evaluation is good and the school is well placed to improve further. The school has outstanding links with other educational establishments and is working very closely and productively with a local secondary school in preparation for the new school as part of the Building Schools for the Future initiative. Community cohesion is good: the school community is extremely harmonious, pupils are valued as individuals regardless of their background, and learn to respect one another. The school has, rightly, identified the

need to extend its involvement with the wider community and to develop global links. Governors provide good support and challenge to the school. A number of governors bring valuable expertise to their roles and the governing body is playing an important strategic role in planning for the new school.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	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	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

How effective is the provision in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS?	3	
How well do children in the EYFS achieve?	3	
How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the children in the EYFS?	2	
How effectively are children in the EYFS helped to learn and develop?	3	
How effectively is the welfare of children in the EYFS promoted?	2	
How effectively is provision in the EYFS led and managed?	3	

Achievement and standards

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

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

Personal development and well-being

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

The quality of provision

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

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B**Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

8 May 2009

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Lonsdale School, Stevenage, SG1 5QU

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school and for taking time to tell us what it is like to be a pupil at Lonsdale. You told us that the school is 'brilliant' and many of your parents wrote to say how pleased they are with the way it helps you. We enjoyed our visit very much and now I am writing to tell you what we found out about your school.

You go to a good school that does some things really well. We liked a lot of things about your school and here are some of the best things about it:

- Your school is a happy place where the staff care for you extremely well and make sure you get the support you need.
- Your time at the school helps you to become confident and independent.
- You have excellent attitudes to school and behave extremely well.
- You are kind and thoughtful to one another and eager to take on responsibility, for instance on the school council and as members of the Green Beans group.
- Those of you who stay overnight enjoy it very much and get a lot from it.
- You make good progress in your lessons and work hard.
- Your headteacher runs the school very well and she wants to make it as good as possible for you.

We have asked the headteacher and the other teachers to:

- improve the Early Years Foundation Stage so that children there make as much progress as they do in the rest of the school
- use what they know about the school and teaching even more carefully to make sure all lessons are planned equally well to help you learn as much as you can

We hope you continue to enjoy your time at Lonsdale and wish you all the best in the future.

Yours faithfully

Ms M J Goodchild

Lead inspector