

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 is co-located with a secondary school in Stevenage. The school is funded for 88 places with up to 34 residential pupils, aged 11 to 18, 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 February 2019.

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 June 2019

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: 5 February 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The leadership of the residential provision is exceptional. The highly experienced staff team remains enthusiastic about and committed to giving the children new and exciting experiences. Parents said that children flourish because of their experiences and the opportunities and friendships that they have in the residential provision. The quality and range of the activities, such as sailing locally and trips abroad, including skiing, mean that children have the same opportunities as their peers.

Staff have been instrumental in setting up a registered charity. This charity will help children to have access to an even wider range of activities, as the staff have begun to build relationships with the local community and businesses in the area.

The small, dedicated staff team knows and understands the children extremely well. The staff clearly enjoy spending time with the children, who have built up strong, trusting relationships with them. Children said that they love spending time in the residential provision with their friends and staff. There is a great deal of laughter and a genuine warmth between children and staff.

Staff have an excellent understanding of children's different communication needs and give them time and space to express themselves. Children were observed helping each other to communicate and giving each other time to express their wishes. Staff spend quality time with the children.

Staff have an excellent understanding of children's health needs and work closely with the nursing staff who are based at the school. Children who need them have high-quality health plans. Comprehensive eating plans are produced with input from parents and speech and language and occupational health therapists. These plans guide the staff effectively to enable children to become as independent as possible at mealtimes.

Staff enable exceptional transitions out of the residential provision. A child said that he was leaving in a few weeks but has lots of lovely memories to take with him. Staff are in the process of arranging an event for the children who are leaving. Children are well prepared to move on.

School attendance for residential children is excellent and has helped their academic attainment. Residential staff supported children who were sitting GCSEs with revision and scribing in exams. A child said that he found this really helpful as he knew the staff and it made him more relaxed. One child said to a member of staff that he likes Porsches and would like to work with cars when he leaves school. The staff member organised for someone from the local dealership to visit. The child said that it was the best day, and that the story was on the news. This example illustrates the lengths that staff go to in order to facilitate children's wishes.

The residential environment is decorated to an extremely high standard. Children have been involved in designing the new gardens and are growing their own plants and vegetables. A child said that they like the new gardens because they can spend time outside with their friends.

Children learn new and valuable independence skills. Parents said that this is an important part of the residential experience. Children participate in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Some children are currently undertaking the gold award.

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

Safeguarding children is a high priority at the school and in the residential provision. Staff recognise and report any concerns and undertake regular safeguarding training. The designated safeguarding officer at the school works in conjunction with the local safeguarding board and safeguarding governor. The designated officer for the local authority commented that the school reports any concerns effectively and follows all actions and recommendations. Parents and social workers said that children are safe.

Children do not go missing. Staff know the children's whereabouts and communicate them to each other, so that children have freedom to move around the school and grounds as independently and safely as possible.

Children's behaviour in the residential provision is exceptional. Children show high levels of care and respect towards each other. The staff act as excellent role models in their behaviour towards each other. Staff manage behaviour by using defusing techniques and enabling children to communicate any differences and sort them out. This means that disagreements do not escalate.

Children have a clear understanding that bullying will not be tolerated. Children have undertaken training to become anti-bullying ambassadors. Children spoke confidently and enthusiastically about their new roles.

Children and parents actively contribute to the comprehensive, child-centred placement plans. These plans guide staff effectively to meet all of the children's daily and personal care needs. Rigorous risk assessments help the staff to safeguard children.

Full premises risk assessments and contingency plans ensure that the environment is safe. Managers implement the risk reduction strategies effectively. This was evidenced during the inspection, following the discovery of a water leak. Governors and other agencies met to discuss the concerns the same day and implemented an action plan. This meant that the residential provision was able to remain open.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Senior managers provide highly effective and efficient leadership. All staff have high expectations of, and aspirations for, the children. Children feel valued by the staff and consequently have high aspirations for themselves.

Leaders and managers extensively review and analyse trends and patterns. As a result, they understand and can demonstrate the positive impact that the residential provision has on children's education and their social and emotional development.

Staff communicate exceptionally well with parents and professionals. Parents said that staff keep them informed about their child.

Governors provide comprehensive reports following their visits to the residential provision. They gain children's views, wishes and feelings and incorporate these into their recommendations to drive the residential provision forward. The children are central to the school and residential provision.

Leaders and managers continually develop the service using their knowledge of current research to inform learning. They work in conjunction with other schools to share and develop good practice.

Staff said that they feel valued by senior staff, who listen to them and support their ideas. Supervisions are of high quality and session notes are well detailed. Staff said that they find these sessions supportive. All staff have up-to-date appraisals that are reviewed throughout the year. Leaders and managers value the staff and invest in their professional development. Residential staff have been included in training as mental health first aiders to enable them to support staff and children effectively.

A strong culture of monitoring and improvement is embedded in the school, with regular practice audits. The local authority undertakes regular brokerage visits and provides actions and recommendations. This supports the continual development of the school and residential provision. As a result, the children have the best possible experiences and outcomes.

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/teacher in charge: Mrs Annemari Ottridge

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Trish Palmer, social care inspector



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