

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 with a range of physical and neurological impairments. The school is co-located with a secondary school in Stevenage. The school is funded for 104 places for pupils aged 11 to 18. There are 34 pupils who access the residential provision with a maximum of 21 pupils per night. Groups of residential pupils stay each week, between Monday and Thursday, for between one and four nights. The focus of the residential provision is to develop the pupils' learning and independence.

The head of the residential provision has been in post since November 2021 and has the relevant qualifications to manage the service.

The inspector only inspected the residential provision at this school.

The last inspection of the residential provision took place in June 2019.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 January 2022

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: 18 June 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the residential education provision (REP) has been open intermittently. This has been due to NHS-funded nurses being unable to provide the required cover. However, leaders and managers have given children the opportunity to have at least one-night stays and extended days. The provision temporarily closed again in January 2022 because the NHS Trust is unable to provide adequate cover for children due to COVID-19 and the need to redeploy the nurses. Consequently, there are no qualified nurses available to administer medication or feeds to the children.

Parents said that although children have missed the routine of the residential provision when it has been closed, they understand the need to close the service or reduce the length of stays. They said that the communication from the school in respect of the plans has been excellent.

Despite no children having residential stays at the time of the inspection, the children who would usually stay spoke with the inspector to give their views. The children said that they love staying because they get to spend time with their friends. They said that they do fun things and that the staff are great. One child communicated using his voice activator, saying, 'Sad no stay now, soon be good.'

The children make exceptional progress because of the support that they receive at this remarkable school. The progress of children staying in REP has been monitored. The monitoring clearly shows that these children have made outstanding progress academically. A parent said that since her child has been staying in REP, her academic grades have significantly improved.

Children have built trusting, dependable relationships with the highly dedicated and motivated staff team. Bullying is not an identified issue. The staff are quick to recognise and respond to any potential difficulties in peer relationships, preventing any escalation.

Due to the closure of the provision, staff have been working across the school. A child said it made her happy when she saw the staff in school. Residential staff have been able to maintain relationships and reassure children that the staff are still available to them.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, children took part in a wide range of enrichment activities which supported them to learn social and academic skills. During times when access to these activities was limited due to national restrictions, staff ensured that there was a wide range of in-house activities. A child said that they have been involved in choosing games, arts and crafts and other activities during their time in REP.

During the first national lockdown due to COVID-19, the school introduced remote learning to provide the opportunity for children and teachers to engage online. A blended-learning approach combined the use of educational materials, interaction online and classroom-based activities for children who were attending school. Despite national restrictions, children were able to continue making exceptional progress educationally and maintained their contact with staff and other children.

Staff work with parents to include them in the school's model of care. This means that children experience a more consistent approach between home and school. The school provides specific care to children, based on their individual needs. The staff work with children and their families to identify individualised goals linked to education, health and care plans. Children and parents take part in reviewing and developing care plans. As a result of this collaboration, parents can see the progress that their child is making, and children are empowered to have a say in their care.

Children benefit from a wide range of professional expertise at the school. As part of a new initiative, the school has employed its own counsellor for two and a half days a week. The counsellor and the strategic manager for REPs coordinate children's therapy and monitor their progress. Together, they review children's progress and whether alternative therapies would be more beneficial and whether children continue to need therapy. Consequently, assessment of children's needs is dynamic and ensures that they continue to progress.

The staff empower children to develop friendships and socialise. The children said that having sleepovers with their friends is one of the best things about staying in REP. A parent said that her child is so excited to stay that she packs her own bag. This parent said that the stays give her child the same opportunities as her sibling.

Children develop practical and social skills that they will need when they leave the security of the school. Children become more confident and their self-esteem improves. A parent said that her child now has the confidence to try new experiences. The child's anxiety about being in groups has reduced. Consequently, the child has more opportunities to join in meaningful activities and learn important independence and life skills.

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

Children said that they feel safe at school and in REP. They could all identify staff who they would talk to if they are worried or upset. The children could name the designated lead for safeguarding and said that they can talk to her at any time and she will listen and help them. Parents all said that they have no concerns about the staff's ability to safeguard their children.

The staff fully understand safeguarding procedures and who to report any concerns to. Children develop their own safeguarding skills through learning about online

safety, building and maintaining healthy relationships and reporting any concerns or worries. The staff work closely with parents in respect of safeguarding concerns. A parent said that any concerns are fully investigated, and they are kept updated and informed of the outcome.

Staff recognise and understand the children's vulnerabilities and behaviours. They identify any changes in the children's presentation and carefully consider what the changes might mean. The governor responsible for safeguarding works closely with the headteacher and designated lead for safeguarding. Together, they review policies and procedures and undertake safeguarding audits which are fed back to the governors.

There is a comprehensive risk assessment for children's sleeping arrangements. The staff thoroughly assess children's stays to ensure that the mix of children is appropriate.

REP and school staff benefit from training in safeguarding vulnerable children. The joint training promotes a shared understanding across the teams of the children's vulnerabilities and how to report concerns. The staff receive training in the 'Prevent' duty, which helps them to recognise other safeguarding concerns. Recently, staff have received training in recognising sexual harassment in schools.

Children are taught to be polite and kind to each other. This was evident when meeting with a group of children during the inspection. The group gave time for a child to use his communication pad to answer a question about what he enjoys. The staff praised the children for allowing him to have the same opportunity. Children understand and respect that although they have different needs, they all need to have their views listened to.

Due to the high level of supervision of children and the work that staff do with them on keeping safe, children do not go missing. A child said that he can move around the different flats independently, which makes him feel free. He was very proud that staff trust him to do this. Staff give children a sense of responsibility and independence during their stays.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Since the last inspection, a REP manager with relevant qualifications and experience has been employed. The school is in the process of appointing a new manager. The strategic lead for REP is currently managing the service.

Exceptional leaders and managers demonstrate their continued commitment to giving children the best possible experiences. Senior managers provide highly effective and efficient leadership. All staff have high expectations of, and aspirations for, the children. Senior managers, regardless of their role in the school, are directly involved with the children. Leaders and managers are ambitious for children, who feel valued by staff and consequently have high aspirations for themselves.

The senior leaders continue to develop the school using research-based practice to enhance their learning. Senior leaders work in conjunction with other schools to share and develop good practice. Their research into a hybrid approach in remote learning has been published.

The school has purchased virtual headsets, learning robots and eye-tracking software for the children. All staff have had training in using the equipment with children. These devices support children with independent learning. Feedback from children and staff measured the impact of the newly introduced technologies and how they have improved outcomes for the children.

The staff seek feedback from the children in various ways. Staff act on children's views and wishes, and keep them informed of decisions and outcomes.

The school and residential staff work closely together to meet children's individual needs, and this work continues to improve. Effective monitoring systems are used to track children's progress across the whole school. This monitoring evidences that children using REP have progressed both academically and socially.

The school has a designated mental health lead who supports a whole-school approach to emotional well-being and mental health. Children can speak to mental health workers when they wish to. The mental health worker involves other professionals, such as counsellors, if appropriate.

The staff said that the senior staff have listened to and supported them throughout the uncertainty of REP opening and closing. The staff said that they have continued to receive supervision throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Leaders and managers value the staff and invest in their professional development. This ensures that staff have the relevant experience and training to support the children.

The staff are clearly proud of their school and REP. Children speak with pride about their time in REP and the staff who look after them.

The independent visitor met with children to ensure that they understood why REP was not open or on reduced days. An area for improvement is for the visitor to include the children's views and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the care and safeguarding in their reports.

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

Recommendation

- The registered person should ensure that the independent visitor's reports record children's views and that reports include an evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children.

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: Annemari Ottridge

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Inspector

Trish Palmer, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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