

Larwood School

Inspection report for residential special school

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Larwood is a special primary school, with 25 boarding places. Children admitted to the school, all have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Boarding is mainly on a weekly basis, usually including Monday to Thursday nights, but the arrangements are flexible. There is the provision of an extended day for other children at the school. The children who board can come from any area of Hertfordshire, as this is the only special primary boarding school in the county. The school is of modern construction and has well-kept grounds and sports pitches around the building. The school was purpose-built in 1996 and is sited in a residential area of Stevenage. The boarding area of the building has recently been restructured and provides improved accommodation for both staff and young people.

Summary

This visit is a Key announced inspection of the service looking at standards identified by Ofsted as key areas of care. Additional standards with regard to catering and premises were inspected. The overall judgment is based on the outcomes of the standards inspected.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The recent additions and alterations to the building provide improved sleeping and living accommodation for the young people. It is well presented and well equipped to meet the needs of the young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The young people's files contain good information about their health needs and the actions being taken to address these needs are well recorded. The school monitors arrangements to ensure that children receive regular medical, dental and optical checks. The school maintains good links with health professionals, such as the local doctor, the Looked After Children Nurse and consultant paediatrician. The consultant paediatrician provides the school with a monthly 'open' appointment for any child whose specialist health needs are not being met elsewhere. The staff have a good understanding and awareness of the health care needs of the young people in their care. Accident records are generally well maintained and monitored by the headmaster, though a recent injury, (to a child by another), had not recorded following the event. Staff undertake training with regard to the administration and understanding of the uses and side-effects of all medication taken by the young people. There is a good system for auditing medication entering and leaving the school. Medication is stored appropriately and securely in the staff office. The medication files are well organised and contain detailed medical and health information on the young people. Staff are able to access the advice and support of a local pharmacist, when necessary. Required consents from individuals with parental responsibility are held on file, supporting staff to make appropriate arrangements with regard to medication administration. The health care needs of the young people are well met. There is a good commitment to ensuring that the nutrition needs of the young people are met. The meals provided are well presented, healthy in content and generally enjoyed by the young people. The chef monitors the young people's response to the menu offered and links with the

school council for suggestions for the menu. The main meal choice, at lunch and tea, is limited as no alternative is provided other than for those young people with special dietary requirements. This impacts specifically on the young people that board at the school. If they do not like the meal offered their dietary intake may not include a hot main meal, only snacks and light refreshments at tea time. Fresh fruit is available for the young people as well as snacks and drinks. The focus at mealtimes is very much on encouraging the young people to experience a sociable and relaxed time with their friends and the staff team. The young people are able to achieve rewards for positive behaviour during mealtimes. The school is involved in the introduction of the national food standards in schools and is monitoring the intake of meals, by the young people, as part of a review of the catering arrangements.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The young people feel that their privacy is respected. They are able to make private telephone calls from the school. The staff are good at ensuring the privacy of young people when bathing or attending to their personal needs. They are very aware of the need to respect the young people's confidentiality and only discuss issues and arrangements with the young people or in private office areas. Information held about young people is stored securely and staff demonstrate a good awareness of the need to keep information confidential. The staff handbook contains policy documents and information regarding practices and procedures to ensure young people's privacy and confidentiality. The young people know how to complain and meetings are held that enable them to voice their concerns or to write down 'grumbles' for discussion. There are clear policies and procedures with regard to complaints. The school has not received any complaints. The staff are aware of the need to work together to provide a safe and caring place for the young people. There are good systems in place that ensure that staff are aware of the whereabouts of the young people and strategies to deal with any unauthorised absences, should they occur. Comments and records by staff demonstrate a good understanding of child protection issues. The Head is the school's designated child protection officer and ensures that all staff receive child protection training. The child protection policies and procedures link into the local authority process and are contained in the staff handbook. The young people feel safe and well looked after at their school. Staff recruitment procedures ensure that the young people are only cared for by staff who have had appropriate checks undertaken on their backgrounds. The process for recording any gaps in staff employment history was not completed for one application sampled at the inspection. Checks on staff and visitors ensure that the young people are protected. The school approach to behaviour management is very much focussed on encouraging the positive behaviours of the young people. Achievement targets for developing individual skills and managing behaviours are set with the young people. The young people are very aware of their targets and strategies for achieving success. This approach is much appreciated by the young people. Parents' comments include, 'my child is more settled and their behaviour has improved'. 'I like the behaviour management approach'. The staff team are trained in the use of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) by qualified members of the senior staff team, including the Headmaster. The young people and their parents are very aware of the style of behaviour management interventions and sanctions used as part of TCI, including the 'time out' room. Records and observed practice indicate a consistent, professional and thoughtful approach by the staff in the use of this form of behaviour management. All sanctions and restraints are well recorded and monitored by a senior member of staff who produces very thorough reports for the Head and governors. The young people feel the rules and sanctions used in the school are fair. They like the emphasis on achieving rewards and know what is

expected of them. The school policy and procedures, with regard to the use of physical interventions, complies with the local education authority policy. Incidents of bullying are monitored and appropriately dealt with by the school. The school has clear and detailed policies with regard to bullying. The policy on behaviour management does not refer to the positive use of Therapeutic Crisis Intervention. The school's ethos and approach to management of pupil behaviour is that 'all children respond well when their appropriate behaviour and achievements receive consistent positive reward and reinforcement'. The school ensures a positive experience for the young people that board at the school. Appropriate processes and checks are in place to ensure that young people are cared for in a safe environment. A health and safety audit has been carried out by the provider and an action plan has been prepared by the school to address any shortfalls highlighted. There are comprehensive risk assessments in place with regard to the premises and activities available for the young people. Checks are undertaken of the fire alarms and regular fire evacuation drills are held with both staff and young people. The school has sufficient parking and security systems in place to ensure the safety of the young people and visitors. Good systems are in place in relation to keeping young people safe and promoting their general wellbeing.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The young people's files contain copies of their education plans and achievement records. Staff support the young people to achieve educationally. The link between the teaching and care staff is positive and focussed on achieving the best educational outcomes for the young people. There are good communication systems in place between the school, the boarding house and parents. There is an after school activity programme for the young people and activities are planned to ensure that all the young people can participate at their own level. Staff are supportive and encourage the young people to participate in different activities. Attendance at activities is recorded and monitored by the boarding staff. The young people are encouraged to participate in a varied programme that includes physical and social activities. The school supports and enables the young people to attend community activities, such as Scouts, in the local area and near their home. The young people's comments about activities are very positive. From discussion and observation, it is clear that the staff have a good understanding of the needs and difficulties of the young people in their care. The care and support is consistent and reflects the young people's targets and information held within the care plans. The 'home/school' record books are used effectively to share actions, achievements and information with parents. The staff respond to the requests from young people in a supportive and caring manner. The young people are relaxed in the company of the staff team and feel able to talk to them. However, the young people do not have access to an independent listener. Parents comments include, 'I am kept well informed of any incidents'. 'I feel able to call and visit any time'. 'I am made welcome in the boarding house'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The staff encourage the young people to have their say and respond well to their requests. House meetings are held each term and the young people are encouraged to share their ideas and comments. Young people are elected by their peers to represent them on the school council. The school council meets regularly and is chaired by a school governor and minutes are made available to the young people and their parents. The young people's care files contain all the

required information. The school links well with different agencies involved in the care of some young people. Individual support plans are produced with the young people and focus on achievable targets. The plans are generally well written though some are not in formats suitable to help the young people understand them, especially for those young people that experience difficulty with reading. The staff are good at encouraging the young people to work on their targets and achieve success. They are positive and supportive in their way of working and talking to the young people in their care. The staff are aware of the contact arrangements for the young people though not all files contained current information on contact arrangements. The staff are aware of the emotional difficulties for the young people when staying away from home. They help the young people to understand and manage their contact arrangements and any difficulties that may occur. The young people have access to a private telephone. Parents are happy with the communication and contact arrangements at the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The boarding house has been altered and refurbished since the last inspection. The living areas and bedrooms are larger, well furnished and equipped. The young people are provided with more space for storage, study and quiet time. The communal spaces are bright and homely and the young people love using them. There are pieces of young people's artwork and photographic evidence of activities and fun times displayed everywhere. The young people are encouraged to use the boarding house kitchens, with staff support, and enjoy making drinks and snacks. The young people have access to school facilities after school which are extensive and include an astro turf pitch, computer rooms, hall and playgrounds. The boarding house is well equipped with toys, games, music and video centres, books and various other activities for the young people to use after school.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a written Statement of Purpose and Function which sets out all required areas of information about this service. There is a very thorough referral and assessment process that ensures that young people are admitted to the school in accordance with the Statement of Purpose. Young people are given information about boarding at the school which is produced in picture form and a more detailed version is provided for parents. The staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the young people. Rotas allow time for staff to attend meetings, training sessions, undertake tasks as key workers and complete records. There is a low rate of turnover of staff. The commitment to training is good. There is an established programme of core training for the whole school which is monitored by the senior management team. Training is provided, for both teaching and boarding house staff, covering an extensive range of topics relating the needs of the young people. For example, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention; epilepsy; infection control; fire precautions and medication. All members of the boarding staff have completed their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) in Childcare at Level 3 or above. The staff receive performance management interviews with their identified senior member of staff. Performance outcomes are monitored by the senior staff team and link to training needs. Boarding staff meetings are held regularly and boarding staff also attend whole school staff meetings. The frequency of staff supervision is not sufficient to ensure that all staff receive adequate support and guidance to enable them to look at practice issues as well as personal development. The Head has delegated areas of responsibility to members of the senior staff

team. The school has an experienced and effective senior management team. Records are monitored and reports produced for staff meetings and school governors. Regular senior staff team meetings ensure that all aspects of life in the school are discussed and monitored by the Head and school governors. The school development plan gives clear indicators for the management, monitoring and development of different aspects of school life over the next year.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that subject to dietary needs, children have a choice of main course at each meal. NMS 15.3
- ensure that the school identifies to each child at least one person, independent of the school and/or the child's placing authority, whom they may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. NMS 22.8
- ensure that care plans are produced in formats that enable a better understanding for the young people. NMS 17.7
- ensure that all staff receive at least one and a half hours one to one supervision from a senior member of staff each half term. NMS 30.2
- ensure that the school's system for recruiting staff who will work with children in the school includes an explanation of any gaps in CV, with a written record by the school that explanations for any gaps have been sought and are satisfactory. NMS 27.2 (ix)
- ensure that a written record is kept of all significant illnesses, accidents or injuries to children during their placement at the school. NMS 14.22

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.