

Larwood School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Kristen Judd
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Date of last inspection	24 February 2009

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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 children.

Summary

This announced statutory inspection looked at the key national minimum standards as well as the school's progress in meeting recommendations made at the last inspection.

The boarding house is managed well and the care staff team benefit from the good leadership provided by the head of care. The staff are committed to providing good outcomes for the children and they demonstrate an enthusiasm to create a nurturing environment for them. All children and staff are positive about the school and the atmosphere is very good.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The registered person was asked to make improvements to the records of child protection and staff recruitment files. These issues have been addressed.

An action was also made in relation to seeking permission for the use of auditory alarms. Relevant permission slips are completed by parents when required.

A further action in relation to following behaviour management guidance was made. However, a new action has been made to review the policy to provide clear information for staff in line with current guidance.

The school has appointed two advocates who are currently undergoing employment checks. Improvements to the support given to staff and the provision of first aid training were required. Improvements have been made in relation to both of these actions.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Staff are aware of the need to help the children to follow a healthy lifestyle. They encourage them to take part in physical activities and to eat healthy food. The children's files contain good information about their health care needs and the actions taken to address these needs are also appropriately recorded. Staff maintain good links with health professionals, such as the children and adolescents mental health service, for assessments when required. Records show that staff discuss issues relating to health and personal hygiene with children and where

needed issues are addressed within the individual plans for children. Staff receive training in first aid and there is always a qualified first aider on duty in the school. Appropriate records are kept of any accidents involving children. The necessary parental consents for medical treatment, the administration of medicines and the use of first aid are held on children's medical files. Children generally return home when unwell and parents confirm that there is good communication from the school regarding medical matters.

The safe handling of medication is managed well in this school. Medication is accurately recorded, received and disposed of appropriately. There are clear records of the administration of medicines to children. The arrangements for regular auditing of the medication stock and records are sound. Staff receive specific training prior to being allowed to take responsibility for administering medication to children. Staff are focussed and committed to ensuring a good quality provision of health care for all children who board.

The school provides good quantities of food, including fresh fruit and vegetables. Meals are presented well and are generally enjoyed by children. The children have access to drinks and a variety of snacks during the day. The staff and children eat together at mealtimes and the focus is very much on encouraging a relaxed atmosphere and a positive social experience. Kitchen staff have received training in safe food handling and hygiene. Children have been involved in growing their own fruit and vegetables and have taken photographs of the project. There is a good level of commitment to meeting the nutritional needs of children.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The information held about children is stored securely and staff demonstrate a good understanding about the need to maintain confidentiality. Children are afforded appropriate privacy arrangements with each child having their own private bed space. Staff are good at ensuring the privacy of children when bathing or attending to personal care. Children are able to make and receive private telephone calls.

The school has an appropriate complaints procedure and information about this is available for parents. Children say that they are able to talk to staff about any issues or concerns and they generally feel confident that such matters are taken seriously. The school council meetings also provide children with opportunities to discuss their views about boarding and to raise anything that they are unhappy about. There is a central file for storing the records of complaints. No complaints have been recorded since the last inspection.

The designated child protection officer has received training for this role and further training is planned. All staff have received child protection awareness training. Staff are clear about the action that they would need to take in the event of a disclosure or allegation being made. The school take an active role in any safeguarding issues that involve the children. Staff are competent in their knowledge of how to keep children safe and of the school's safeguarding procedures. Discussions with children indicate that they feel safe and well looked after at the school.

Children are aware that bullying is not tolerated and that staff take seriously any incidents or reported concerns. There are policies and procedures with regard to bullying in place. There are displays to help children understand when their behaviour may be construed as bullying.

Staff report that there are few incidents of bullying within the boarding provision. The children feel safe from bullying within the residential provision.

The school has arrangements to ensure that staff know the whereabouts of the children and are able to respond promptly in the event of a child leaving the site without permission. Information provided by the school shows that there have been no unauthorised absences of this type since the last inspection.

There is a positive behaviour management system in place and children can earn rewards for effort and achievement; these are presented in an assembly held at the end of each week. The positive relationships between children and staff continue to play an important part in helping the children improve their behaviour. Children are fully aware of expectations in relation to behaviour and consider the rules to be fair.

Risk assessments are in place for each child. All care staff receive training in behaviour management which includes accredited physical restraint and de-escalation techniques. This promotes safe practice. Physical restraint is seldom used beyond the school day. Records of incidents involving physical intervention are kept in bound, page-numbered books.

The school uses a room to provide children with time and space to calm down and consider their actions in response to specific behaviours. Children are clear about the use of this room and know that when they are calm they can rejoin their peers. Procedures are in place for the use of this room but they have not been reviewed for some time. The length of time a child may spend in the room is not defined nor is practice constituting restriction of liberty. On occasions children have been in the room in isolation for an hour and the door handle held to prevent children from leaving the room. Without clear guidance in place staff are not consistently following best practice and this may place children at risk.

Appropriate processes and checks are in place to ensure that children are cared for in a safe environment. Records relating to health and safety procedures are comprehensive and organised well. Routine checks are carried out on the fire alarm system and regular fire evacuation drills are undertaken with staff and children.

Checks carried out on staff and visitors ensure that the children are protected. Visitors to the school are required to produce identification and to sign in and out. There is a robust vetting process for new staff. There are clear records to demonstrate that all of the required checks are undertaken on new staff before they start work in the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Care staff offer children consistent support and encouragement, in line with the needs identified in individual placement plans. Children confirm that they are able to talk to staff about any personal issues. Staff provide sensitive help to those children experiencing homesickness and other problems that children may suffer from. The school has two independent advocates who are waiting for the relevant checks to be processed before starting in the role. From observation and comments from the children, it is evident that staff provide a positive, nurturing and professional approach to working with the children in their care.

There are excellent arrangements in place that ensure effective communication between the school and children's parents or other main carers. Survey responses show that parents and carers appreciate telephone calls from the school to inform them about their child's progress. These calls also give them the opportunity to discuss any areas of concern. Good records are kept of this contact.

The residential experience supports the children's education and personal development. Some of the teaching support staff carry out residential duties and this reinforces the connections between the school day and boarding time. Care staff actively encourage children to attend lessons on time. Staff reflect on a child's day while in education during handover meetings; this ensures that staff are fully aware of any issues that may impact on the support required, by a child, at any one time. There are facilities for children to complete any educational work at the boarding house. Care staff offer support if needed. Children have the opportunity to spend time with their key worker to discuss any concerns regarding any aspect of their school life.

Children have good opportunities to take part in a varied programme of activities that offer them valuable learning opportunities and expands their life experiences. Activities have included swimming, football, bowling, and sailing in the summer months. There are plenty of age appropriate toys and games available for children to use. Children speak positively about the activities that they are able to participate in while staying at the boarding house.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

New boarders benefit from a sensitive admission process which helps them to become familiar with the staff, boarders and daily routines. Following assessments and discussions with parents, children are introduced to the boarding house in a supported manner. Children and parents are given a guided tour of the residential unit as part of the admission process. This is an informative document.

The care files for individual children contain good information and details regarding their health and social care needs. All aspects of the children's needs are assessed and identified actions and interventions are clearly stated in their placement plans. The content of placement plans are discussed with the children and they are involved in reviewing their personal targets. The placement plans are updated on a half termly basis. Staff set new achievable targets in line with a child's ability. Documentation provides good information about the children and ensures that a consistent approach is used by all staff to meet their individual needs.

Children are encouraged to maintain contact with their families, if they choose to, while staying at the boarding house. They are provided with the necessary means to do so, such as telephone access at reasonable times. The staff team have built up good relationships with parents who confirm that staff regularly consult with them about important issues and their child's day-to-day care.

There are good arrangements for encouraging and supporting the children's involvement in decisions about daily life at the school and other aspects of their lives. Children who board have a representative on the school council and house meetings are held with the care staff. There are examples of children's views being considered in relation to such matters as activities and meals.

The children benefit from good relationships with staff, as demonstrated by the friendly and mutually respectful interaction seen during the inspection. They are helped to feel secure by understanding the boundaries. It is clear from observation and discussions that any disagreements are resolved reasonably. Staff help children to achieve their goals in developing their social and communication skills. Success is celebrated, raising children's confidence and self-esteem.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children have single or double rooms that provide suitable storage and a study area. Children are able to personalise their rooms. The living areas are suitably furnished and equipped. The children have access to small kitchen areas and with staff support are able to make drinks and light snacks. Bathing facilities are satisfactory and afford an adequate level of privacy when bathing.

Staff accommodation is close to the children's bedrooms so that staff can be woken by the children should they have a problem. Some of the children's bedrooms have alarms fitted, which are activated at night, so that the night staff are alerted if the child leaves their room. The use of this monitoring system is implemented following an assessment of the children's individual placement plans.

The school facilities are available for the children to use after school, such as the sports hall and outdoor areas. The boarding house is well equipped with games, music and video centres, books and various other activities for the children to use after school. The children live in accommodation that provides good facilities for their use. They confirm that they are happy with the facilities provided.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is good evidence of the promotion and development of social inclusion and work with the children to help them achieve their potential. There is an appropriate gender mix of staff within the boarding house.

Children are admitted to the school in accordance with the Statement of Purpose. Parents are provided with an information pack that details the provisions for boarding at the school. The children's guide is detailed and produced in a child-friendly format to aid their understanding about life at the school.

Staffing levels outside teaching time are sufficient for the number of boarders, the different age groups and the activities they are involved in. Children are aware of who is on duty and who is responsible for them at specific times. The staff team are extremely positive in their approach to working with the children and each other. They strive to achieve the best for the children in their care. Comments received from parents are supportive of the boarding house's approach to working with, supporting and encouraging the children to achieve and fulfil their potential. Parents' comments are extremely positive and include, 'we are very happy with the standard of care that I feel is beyond the normal level' and 'bravo Larwood, you have improved the quality of my son's life and my family's life immeasurably.'

Boarders are looked after by experienced, well trained and competent staff who understand their needs and work closely with them to develop and achieve to the best of their ability. The low turnover of staff provides children with consistency and stability and promotes positive relationships. Staff handover systems ensure that information is shared and care is consistent. Staff are well trained in the different methods and approaches, used across the whole school, to support and enable the children to achieve their potential. Staff confirm that they receive regular formal supervision and there is easy access to senior staff for informal support.

The monitoring and management of the school means that children receive a good level of care and education. The headteacher and head of care are suitably experienced and provide clear and effective leadership of the school's boarding provision. The leadership team meets regularly, ensuring that matters affecting the children's welfare is discussed and monitored. The governing body have a designated member of the group who is responsible for visiting the residential part of the school. However, visits are not conducted in line with the national minimum standards. Parental comments endorse the positive outcomes of boarding for their children.

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 the school's policy on the on the control, disciplinary and physical intervention measures is reviewed. This is with particular reference to updating the policy in line with current guidance about the duration of 'timeout' strategies and the potential to restrict young people's liberty (national minimum standard 10.2)
- ensure the governing body responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number or a representative who does not work at, or directly manage, the school, to visit the school once every half term and complete a written report on the conduct of the school in line with the national minimum standards. (national minimum standard 33.2)