

# Pontville Residential School

Black Moss Lane, Ormskirk, Lancashire L39 4TW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Pontville is a residential and day special school for children and young people aged five to 19 who have social communication difficulties. The school is situated in a residential area on the outskirts of Ormskirk. Children and young people who attend the school have an education, health and care plan. The residential provision can accommodate a maximum of 12 children and young people. At the time of the inspection, seven children and young people were staying for four nights a week, Monday to Friday, during term time only. The residential provision was last inspected in September 2017.

**Inspection dates:** 2 to 4 October 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 12 September 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children and young people flourish. The residential provision has a substantial beneficial impact on the overall experiences and progress made by the children and young people who stay there.
- There are measurable improvements in children's and young people's educational attainment and in the skills that they acquire and a reduction in significant incidents resulting from difficult or bad behaviour.
- Children and young people benefit hugely from warm and trusting relationships with highly committed and child-focused staff.
- Staff are creative, and they deliver excellent personalised and group support. The on-site facilities provide the children and young people with an exceptional range of fun activities. Because of this, the children's and young people's emotional and physical well-being is improved.
- Residential staff work in the day-school provision. They have a unique insight into the behavioural patterns and the academic needs of the children and young people, and this helps them to extend and support the curriculum within the residential house.
- The staff have an excellent understanding of the children's and young people's different emotional, health and communication needs. The team around the child is evident and successful.
- The safety of children and young people is a priority. All staff are trained in and fully understand safeguarding practice. This is supported by committed designated safeguarding leads. Proactive safeguarding practice raises the children's and young people's awareness and understanding of the risks that they face. This educates them in how to keep themselves safe.
- There is extensive tracking and analysis of the children's and young people's progress, behavioural incidents and behaviour management issues. Should any common factors or triggers be identified, the children's and young people's timetables and activities are adjusted accordingly.
- There are excellent facilities in the school's 16 to 19 college. Well-equipped workshops provide the children and young people with workplace experiences and life skills.
- A forward-thinking and dynamic management team listens to and values staff's opinions. This supports the staff to develop new ideas that help the children and young people to progress.
- Leaders and managers continue to monitor practice thoroughly and use the latest research to inform practice.
- There is significant overview of all practice within the school and the residential house. Governance, challenge and the actions taken are evident in the focus reports produced.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children and young people benefit from highly personalised and nurturing care and support from the residential staff. Their positive experiences are directly related to the trusting relationships that they form with the residential and teaching staff. The staff have a genuine interest in the children's and young people's welfare and well-being. The children and young people flourish, and they make significant progress in many aspects of their lives, including developing their social skills, managing their emotions and improving their behaviour.

The children and young people love their residential stays. They are confident that the staff care about them and always have their well-being at heart. This is because the staff have a long-term commitment to them and to their parents or carers. Staff know each child or young person exceptionally well and provide a very good level of support to the children's and young people's families. One parent described her experience with the staff and her son's progress as 'magic'. Other parents and carers told the inspector:

- 'Staff are so impressive, (and) they know everything about everything.'
- 'I can honestly say they (staff) have saved my family.'
- 'I was so anxious and had this terrible vision, but I don't know why, because all that vanished when we arrived at the school and, looking around the residential house, I could see my fears were diminished.'
- 'This is basically home from home, thanks to all the efforts of all the staff working there.'
- 'It's like having an extended family, and (young person) often refers to the residential house as her second home.'

The staff have an excellent understanding of the children's and young people's different communication needs. They expertly give the children and young people space and time to express themselves. They also ensure that the children and young people recognise each other's communication needs and give each other the space and time to communicate.

Children and young people feel listened to. The school newsletter and blog include interviews carried out by the children and young people. The publications detail the funds raised by charitable days and include information about past and future events. Overseen by the headteacher, the children and young people are involved in editing the newsletter and blog. The children and young people, parents and carers fill out surveys, and their recommendations are incorporated in the planning of future events. Regular children's and young people's meetings are held in the residential

house, and it is evident that their views, wishes and feelings are listened to and acted on.

Children and young people enjoy a range of exciting and stimulating activities both on site and in the local and wider community. Such as sensory rooms and equipment, the outdoor adventure park, a gym and a forestry area are all within the school grounds. A favourite is the livestock that live on the school farm. A carer told the inspector, 'The farm is without doubt (child's) favourite place to be whenever she can, and she never stops talking to us at home about it all.'

The residential house and the services provided are extremely important to the ethos of the school. Despite considerable challenges, the children and young people make very good progress in education compared to their previous education experiences. Year-on-year, the success rate of passes in GCSE examinations have risen. The 16 to 19 college provides the children and young people with workplace experiences and life skills.

The college is situated off-site and is fully equipped, providing the children and young people with excellent facilities and experiences, for example catering, hair and beauty, vehicle maintenance and a full workshop for metalwork or joinery, along with two rooms used for skills in plastering, wallpapering and painting. There is a fully equipped makeshift flat where independence training goes on. A young person who has transitioned from the school to the college told the inspector, 'This has been the best experience of my life.'

Meeting the children's and young people's physical, psychological and emotional health and social needs is a high priority. Childcare practice is clearly informed by research into developing confident children and young people. There is on-site access to qualified professionals, for example mental health practitioners, speech and language therapists and art, animal and occupational therapists. The headteacher regularly publicises her practice through social media, seminars and conferences. She has a professional interest in autism spectrum disorder, social communication difficulties and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

Staff safely administer any necessary medication to children and young people.

Admissions to the residential house are carefully planned, monitored and reviewed. The staff take account of the individual circumstances of each child, young person and family to help to plan a transition, including family history, identity and culture. Family liaison workers spend as much time as is needed to come to know the children's and young people's parents and carers. A post-admission review ensures that planning is on track, and this instils confidence in the children's and young people's families and carers.

A parent told the inspector, 'We had such a smooth and planned transition. We all attended for tea, and (child) had a couple of overnights. He loves it there and, although he loves home, he is always ready to go back.'

## **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

Safeguarding practice is very strong. The designated safeguarding lead manages sensitive issues through excellent communication, consistency and strong leadership. Leaders and managers use recording systems effectively to track and monitor the progression and impact of concerns.

The headteacher, head of care, designated safeguarding lead and staff are proactive in ensuring that the children and young people are safe. Staff are encouraged to report and record anything that has caused them concern. This system works well because of the openness, honesty and transparency of the school and residential house. The designated safeguarding lead provides training for the residential and school staff. This gives a holistic and consistent approach to safeguarding the children and young people.

Safeguarding training completed includes managing child sexual exploitation, allegations and self-harm, as well as identifying radicalisation and grooming and preventing online abuse. Staff demonstrate well their knowledge in relation to the revised guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' and updated 'Working together to safeguard children'. The designated safeguarding lead has presented real-life scenarios about the dangers of local issues, such as gangs and 'county lines'. These arrangements ensure that the staff are always vigilant and know how to recognise safeguarding concerns.

Staff know the procedures to follow if the children and young people go missing. The security of the residential house and the school grounds and the close supervision that the staff provide mean that the children and young people do not go missing.

In the residential house, the number of physical interventions is minimal, and the children's and young people's behaviour is closely monitored and supported by staff. Staff skilfully enable the children and young people to feel relaxed, and this reduces tensions between peers. The records of physical interventions in school show a significant reduction from previous years.

The children's and young people's care plans and risk assessments identify the support and strategies required to advance their development and reduce the potential of harm. These risk assessments and care plans are clearly linked to the needs identified and agreed in the children's and young people's education, health and care plans. The targets for the children and young people are in the focus reports and clearly show progress relevant to the specific stage of their development.

The staff are sensitive and thoughtful in their approach to the specific cultural and identity needs of the children's and young people's families. They are vigilant, and encourage families to be responsive to all types of bullying and e-safety, and they encourage a culture of respect, dignity and tolerance.

Children and young people are cared for by residential staff and taught by teachers who have been subject to safer recruitment checks and vetting. The school's central record clearly shows the thoroughness of the checks completed before adults have access to the children and young people.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

Leadership across the school, residential house and 16 to 19 college is of a high calibre and is forward thinking. It is characterised by vision, openness, flexibility and optimism. The leadership and management are dynamic. The headteacher and the head of care are open and approachable. Together, they ensure that there is an excellent level of communication between the residential staff, teaching staff, families and professionals. Staff told the inspector that they very much enjoy working in the residential house and that there is an exceptional level of stability in the staff team.

Leaders and managers across the residential house, school and college demonstrate a keen insight into the strengths and areas for improvement and further development. Succession plans are proactive, and they are carefully considered and driven by the maintenance of high standards and the ongoing success and development of the school and residential house. A strong senior management team provides thorough scrutiny and oversight of the residential provision. Reports submitted to the board are challenged to maintain the consistently high levels of the care provided to the children and young people.

The residential house is now regularly visited and reviewed by an independent visitor. This was an area for development at the last inspection. The independent visitor report produced after each visit shows that the head of care always acts on recommendations made.

The emphasis on working as an internal team around the child is clear in day-to-day practice. Many of the care staff have worked in the school for several years. Care staff, teaching staff and therapists work together across the school day, and this ensures seamless support for the children in the evenings. Staff are qualified and experienced. The routine of staff supervision, personal development reviews, training and opportunities for reflection is firmly rooted in practice. These arrangements ensure that the staff remain competent in fulfilling their roles to support and care for the children and young people.

Key workers draw up plans for sessions and half-termly reviews to ensure that this work is focused and contributes to the children's and young people's development. Much thought is given to how to address topics creatively, and the records demonstrate the children's and young people's contributions and participation in activities and discussions.

A partnership approach to working with parents and carers offers additional layers of support and protection for their children and young people. The parent and carer voice group network meetings provide creative opportunities for parents and carers

to come together to talk with experienced professionals. These discussions cover autism spectrum disorder, behaviour, communication and emotional regulation. These arrangements contribute to the smooth transition of the children and young people from school to home and back to school.

The residential house is homely, spacious and clean. The children and young people have personalised their bedrooms with items brought from home. There are pictures showing the children's and young people's enjoyment, arts and crafts made by the children and young people and plenty of useful information.

All health and safety checks are completed by a designated person. Any damage, repair or replacement of furniture is quickly responded to. Fire safety is taken seriously, and innovative steps have been taken to ensure that all the children and young people assemble in line ready for roll call when the fire alarm goes off.

All visitors to the residential house, school and 16 to 19 college must produce their identity, sign in and wear a visitor's badge. These arrangements ensure the safety of the children and young people, staff and visitors.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC061727

**Headteacher:** Justine Sims

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Mark Kersh, social care inspector (lead)





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