

Larwood School

Larwood School, Webb Rise, STEVENAGE, Hertfordshire SG1 5QU

Inspection dates

28/02/2017 to 02/03/2017

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

- A highly motivated and committed leadership team provides exemplary direction and support to the well-established and experienced staff. Innovative and creative practice means that children and parents are at the centre of the children's care and fully included in planning and decision making.
- Excellent communication between the residential staff and education staff coupled with robust monitoring processes means that staff have the information that they need to identify concerns and to safeguard the children.
- The children have developed positive relationships with a stable, accomplished and dynamic staff team that interacts well with them in a calm and relaxed manner.
- The children are treated with dignity and respect, and are taught to respect each other. They are encouraged to help and support each other with independence and daily living.
- Children are given the opportunity to experience new activities, have fun and to thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. Staff are not risk averse and they want the children to have the same positive experiences as their peers.
- The children make excellent progress because of the residential provision. They have improved their behaviours and they have developed their social and independence skills.
- An independent person carries out robust monitoring visits and spends time engaging

with the children during activities in order to build a rapport with them so as to gain their views.

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 professionals employed by the school have appropriate titles in line with their professional qualifications.

Information about this inspection

The inspection took place within two hours and thirty minutes of announcement. Inspection activity included a review of Parent View responses and surveys completed by children and their parents or carers; observation of residential care routines and practice; scrutiny of policies and records; discussion with parents by telephone; and meetings with children. Discussions took place with a range of staff responsible for leading, managing and delivering residential care. This included residential staff, support staff, the head of care, the headteacher, school governors and the independent visitor. Discussion also took place with external professionals involved with the residential provision, including the designated officer in the local authority.

Inspection team

Trish Palmer
Jensy Kelly

Lead social care inspector
HMI

Full report

Information about this school

Larwood School is a special primary school situated in a residential area of Stevenage. It has boarding places for 12 children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Residential pupils are accommodated in two boarding houses that are adjoined to the school premises. Boarding nights are Monday to Thursday with residential pupils staying between one and three nights. The children who board mainly come from the Hertfordshire area, as this is the only special primary boarding school in the county.

The last social care inspection was in November 2015.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

The children make excellent progress because they stay in the residential provision. They are at the centre of the care provided and staff involve them with decision-making regarding activities and the decor. At present, there is only one girl using the residential provision. Every half term she has the opportunity to choose a friend from school to have a sleepover. This shows that staff take into account children's individual needs. They ensure that she has the same opportunities to build and maintain positive friendships as the boys.

The children have built strong and trusting relationships with a stable, experienced, dynamic and highly-skilled staff team that understands each child's individual needs and behaviours. The staff support and encourage the children to reach their full potential. Staff clearly want children to have the best experience they can by having fun, learning independence skills and helping and supporting each other.

The residential staff provide one-to-one support to the children to help them to complete their homework because the staff recognise that children are at different levels academically. The residential staff have completed training with the school staff in maths, English and reading, so that they can support children using the same techniques as the school staff. The children benefit from this consistent approach.

The children develop their independence skills in line with their age, understanding and ability. A parent commented, 'The first day after he came home, he made his bed. He did it army style with corners as that's what he did in boarding. He had never made his bed previously.' Another parent said, 'It has given him the opportunity to learn some independence, he loves it.' The children are supported to work through bronze, silver and gold levels of an independence programme. The children are awarded a certificate when they achieve each level. The staff understand the importance of recognising, praising and celebrating children's achievements and they are clearly proud of each child's efforts, however small. The staff ensure that children celebrate each other's achievements.

The older children are encouraged to support younger or newer children in both the school and residential provision. The older children wear a yellow or black T-shirt when they have reached a higher level of points by supporting less able or younger children. Their picture and an explanation of how they achieved their shirt are displayed in the reception area of the school. The children are very proud to achieve this status.

A highly motivated and committed leadership team provides exemplary direction and support to the well-established and experienced staff. Innovative and creative practice means that parents and children are at the centre of the children's care and fully included in planning and decision making.

A seamless approach between the education staff and residential staff mean that

children are safeguarded well. The staff have excellent systems in place to share information continuously, which enables them to identify and act on concerns immediately.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Staff know and understand the children's individual needs and personalities. They spend quality time listening to the children's wishes and feelings. When the children finish school, the staff talk to them about their day, focusing on the positive aspects. Children and staff view residential time as a fresh start. A parent said, 'I think it's really good that he has the opportunity to start afresh if he has had a bad day at school. He knows that he has a good opportunity to turn any negative behaviours he has had in school into positives in residential time, and that's important for him.'

Children have a review after four weeks of boarding, to ensure that they are happy and want to continue. Children choose to board because staff feel that if children find it distressing the experience will not enhance their progress. School staff and residential staff are involved in the review, along with parents and the child, to ensure that the residential experience is positive and effective. A parent said that the staff supported them to understand the referral process for the residential provision. The parent said, 'I was very happy with how the decision was reached for my son to board, and I fully understand the panel process. He was very keen to be a boarder as he had a friend who boarded. He told me that he wanted to go to the hotel.' Another parent said, 'He didn't have a problem staying in residential, it was me. The staff were really reassuring and I'm really relaxed about it now.'

A high percentage of the children have been excluded from previous schools due to negative behaviour. The headteacher and the head of care are extremely proactive in supporting parents to manage children's behaviours at home. They regularly have sessions with parents to help them to learn techniques to manage behaviour at home by setting consistent boundaries and routines in line with the school and residential provision. This consistent approach between school and home supports the children and gives them security. A parent said, 'We have regular one-to-ones with staff to discuss his behaviour to ensure that everyone is using consistent routines and strategies to help him.' Another parent said, 'There are group meetings when we meet with boarding staff to discuss strategies to manage behaviours and to develop routines.'

The children have the opportunity to experience a wide variety of activities in both the residential provision and the community. The children have fun with staff who fully involve themselves with the children and activities. Children who have specific needs have access to a sensory room. A weekly after-school club has been implemented, which both residential and non-residential children can attend. This helps the children to build and maintain friendships. Children have the opportunity to visit a local home for the elderly, which is clearly enjoyed by both parties. The children are sensitive to the needs of the older people and show great understanding and empathy. The children were proud to report what they had been doing during the visit. These visits help the children to develop their social awareness. The children are in the process of deciding how they want to raise money for a local

charity. The staff teach the children to think about others less fortunate and how they can do something to help.

Children share positive mutual respect for each other and staff, which is an important part of both the school and residential provision. Children are encouraged to help and support each other when playing games and to share games and toys. The staff are highly skilled in recognising potential issues between children. Staff help the children to reflect on their behaviour. Inspectors observed children asking if they could have time away from the group when they found a situation difficult. This shows that they have learned to recognise when their behaviour could have a negative impact on themselves or others.

The children can all name staff members who they can speak to if they are worried or upset. There are contact numbers displayed around the school and residential setting that the children can call if they do not wish to speak to staff. The children know how to complain and staff remind them of the process at the start of house meetings. Consequently, children are able to raise concerns.

An independent person visits the children termly. A photo and the visitor's contact number are displayed in the residential provision in case children wish to contact him between visits. He visited the children during the inspection and they were clearly pleased to see him; he joins in with their activities. The visitor said, 'I always get involved in the activities and this helps to build a positive relationship with the children. They are happier to talk if we are doing something positive.' The visitor provides reports detailing his findings. The children know the school governors, who are proactive and are seen around the school regularly. The governors visit the children regularly and spend time listening to their views, wishes and feelings. One child was heard to shout down the corridor, 'Hi, Gov, I saw you in school today.' The governors are an integral part of the school and residential provision, and engage meaningfully with the children.

The children attend regular house meetings to discuss food choices, activities, rules and boundaries, achievements and the decor or purchases for the residential provision. During a residential meeting at the time of inspection, a child explained that he had put in the grumble book that his mattress was uncomfortable. The head of care purchased a mattress topper and asked the child to report to the other children during the meeting if this had helped. The child was very proud to tell the other children that he had tried the topper for a week and it was very comfortable. Staff will now purchase mattress toppers for all of the children. Children know that they are listened to and that the staff value and act on their views.

Mealtimes are sociable occasions with learning and development opportunities. The school employs its own catering staff, who prepare a well-balanced and healthy diet using fresh, seasonal ingredients. All of the food is cooked from scratch. The children can choose from options of a hot meal, salad or sandwich. The children said that if they change their mind about their meal choice it is not a problem. Yogurts and fruit are available at every mealtime. The kitchen staff are knowledgeable about the children's health, dietary and religious needs and they incorporate alternatives into the menu. Staff encourage the children to make healthy choices.

The staff keep a portfolio of each child's achievements and certificates, which the children take with them when they leave as a memory of their time in the residential provision. This helps to build positive memories and gives children the opportunity to see how far they have progressed.

The school has employed a psychiatric nurse to support the parents with their child's behaviour. This has been successful in the school and residential provision. It has helped parents to access other agencies to support their children and enhance their progress. However, the nurse's registration has lapsed and therefore clarity is required about this role if registration is not reinstated.

Children have positive contact with their parents while they are away from home. Parents are encouraged to contact their child during the residential evening. Staff record the contact that children have with their parents to ensure that they receive a call from home. Children are able to make calls and this helps them to maintain their relationships with people who important to them.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

The children say that they feel safe and are happy staying in the residential provision. They can identify a number of adults who they can speak to if they are worried or upset. Children are able to explain how they would complain if they need to and they say that staff would help them. A parent said, 'I know he is safe. I have no concerns; the staff really look after him.'

The staff understand that the children need to enjoy new experiences which enhance their stay and help them to develop new skills. Staff are not risk averse; they support children to learn and manage risks in accordance with their age, understanding and ability, and in consultation with parents. A parent said, 'He has had so many new opportunities since he has been staying in the residential setting that he would not have had at home. This has built his confidence so much.'

Risk assessments and behaviour plans are robust and guide the staff in keeping the children safe during their stay. The staff monitor and review the plans regularly. There is a comprehensive risk assessment for the sleeping arrangements in the residential provision, which promotes the children's safety.

The governor responsible for safeguarding reviews the policies, procedures and practices and completes a safeguarding audit with the head teacher and deputy head. The findings are reported at the governors' meetings so that the governors are made aware of any actions and potential risks. The staff and governors have level two safeguarding training. The head of care completes a safeguarding audit with the staff to identify any gaps or extra training that may be required. Safeguarding is a priority in the residential provision.

Staff have used two sanctions since the last inspection. The children have had the opportunity to comment and sign the records of these sanctions. The staff focus on rewarding positive behaviours, either verbally or by giving out certificates. Children

have responded well to this positive reinforcement, which has led to a decrease in the number of sanctions.

The staff have used physical intervention twice since the last inspection, to prevent harm to children. The staff speak to the children after the incidents to ensure that the children understand why the staff needed to intervene. This helps the children to reflect on their behaviour and the possible consequences.

The children do not go missing because staff engage them fully. There have been no incidents of bullying since the last inspection. The staff discuss bullying behaviours in the house meetings. They support the children to recognise bullying and to build, maintain and manage friendships.

The security of the building in the school and residential provision is robust. Visitors are requested to sign in and are accompanied when in the school or residential provision. This protects children from access by unchecked adults.

The school and residential staff hand over to each other every morning and evening. This means that patterns and trends are quickly identified and acted upon so that the child is supported before there is an issue. The staff act as exceptional role models. They promote respect and positive behaviour. Consequently, the children understand the behavioural boundaries and expectations and adhere to them. The behaviour management plans are robust and support the highly skilled staff team to recognise and respond to potential triggers and behaviours. Staff de-escalate negative behaviour discreetly and they praise children when they make positive choices.

The staff recognise that technology is an important part of the modern world and they teach the children to use technology safely. The children do not bring mobile phones into school, and all of the computers are linked into the school's security system, which is regularly monitored and updated. The children use electronic tablets, which do not have internet access. The children give good examples of how they keep themselves safe using computers and electronic tablets at home. The work that the staff do with the children is effective because children can recognise potential dangers.

Recruitment processes are robust and all checks are completed and verified before staff begin working in the school or residential provision. Contracts are in place for all staff that live on site. This means that children are safeguarded from unsuitable adults.

There have been two complaints since the last inspection. One complaint became a safeguarding concern. It was robustly investigated and the necessary action taken.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Senior managers in the school and the residential provision are highly skilled, dedicated and fully committed to providing effective and efficient leadership to ensure that the children have the best possible outcomes. The staff have high

expectations of each other and the children.

Since the last inspection, the school and residential provision have developed a closer working relationship which ensures that the children are fully supported in both their academic and residential experiences. All staff have an electronic tablet which is linked into the school's main computer. This enables the staff to remain fully updated about the children and they can add information throughout the day. This supports the staff to identify potential issues or concerns. The headteacher and the head of care review the graphs and data which are produced by this system, to plot individual children's and to identify triggers and patterns of behaviour.

The headteacher and the head of care complete regular self-evaluations of practice and outcomes in school and in the residential provision. The senior staff recognise the importance of continuous evaluation in order to drive improvement and to promote positive outcomes for the children.

The staff seek feedback from the children regularly, through house meetings and questionnaires. Since the last inspection, the headteacher and the head of care have begun to undertake individual video interviews with the children. This means that children are able to express themselves fully rather than just completing surveys. The children spoken to during the inspection were able to demonstrate that the staff had listened to and acted on their wishes and feelings.

The staff in school and in the residential provision work closely together to support children's individual needs. Communication with parents is excellent. A parent said, 'Communication is great. We can email or phone anytime and staff always get back to me. That's important when your child is away from home.'

Leaders and managers receive regular supervision, which is recorded and signed. The staff discuss children, care practice, training and the development of the residential provision during their weekly meetings. The residential staff often attend training with school staff. This further embeds the good practice across the whole school. All of the residential staff have completed either a level 3 or level 5 qualification and they are all up to date with their mandatory training. Sound knowledge underpins their excellent practice.

All of the staff, including the headteacher, and reception staff who work some evenings, mentor individual children. This makes the children feel valued and enables all of the staff to share valuable information to support the children's development.

Parents say that there is good communication between them, the school and the residential provision. A parent said, 'He [child] got tearful in his first week of boarding, so they let him phone home. He told me he was missing his night time story so they told him one to help him settle.' The staff listen to and act on parent's and children's wishes in order for them to settle into and enjoy their residential experience. There is a comprehensive interactive webpage, which children and parents can use. The headteacher completes a regular blog, updating parents about events in school and the residential provision.

The school holds coffee mornings for parents to give them the opportunity to meet and support each other. Senior managers are proactive in creating opportunities to bring parents together in a safe environment to share ideas and experiences.

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 exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact 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 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 children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	115450
Social care unique reference number	SC056394
DfE registration number	919/7034

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	12
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	5 to 11
Headteacher	Mr Sean Trimble
Date of previous boarding inspection	17/11/2015
Telephone number	01438 236 333
Email address	head@larwood.herts.sch.uk

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