

# Laleham Gap School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Inspector** Sophie Wood

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## **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

The Laleham Gap School is situated in Margate, Kent. It is a Residential Special School, maintained by the local authority. The school provides care and education for boys and girls who have high functioning autism and/or speech and language difficulties for an age range spanning 10 to 16 years. The residential provision offers flexible weekly boarding arrangements and is comprised of three separate living areas. Twenty one residential pupils are currently in placement. The school was last inspected in September 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>good</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the school's residential provision is good. Residential pupils are happy and enjoy their time at the school. Parents and carers benefit from excellent communication which enables them to work collaboratively with a service they trust. Pupils form appropriate and meaningful relationships with the staff. They are valued as unique individuals and they grow in confidence, independence and self-esteem.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Robust recruitment procedures are implemented for every appointment. The protection of the residential pupils is assured. Staff across all disciplines take their child protection responsibilities very seriously. All matters concerning the welfare of the pupils are raised, scrutinised and appropriately shared with external agencies. The management of challenging behaviours is safely delivered.
- Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Care planning is a particular strength. Residential pupils make excellent progress from their starting points. Staff are sympathetic and show empathy with regards to presenting needs and idiosyncrasies brought about by individual circumstances. This is effectively balanced by appropriately stretching pupils to realise their full potential.
- The promotion of pupil's mental, psychological and emotional well being is outstanding. Appropriate external support is secured where necessary. Staff follow the prescribed guidance of professional services and advocate strongly, securing the interventions that pupils need.
- Residential pupils enjoy and benefit from a wide and diverse range of activities. They are encouraged and supported to try new ventures. Individual talents and

interests are keenly celebrated. Staff instil a 'can do' belief in the pupils and this energy and commitment is a key component of the school's recipe for success.

- Arrangements for the health care needs of residential pupils is outstanding. Residential pupils receive the support they need to maintain excellent physical health and well being. Pupils commend the catering arrangements and learn to make their own decisions about maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- The residential accommodation is of a good standard. Residential pupils enjoy good levels of privacy and they feel safe within their environment. A rolling programme of ongoing maintenance ensures the continued safety of the premises but living areas are in need of a significant update. Refurbishment plans have not come to fruition. The acquisition of independence skills risks being hindered as a result.
- The national minimum standards have not been fully met. A recommendation is made from this inspection to ensure all records are kept up-to-date. This is made with particular regards to premises risk assessments and records. The school is also asked to improve upon the overall quality of the residential accommodation.
- Leadership and management arrangements are good throughout the senior leadership team. Internal and external monitoring mechanisms are robust. Potential negative impacts are minimised because the staff team works flexibly and creatively within limiting resources.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Excellent progress is made from their starting points because care plans pinpoint exact and specific individual needs. Key working responsibilities are evenly distributed throughout the staff team. Pupils receive excellent levels of individual support as a result. Meaningful and appropriate relationships are established and staff members know the pupils very well.

Great effort is placed upon the acquisition of independence skills. Care plan targets are achievable but they also appropriately stretch pupils. Comments from parents include, 'My child has made fantastic progress' and 'he is a different child, much more confident.'

Residential pupils benefit from excellent health care provision. Specifically tailored health care plans are diligently followed to ensure pupils receive the services and support they need. Excellent liaison with external professional services is a strength of the school. Pupils are effectively supported with regards to their emotional health and well being. They learn to cope with the complexities of adolescence and receive clear and appropriate guidance in terms of their own mental, emotional and sexual development.

A culture of acceptance and tolerance is actively promoted. Pupils learn to live

alongside each other and are encouraged to think about the needs of everyone. This is largely achieved through excellent staff role modelling, clear, structured routines and an emphasis placed upon anti-bullying practices. Pupils are regularly consulted about their residential provision and develop a strong sense of pride and ownership. Comments include, 'I like being here', 'it's really good fun' and 'our house is the best.'

The team is sensitive and empathic towards the needs of the pupils. Social situations are carefully planned to consider individual and collective needs. Pupils benefit by being taught appropriate coping strategies which begin to replace previous negative and challenging behaviours. The use of physical interventions is rare but robustly monitored when implemented to ensure the safety of all concerned. The staff team receives ongoing appropriate training and gradually introduces pupils to new situations in preparation for learning to cope positively with change.

The acquisition of independence skills is actively supported. Individual plans effectively capture appropriate targets and goals. Excellent staffing levels give residential pupils the individual time they need to develop and practise their new skills. Parents say, 'he has blossomed' and 'he is becoming much more independent.' This aspect is further enhanced through excellent liaison with future placements, for example colleges, in order for pupils to be well prepared for the next stage in their lives. Staff members describe the ethos of the school by saying: 'It is our job to make them excited about moving on, not scared.'

## **Quality of residential provision and care**

The quality of the residential provision is good. Detailed assessment processes ensure residential pupils join the school because it can meet their needs. Current residential pupils are encouraged to befriend newer ones and wherever possible, newcomers choose which residential house to join. Staff across all disciplines communicate effectively with each other. Dedicated handover meetings are complemented by a culture of ongoing communication at all times of the day and evening. Pupils receive consistent support because of an excellent holistic team approach.

Written care plans effectively capture the needs of individuals. Clear targets cover a mixture of educational and social topics. Residential pupils are themselves integral to the care planning process and they take pride in their achievements as a result. Experienced, competent staff are quick to identify issues and concerns in between planned review meetings. Time is not wasted and plans are modified and adapted as soon as they need to be. They remain current, relevant and appropriate. Personal growth and development is encouraged and promoted as a result. Trusting and nurturing relationships with the staff team make pupils feel valued and cared for.

Residential pupils delight in the wide range of activities made available to them. Staff are enthusiastic and instil a desire to explore new hobbies and interests. Individual talents are celebrated and confidence levels soar as a direct result of the positive

energy displayed by the staff team. Pupils say, 'this house is so good because I can play my trumpet whenever I want to' and 'we get to do so many different things here.'

Effective health care arrangements provide residential pupils with excellent levels of support and guidance. A dynamic, motivated school nurse maintains a coordinated approach which ensures day-to-day health needs are promoted and enhanced through excellent liaison with external specialist services, where needed. Pupils are thriving. Staff fully appreciate and understand the importance of nurturing pupils' emotional and psychological well-being. The exploration of topics including sex and relationships is competently delivered in styles which suit individual needs and levels of understanding.

Healthy lifestyles are encouraged and promoted through education and role modelling. Full use is made of the school grounds and facilities outside of the school day to encourage physical exercise. The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme is very popular. Imagery throughout the school in the form of posters, pictorial aids and literature reinforces positive messages with regards to being healthy.

Residential pupils commend the school's catering provision. A dedicated catering team provides healthy, nutritious meals which are appetising, well presented and enjoyed by all. Every mealtime is used to develop appropriate independence and social skills. Residential pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to practise their cooking skills outside of the school day but this aspect is not achieving its full potential due to the facilities within the residential provision.

The physical environment provides good levels of safety and security. Where potential risks are evident, additional safety measures are put into place and closely monitored. Residential pupils enjoy excellent levels of privacy and their possessions are safe and well looked after. The standard of house keeping throughout the residential provision is outstanding. This is particularly valued as the overall provision is becoming tired and outdated. Historic refurbishment plans have not come to fruition and this restricts the staff team's ability to fully utilise areas such as kitchens for independence work with the pupils.

Parents and carers comment very positively with regards to maintaining ongoing contact with their child and school personnel. They frequently refer to 'excellent communication', that they are 'always in the loop' and are 'frequently updated'. Residential pupils can easily use a variety of means to maintain regular contact with their family members and friends during their time at school.

## **Residential pupils' safety**

The arrangements for ensuring residential pupils are safe and protected from harm are good. This begins with excellent recruitment processes which are implemented for all prospective employees, including volunteers. Due to the forthcoming

retirement of a key individual, the school has decided to further strengthen its child protection systems with the creation of a dedicated safeguarding manager post. Safeguarding arrangements are effective, clear and known to all. Those individuals with designated child protection responsibilities receive the training commensurate with their roles. Staff throughout the school understand and implement effective procedures and have their own training updated annually.

The local authority describes the school as 'working openly and transparently in the best interests of safeguarding its pupils.' The school is quick to refer to the local authority for consultations and advice. Procedures for dealing with safeguarding concerns and allegations are effective. They are being implemented where necessary and serve to protect all of the parties involved.

Policy and procedural guidance in respect of bullying, behaviour management, being absent and general health and safety is subject to ongoing review and update. Such guidance remains live and relevant and is monitored and scrutinised by an active governing body. Staff are expected to follow all such procedures and they take their responsibilities very seriously. One staff member commented, 'if the children aren't safe or don't feel safe then we have failed.'

Residential pupils say they feel very safe at school. They attribute this to high staffing levels and feeling secure because of the actions of the staff team. Friendship issues and instances of bullying are swiftly handled. All incidents which potentially affect the safety or welfare of pupils are diligently recorded and passed without delay to senior managers. Patterns and trends are identified with appropriate remedial action taken as a result.

Individual behaviour management plans are underpinned by excellent risk assessment processes. Staff receive regular behaviour management training and every incident involving the use of physical intervention is scrutinised by senior managers. The school is very good at the implementation of reflective practice. Whenever a physical restraint or sanction is used, its reasons are questioned and explored. Its use is minimal and staff rely heavily upon the use of de-escalation techniques and teaching communication skills to pupils to avoid the onset of challenging behaviours.

Residential pupils live in a physically safe and secure environment. A small dedicated care taking team works tirelessly to maintain premises which are becoming increasingly in need of maintenance and repair. Regular health and safety checks reliably inform premises risk assessments in order to minimise any immediate risks to pupil's safety. These are generally in good order but some documents need updating. The care taking team is extremely busy performing the physical aspects of its role and administrative tasks are slipping. Fire safety procedures are well known by all. Residential pupils say they practise these at different times of the day and evening.

## **Leadership and management of the residential provision**

The management and leadership of the school is good. Staff across all disciplines understand and implement the school's aims and objectives. These are clearly explained to pupils, parents and carers, and social workers. Information is provided in styles and formats appropriate for the intended audience. As a result, the whole school works as a collective and residential pupils know what to expect.

Collaborative working is a particular strength. This is coordinated and ensured by an experienced senior management team. Residential pupils receive the support they need from teachers, key workers and health services when they need it. Effective care planning is at the very heart of the school's practice. Staff respect each others' areas of expertise; hence, care plans effectively capture the holistic presenting needs of pupils and recognise that these can change. Robust monitoring processes ensure the flexibility of such plans. They are amended as soon as they need to be and this is achieved through excellent communication.

The residential team is suitably qualified and very experienced. Roles and responsibilities are embedded. This creates a culture of confidence and competence in the day-to-day running of the residential provision. The actions and demeanour of staff makes the environment feel safe and very relaxed. This aspect is hugely positive for residential pupils. High staffing levels provide pupils with the nature and intensity of the support they need.

Staff receive excellent levels of support and continued training opportunities. Residential pupils are effectively looked after by a competent team. The training programme incorporates core mandatory subjects and also the individual and specific needs of pupils. This factor ensures fair and equitable provision for all. Staff are equally sensitive to the needs of parents and carers. Excellent communication is achieved by the staff adopting the approach preferred by each party, including email, letters and telephone calls at agreed frequencies. Comments from parents include, 'I am always kept up-to-date' and 'I appreciate the openness.'

The school is open and inclusive with all of its stakeholders. Parents and carers are encouraged to give ongoing feedback about their own child and the provision more generally. Forums for pupils, such as student councils are enabling and, in the words of pupils, 'worthwhile'. All members of the school community are proud of the provision and strive to provide the very best outcomes for the pupils.

Staff work within clear prescribed guidance which is underpinned by accurate policies and procedures. An active governing body provides robust governance and is keenly interested in areas including safeguarding, complaints and the continued development of the residential provision. The school thinks ahead and is currently exploring the senior management structure to continue to strengthen its safeguarding practice.

The required school records are in place, securely held and routinely evaluated. Those in respect of residential pupil information are being very well maintained. A small number of records relating to premises risk assessments are falling behind largely due to insufficient administration time being allocated to this department.

Robust monitoring arrangements reliably inform the senior management team of areas in need of development and improvement. Processes include internal and external arrangements. The school is acutely aware of shortfalls with regards to the quality of the physical environment and is reliant upon the provider to address this.

## **National minimum standards**

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- Accommodation is suitably furnished and of sufficient size for the number, needs and ages of children accommodated, with appropriate protection and separation between genders, age groups and accommodation for adults. Bedding is clean and suitable, and is sufficiently warm. (NMS 5.2)
- A child's file may include the information in Appendix 2 (Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards) - 'individual records'. (NMS 22.2)

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



09/02/2012

Dear Residential Pupils,

### **Inspection of Laleham Gap School**

Inspection of Laleham Gap School

As you will know, Ofsted recently inspected the boarding houses at your school. I visited your houses, joined you for meals and spent time with you during the evening activities. Some of you spent time telling me all about life at school and some of you sent in questionnaires. A number of parents and carers also did this and I spent time looking at records and interviewing different members of staff.

Everyone has been extremely helpful and honest and I have been able to look at all of the areas needed to write the report about your school.

I have found that your school provides good levels of care. You receive the help and support you need with any difficulties you may have. You make excellent progress from when you first join and this is because you enjoy very positive relationships with those who look after you.

You told me you feel very safe at school and I have also found many examples of how your school achieves this. The staff receive the training they need to understand your needs and you trust that they know you well.

The boarding houses are very different and each of you is happy in your particular house. This is largely because you live alongside friends and staff who share your interests.

I have asked the school to make sure all of its paperwork is kept up-to-date and to improve the overall quality of your boarding houses.

Overall, your school provides you with a good service and the staff work very hard to achieve this.

I really enjoyed meeting you all and wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Wood