

Laleham Gap School

Laleham Gap School, Ozengell Place, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 6FH

Inspection dates	15/11/2016 to 17/11/2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Outstanding	1
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Highly effective leadership and management of the residential facility ensure that the quality of care is consistently good, and any weaknesses are quickly identified and rectified.
- A safeguarding culture is embedded in practice. The vulnerabilities and associated risks for each young person are clearly identified. Effective systems ensure that young people at risk of harm receive appropriate support and protection.
- Care planning is a strength in the residential facility. This means that the care that is delivered is personalised and relevant to the needs of the young person.
- Young people make excellent progress across many aspects of their lives. They achieve well in education, become more emotionally resilient and develop improved social skills.
- Staff form trusting relationships with young people. They use creative approaches to promote positive peer relationships.
- Well-developed behaviour management strategies are consistently implemented. Staff recognise the triggers for challenging behaviours and are skilled in de-escalating potentially disruptive behaviour.
- The professional development of staff is prioritised. Training is delivered in response to research findings pertaining to the specific needs of the young people.
- Excellent support and guidance are available to parents. This helps to promote improved relationships between young people and their families.
- The wishes and feelings of young people are valued and responded to appropriately.

- An imaginative range of activities enables young people to develop their interests, learn new skills and reflect upon the society they live in.
- Young people's healthcare needs are fully met. Staff take a proactive approach to securing young people's access to specialist support services.
- The standard of residential accommodation is exceptionally good. Young people live in a safe, secure, homely environment.
- The residential provision is a fully integrated resource within the school. Collaborative working between teaching and care staff contributes towards positive outcomes for young people.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that there is a schedule for monitoring compliance with health and safety procedures.
- Prioritise the need for residential care staff to receive specific training related to the identification and prevention of child sexual exploitation.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted carried out this inspection with four hours' notice. Inspection activities included formal and informal discussions with residential pupils and joining pupils for meals. Discussions were held with the acting headteacher and the head of care, the designated safeguarding lead person, members of care staff, teachers, speech and language therapists, the school secretary and the caretaker. Telephone interviews were held with the governor with responsibility for the residential provision and the independent visitor. Telephone discussions with parents were also undertaken. A wide range of documentation concerning the residential provision was reviewed. No feedback on 'Parent View' was available due to an insufficient number of responses.

Inspection team

Stephen Collett

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Laleham Gap school is situated in Ramsgate, 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 and who are aged between 10 and 16 years. The residential provision is located within the main school site. It provides overnight accommodation for up to 24 residential pupils. The residential provision was last inspected in January 2016.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Young people make significant progress in terms of their education achievement, emotional well-being and independence skills. Their communication skills improve, and this enables them to cope more effectively in social situations.

Many young people attend after-school clubs, where they have the chance to catch up on their coursework, or prepare themselves for examinations. This reduces some young people's levels of anxiety and fear of falling behind with their studies. Other young people develop their interest in books, film and artwork. There is a strong focus on supporting young people to develop their communication skills. Teaching staff liaise with residential key workers, so that young people receive consistent support to achieve their communication targets. This collaborative approach between the school and residential facility has had positive results. For some young people, the outcome has been better than expected GCSE results, and all residential pupils are consistently among the strongest readers in the school.

Over time, young people become more secure, and benefit from the consistency and stability that the residential facility provides. They become less anxious and develop the ability to manage their frustration and anger effectively. Young people who have been residential pupils for significant periods can reflect on the changes that they have made over the years. One young person said, 'I used to shout, swear and go around kicking things, but here I have learned to talk to teachers and staff, and I am more tolerant.'

The support that young people receive enables them to make significant progress towards independence. They learn basic domestic skills, such as cooking and doing their laundry, and become better at maintaining personal hygiene. One teacher commented, 'You can always tell who the residential pupils are when we are on the school summer camp, as they are better organised than all the other pupils.' A parent confirmed this view and said, 'My son has excelled in so many ways; he can now get his point across, and do household tasks, such as changing a bed, and he checks his personal hygiene.'

There is a strong commitment to ensuring that the views of young people are heard and taken into account when planning how the residential facility will operate and develop in the future. In the last year, the school moved to a new building. Throughout the transition phase, young people were kept informed of developments and made fully aware of the practical arrangements for moving. Parents spoken to during this inspection confirmed that this approach minimised young people's anxiety levels. Young people were consulted about furnishings and were given responsibility for naming the two residential houses. This ensured that they felt included and valued.

Strong leadership and management ensure that any weaknesses in the residential provision are quickly identified and action is taken to rectify the situation. There is an embedded culture that prioritises the needs of young people and a commitment to keeping them safe. This supportive environment allows trusting relationships between staff and young people to flourish. Young people generally build good relationships with their peers, and some form strong friendships. Young people can have friends, who are day pupils at the school, to visit them in the residential houses. This reflects the fully integrated nature of the residential facility within the school.

Young people were observed to be relaxed, well behaved and often supportive of one another. All said that they enjoy being residential pupils, and were particularly enthusiastic about the activities and new experiences that residential life brings them. Staff consistently offer sensitive, nurturing care, making the young people feel valued and respected. They demonstrated interest and encouragement when young people made suggestions for new activities and projects to be pursued in the future.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

An excellent standard of planning ensures that the young people's needs are clearly identified. Plans are kept up to date and amended, following any significant change in the young person's circumstances. They provide staff with clear guidance and strategies for caring for the young person. Each plan sets out the young person's targets and records the progress made towards meeting these. Young people are fully engaged in setting and agreeing their targets and take high levels of ownership of the process. During the inspection, one young person was keen to show the inspector his placement plan, pointing out which targets he had met, and those he is still working on. The young person also shared recordings of key-work sessions that he had engaged in, as a way of further demonstrating how he is making good overall progress.

Young people who are new to the residential facility are made to feel welcome and given the support needed to overcome their initial anxieties. Prior to becoming a residential pupil, they have the opportunity to have a trial overnight stay and are given information about how they will be cared for and the expectations that will be placed on them. One young person who is fairly new to the residential provision recalled how he was very nervous when he first arrived, but now feels settled. He said that he likes all the staff and knows whom to speak to if he is worried, even if this is during the night. The young person went on to say, 'I was well looked after when I was ill one night.'

Parents are fully involved in the admissions process when young people first join the residential facility. The working relationships between parents and staff are excellent. One parent said, 'I have no words to describe just how good the input from staff has been. They go above and beyond to help.' Another parent described how staff support her to understand the challenges that her son experiences. She said, 'The head of care explains how my son is feeling, how he is anxious about being separated. This helps me understand his sadness, and we now talk about his feelings when he is at home.'

Equal priority is given to young people who are preparing to leave the school. Staff accompany young people on pre-admission visits to their next education placement and provide teaching staff with comprehensive information related to the young person's needs. Staff are also prepared to visit students in their new college placements, to help them to settle and adjust to new ways of working. Staff recognise that residential pupils are likely to experience feelings of loss when they move on from the residential facility. They plan in advance how they will support the young person to overcome these feelings. One young person is currently being supported to create a memory box of his time at the residential facility, as he is due to leave at the end of the current academic year.

The health needs of young people are exceptionally well met. The head nurse ensures

that residential staff are familiar with any diagnosed medical conditions that young people may have, and that they have the skills to care for the young person. Additional training is provided if staff need to improve their knowledge of a specific medical condition. The head nurse maintains contact with medical practitioners, so that she is fully aware of the treatment being recommended. She seeks clarification whenever there is any question about medication that has been prescribed. Procedures for the administration of medication are safe. Records of medication held are well maintained. The head nurse is open to considering how these records might be developed in the future.

Young people's mental health and emotional well-being are also prioritised. Staff are proactive in ensuring that young people can access specialist support services to meet their needs. One young person has benefited greatly from attending sessions with an external agency mentor, to address anger management issues. A member of staff supported the young person to access this service, and has ensured that arrangements are in place for this to continue. When managers have serious concerns about a young person's mental health, they advocate strongly on the young person's behalf, and challenge professionals when they perceive them not to be acting in the best interests of the young person.

Young people benefit from eating a healthy diet. Staff are aware that diet can be anxiety provoking for some young people, and are therefore flexible in terms of what food is offered. However, they ensure that, over the course of the week, each young person's diet is well balanced. The school catering facility has achieved a five-star food hygiene award. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that individual young people's special dietary needs are catered for. Meals in the residential houses are prepared by staff, and were observed to be of good quality. Mealtimes are relaxed, social events, in which young people engage positively with staff and their peers.

Access to a range of stimulating activities is provided within the school and the local community. Some of these provide opportunities to take regular exercise. Many young people enjoy attending a local gym, and one young person has been particularly successful playing for a local football team. Another young person spoke enthusiastically about forming a band with his peers and staff, and one demonstrated how he had learned to play the drums. This young person explained how taking up this activity had given him an outlet for managing his anger, when he is feeling anxious or frustrated.

Recently, many of the young people participated in making a 'zombie' film. Young people wrote the script, took on acting roles and were largely responsible for the film's production. The film explores issues related to how people diagnosed as being on the autistic spectrum can face discrimination in society, and the injustice of this. It provided young people with the opportunity to focus on the negative impact of discriminatory attitudes and to examine their own feelings in relation to this. The young people involved in this project take great pride in their achievements, and this has had a positive impact on their levels of self-esteem.

A high standard of residential accommodation is provided. All young people have their own bedrooms with private bathrooms. Young people personalise their rooms, to reflect their particular interests and individual identities. Communal areas are comfortably furnished and provide sufficient space for communal living. Young people have played an active role in choosing the furnishings and decoration. All young people express the view that the standard of accommodation is a great improvement on the facilities provided in

the old school building.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

A strong commitment to protecting young people from harm underpins practice in the residential facility. Care staff have a thorough understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of each young person and implement agreed strategies for minimising the risk of harm. Child protection concerns are quickly identified, and action is taken in accordance with the school's child protection policy. Leaders and managers encourage staff to adopt professional curiosity in respect of potential safeguarding matters. This ensures that staff have the confidence to share their observations and collectively assess whether a young person could be at risk of harm. This highly effective safeguarding culture is a strong protective factor.

Procedures for identifying the risks associated with each young person are thorough. All staff spoken to during this inspection demonstrated considerable knowledge of these risks and the strategies outlined in risk assessments. These strategies are implemented in practice, so that the potential for young people to harm one another, or put themselves in danger when out in the community, is minimised. Risk assessments take into account background information and are updated following any significant event. This ensures that they are relevant and reflects whether the level and severity of the risk are increasing or diminishing.

Staff are familiar with the risks that young people can be exposed to when accessing the internet and social media websites. This enables them to provide young people with advice and guidance on how to keep safe. Young people generally respond positively to the advice that they are given. One young person described in detail to the inspector how he avoids dangerous people when using the internet. Software installed on the school's computer systems enables the early detection of any safeguarding concerns. This was particularly effective in identifying a young person who was placing himself at risk of becoming radicalised by extremist views. Subsequent actions taken by staff, including prompt consultation with the relevant professional agencies, ensured that this risk was addressed.

Training opportunities have a strong focus on safeguarding issues. In general, this means that staff are aware of practice developments relating to child protection. They have recently undertaken training focused on female genital mutilation and radicalisation. However, residential staff have not yet undertaken specific training relating to child sexual exploitation, although the subject is touched upon in other training courses completed by staff.

There have been no incidents when young people have gone missing from the residential facility since the last inspection. On the rare occasions when young people have left the school premises without permission, staff have followed them and been constantly aware of their whereabouts. This has ensured that the young person quickly returns to school. There are clear protocols and procedures in place for responding to missing episodes. Staff are familiar with the content of these documents and with the actions that they would need to take if a young person did go missing.

Young people reported that they feel safe in the residential accommodation, and all of

them could name a member of the care staff they would speak to if they had any worries or concerns. Records of key-work sessions undertaken with young people indicate that they have the confidence and trust in staff to speak about a range of sensitive issues. Parents spoken to during the inspection shared the view that young people are kept safe. One parent said, 'He is as safe with staff, as he would be with me.'

Highly effective behaviour management strategies support young people to maintain generally positive behaviour. These strategies are tailored to meet individual needs. One young person, who has previously demonstrated aggressive behaviour in school, has responded positively to the support and consistent boundaries that he experiences in the residential facility. This can be attributed to staff being familiar with the triggers for the young person's anxiety, and to well-planned de-escalation techniques being implemented in practice. There have been no physical restraints of young people in the residential facility since the last inspection, and, across the school, the use of physical restraint has decreased significantly following the implementation of revised behaviour management strategies.

Staff are vigilant to any signs of bullying. Young people say that bullying is not an issue and that, when it has occurred in the past, staff have quickly stepped in to address the issue. A restorative approach is taken to resolving any conflicts that arise between young people. Creative approaches are taken to improve peer relationships. In one case, an older residential pupil, supported by staff, took on the role of mediator for two younger peers who were struggling to form a positive relationship.

Managers and staff communicate effectively with external agencies when there are concerns for a young person's well-being. They are familiar with the circumstances leading to some young people and their families receiving support services, and information is shared appropriately with relevant professionals. Staff across the school are familiar with the process for reporting welfare matters to the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). All information received by the DSL is analysed and reviewed within appropriate timescales. This ensures that an overall picture of the welfare concerns for a young person is maintained.

There is a strong response to any allegations that are made against staff. Effective communication takes place with all relevant professionals, including the designated person in the local authority. Advice and guidance given by other professionals is followed, and this ensures that correct procedures are implemented. Leaders and managers demonstrate a commitment to learning from any incidents of poor practice.

Safe recruitment procedures minimise the potential for unsuitable adults being employed in the school. All necessary background checks are completed before an employee commences working with young people. The head of care oversees a thorough interview process when recruiting new residential care staff. The interview focuses on the candidate's motivation for working with vulnerable young people and fully explores the individual's values and knowledge of safeguarding matters. This is indicative of the head of care's determination to ensure that young people receive high-quality safe care.

The residential accommodation is well maintained and secure. Equipment and domestic installations are regularly checked for any defects. Fire safety equipment is serviced within appropriate timescales, and fire drills are carried out in accordance with regulations. This ensures that young people live in a safe environment where risks to their physical safety are minimised.

The residential provision is exceptionally well managed by an experienced and dedicated head of care. He holds the national vocational qualification level 4 in care and care management and a Master's degree in social work. He is supported by a deputy head of care and effectively leads a stable, experienced team of residential care staff. All staff are suitably qualified for their roles. Most of the staff have been in post for a number of years. They are a cohesive team that works collaboratively to meet the needs of young people. The stability of the team ensures that young people experience consistency of care in a calm, well-ordered environment.

Managers and staff demonstrate consistently high aspirations for young people, encourage them to do well and celebrate their achievements. The head of care has been highly successful at integrating the residential facility into the whole-school provision. Particularly effective links have been made with the speech and language therapists. They have provided training and guidance for care staff, who are then able to support young people to practise the techniques that they have learned in therapy. Recently, the curriculum communication teacher attended a care staff team meeting, to promote a 'reading for pleasure' initiative. This resulted in high levels of engagement from the residential pupils, who renewed their enthusiasm for reading.

There are strong systems for monitoring the quality of care being delivered. A self-evaluation of the residential provision, undertaken in recent months, clearly identifies the strengths and areas for development. Similarly, a safeguarding audit undertaken by the DSL identifies how safe practice can be further enhanced. Reports from meetings of the governing body verify that information gathered through monitoring processes is shared and scrutinised. An external independent visitor assesses the quality of the care being provided, in accordance with regulations. As part of this process, consultation takes place with the head of care, young people and the DSL. Detailed reports of these visits identify areas where practice could be changed or improved. The head of care responds positively to any recommendations made.

The school moved to newly built premises nearly one year ago. Good progress has been made in relation to monitoring all aspects of health and safety at the new site. This has ensured regular maintenance of domestic equipment and utilities. However, at the time of this inspection, a comprehensive schedule for ensuring that all health and safety requirements are met within required timescales was not in place. Leaders and managers gave assurances that a newly appointed business manager will take responsibility for ensuring that health and safety monitoring becomes more formalised.

The professional development of staff is given high priority. Staff are supported to identify their training needs and develop their practice in areas of particular interest. This is achieved through high-quality supervision and annual performance appraisals. Recently, residential staff have undertaken training on attachment theory. Many staff members spoke about the impact of this training and the difference that it has made to their practice. Staff now have a greater understanding of the underlying reasons for young people's challenging behaviour. The head of care identified the need for attachment theory training in response to research that has made links between autism and attachment disorder and is, therefore, highly relevant to meeting the needs of the

residential pupils.

Training also ensures that staff regularly update their knowledge in relation to key aspects of their roles. For example, behaviour management, safeguarding and first aid training are all kept up to date. Team meetings provide opportunities for staff to discuss their learning. When training related to radicalisation was recently delivered on line, a decision was taken that all residential staff would do this at the same time, as this would facilitate group discussion on the issues raised. Managers and staff feel well supported in their roles. This ensures that they remain motivated and committed to delivering high standards of care for the young people.

Leaders and managers carefully consider which of the two residential houses is most appropriate for each young person. They take into account each individual's needs and the group dynamics before making a decision. Similarly, staff are deployed where their skills and relationships with young people will have the most positive impact. This ensures that strong relationships between staff and young people are maintained and that positive peer relationships are continuously promoted.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding, and the impact that the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services, which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean that children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	134971
Social care unique reference number	SC023691
DfE registration number	

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.

Type of school	Residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	Eight
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	Four to 16
Headteacher (acting)	Katie Reeves
Date of previous boarding inspection	19/01/2016
Telephone number	01843 570598
Email address	headteacher@laleham-gap.kent.sch.uk

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