

# 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 who have a range of physical and neurological impairments. The school moved to new, purpose-built premises in January 2013 and is co-located with a secondary school in Stevenage. The school is funded for 85 places with up to 23 residential pupils, aged 11 to 18 years, at any one time. Groups of residential pupils stay each week, between Monday and Thursday, from one to four nights. The focus of the residential provision is to develop the pupils' learning and independence. The last inspection of the residential provision took place in November 2016.

**Inspection dates:** 14 to 16 November 2017

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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:** 29 November 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- The children make excellent progress through the support that they receive.
- Staff provide high-quality care which is tailored to the individual needs of the children.
- Children's knowledge and skills are enhanced by the '24-hour curriculum' approach that the staff take in the residential provision.
- The children benefit from strong, positive relationships with a staff team that is child-focused.
- Day-to-day practice is excellent. Feedback from professionals highlights the quality of care.
- Staff work meticulously to identify ways to improve outcomes for the children.
- The leadership of the provision is ambitious and confident. Managers have a clear understanding of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the service.
- Safeguarding and safe-care practice is woven throughout the provision. As a result, these potentially vulnerable children are kept safe.
- Feedback from families highlights positive outcomes achieved for their children.
- The children benefit from access to a wide range of activities, most of which they would not be able to participate in if they did not attend this facility.
- Independent living skills are critically important for these children. Staff make every effort to provide opportunities for them to develop and improve these skills.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Managers do not have a robust process to ensure that they know that all relevant staff have read children's care plans and risk assessments.
- The choices that the children make to participate or not in activities offered after the evening meal are not recorded. This information would help with planning.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that all staff read and sign placement plans when they are working with the children.
- Ensure that options and choices of activities offered to children are clearly recorded and age-appropriate. Consider the reasons why children choose not to participate.

## Inspection judgements

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

This outstanding residential provision is central to the school's efforts to improve outcomes for children. Families value highly the input that their children receive at the school and its impact on their lives. One parent commented, 'This is a wonderful and unique environment for children with special needs to grow up in. After an initial year of personalised teaching and therapy, originally as a day student, our child now attends the residential provision for two nights a week. Since they have been attending, our friends and family have seen them grow from quite a dependent child into a self-confident more independent young adult. Our child has exceeded all our expectations. The establishment have truly untapped their full potential. Instead of being dependent on support in adult life, we now anticipate that they will have the independence skills to contribute to society in the future.'

The children make exceptional progress because of the support that they receive in the residential provision. The staff provide high-quality, child-focused care tailored to meet their individual needs. The staff work meticulously with well-written care plans that identify specific ways to work with these children. However, all the staff members who work with the children have not signed these plans. This minor shortfall is minimised by the knowledge and awareness that the staff demonstrate about the children's needs. The staff meet at handover to share important information with each other about the children, and this maintains the consistently excellent care that the children receive.

The children make excellent educational progress against their targets. Some children attend the secondary school on the same site to complete their GCSE coursework. This provides them with the chance to develop their knowledge and complete recognised qualifications that will help them to move through to further or higher education. It also helps them to make friends in the local community.

The children develop their independence skills because of the support and guidance of the staff. The children identify this themselves. One child commented, 'I could not learn to cook unless I came here. The kitchen at home is not accessible for me to use.' Feedback from other children is consistently outstanding. Comments include:

- 'If I could pick it [the residential provision] up I would, and take it with me.' (This was about this young person's move towards adult services now that they are 17 years old.)
- 'Since accessing this service I have learned to use my frame to walk. I can walk with staff holding onto me to support me.'
- 'We are encouraged to be young people rather than living our lives as disabled young people'.
- 'We are encouraged to spend time with our friends. When I go to college I

want to do childcare.'

- 'This is the only opportunity I get to socialise. I can't do this at home.'

The staff give careful consideration to the arrangements for transition into and moving on from the residential provision. The importance of the children's relationships with one another is discussed prior to the children being offered the chance to stay at the provision. Consequently, the children attend with peers who they know, and can develop their friendship outside the school.

The multi-agency team at this provision includes nurses, occupational therapists speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and school counsellor. They all work together with the residential staff to ensure that medication and therapeutic regimes are supported and maintained. The children's health needs are very well understood because of this input.

The children enjoy healthy and nutritious, freshly cooked meals. These are eaten in the communal area. Children have been involved in discussions to make changes to the layout and decor of this area to make it more homely.

The children benefit from access to a wide range of activities. These include specifically designed sports activities as well as swimming and trampolining. As a result, they enjoy opportunities and experiences that would not otherwise be available to them. These events have both a therapeutic and enjoyment element to them. The children can participate in external activities, for example going to the park or going shopping. Children are consulted prior to taking part, to ensure that they wish to join in. However, records are not kept if a child is offered an activity but declines. As a result, the reasons why children choose not to participate are not reviewed.

The staff are supported by managers to be innovative. For example, creative use of computer-aided adaptations to develop independent living skills has enabled resourceful practice to grow. Consequently, already good performance improves and children make better progress. The staff have a positive 'can do' approach which inspires the children to try out new activities and ways to work. There is a great deal of warmth shared between the staff and the children. The relationships are extremely good, and children are listened to by the staff. The skill of the staff is knowing the signs and symptoms that each child shows both verbally and, more crucially, non-verbally. They act seemingly instinctively to these cues or triggers to soothe or talk to the children. These intuitive responses to children's needs come about through the close relationships and understanding of the children that they have developed. Throughout the inspection, the joy and pleasure that children get when attending this provision were clear to see.

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

Consistent high-level monitoring and observation mean that children do not go missing from the provision; indeed, they are consistently keen to stay and participate. The staff are keenly aware of the risks to the children should they be in the community without support. Training has cemented the knowledge that staff have about safeguarding children from risk and exploitation, including sexual abuse. The staff have completed online training raising their awareness of radicalisation and the risks that children could be exposed to through social media. As a result, the children experience outstanding help and protection from the staff.

Before this inspection, discussions took place with the designated officer for safeguarding in the local authority. This provided confidence that the managers and seniors are aware of the processes to follow should there be a concern about the conduct of a staff member. There have been no allegations made, and no consultations have taken place. The designated officer has been into the school and spoken to the staff in the residential provision as part of whole school training on safe-care.

Behaviour is managed through positive relationships between the children and the staff. Staff take a restorative approach, if needed, to help the child to understand the consequences of poor conduct. Their calm, well-planned approach to behaviour means that no physical interventions have been necessary and no significant incidents have taken place in the residential provision since the last inspection. The headteacher, Head of Support and Student Care, and Head of REP regularly review risk assessments. Risk management arrangements begin before any admission takes place. The children are well known to the staff. They attend the school before admission, enabling staff to understand their needs well, many months before they begin to stay. This effective, planned approach to admissions ensures that the staff understand risks well and that the children's experience is positive.

Good multi-agency working relationships mean that the staff can reflect on children's holistic needs. This reflection gives the staff the opportunity to discuss care plans and the approaches needed to safely care for the children. This also results in children benefiting from a wider range of adults who can monitor their welfare needs. Because of the diligent work by the staff, the children can identify trusted adults with whom they can talk if they are concerned. Each residential flat has information about who the children can contact if they have a concern. Alongside this, an independent person, who is known to the children, makes regular visits to the school.

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

The leadership and management of the provision are highly effective. The staff

mirror the commitment that the headteacher and the senior staff have to providing the highest quality services to the children. This drive supports the staff to attend suitable training; this includes the required level 3 qualification, which all relevant staff have completed. As a result, all of the staff have the knowledge and skills to safely meet the children's complex care needs. Senior staff monitor the working practices of the staff through observations on-shift and through regular reviews of care plans and risk analysis. This high level of monitoring by effective leaders and managers is an important element driving quality and improvement.

Managers and staff are ambitious for each of the children, expecting them to make excellent progress. They have an action plan which is used to monitor the development of the residential provision and the staff. The managers inspire the staff to take a 'can-do' approach to every aspect of their work. A clear child focus and shared enthusiasm drive the whole team to improve outcomes for the children. They work collaboratively to manage issues as they arise and seek inventive and effective ways to meet children's needs. Feedback from families consistently reflects the strength of the service. Comments include:

- 'I am very happy with the residential provision. My child is a complex character in terms of their needs. They speak their mind, especially if they are not happy. They use a communication aid when they are staying and they have become much more verbal.'
- 'Going to the residential provision has certainly has helped with my child's confidence. They would shy away whenever they could but this has improved. They [the staff] have been amazing.'

Senior care staff and managers encourage the staff through regular supervision to develop excellent relationships with the children. This is a real strength in this service. Children's care plans are detailed and they are treated as individuals. A good understanding and awareness of children's individual care needs ensure that targets agreed at care planning meetings for each child to reach are relevant and motivating. This is the central theme of all of the work completed in the provision.

The governors are regular visitors to the residential provision. This forms part of their monitoring and reviewing of the services provided in the school. Alongside managers and senior care staff, governors ensure the delivery of a high-quality service for children, supported by a clear and detailed action plan. This plan accurately identifies the strengths and weaknesses of the residential provision and guides leaders to ensure that sustained improvements are made for the children.

As an example of the drive to offer exciting and inspirational activities, the management team has planned and organised a skiing trip for a small group of children who use the residential provision. A local sportswear company has helped and supported this by providing equipment. The staff have rigorously risk assessed the trip. The children have been attending skiing classes to improve their skills. There is understandably a great deal of excitement for the group. This trip will raise self-

esteem and provide a great opportunity for building stronger relationships.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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/teacher in charge:** Ms Annemari Ottridge

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01438 726 999

**Email address:** [tneal@lonsdale.herts.sch.uk](mailto:tneal@lonsdale.herts.sch.uk)

## **Inspector(s)**

Michael Mulvaney, social care inspector (lead)  
Natalie Burton, social care inspector (second)



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