

# Laleham Gap School

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

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special 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 may have 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 12 residential pupils, but the decision has been taken to close the house due to a decreasing number of referrals.

**Inspection dates:** 5 to 7 February 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

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:** 4 July 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- A high level of skilled support has made a significant difference to children's quality of life, and in more than one case this has had a life-changing impact.
- Developing children's independence is central to the work of the residential provision and leads to children having a greatly increased ability to meet their own needs.
- Managers and staff identify when things are not going well for children and take decisive action to address the issues.
- Children unable to attend the school due to their health are supported extraordinarily well, including close collaboration with families and professionals to prepare for the children's reintegration.
- Staff help children to keep themselves safe and to anticipate potential risks, with some undertaking their own risk assessments for activities they would like to participate in.
- Highly experienced care staff work closely with other disciplines across the school to share their expertise and gain from the skills of others. This leads to collaborations that enhance children's progress and positive experiences.
- Care staff have a deep understanding of care and affection for children. Children respond well to this and have one or more trusting relationships with those who care for them, which gives them the confidence to face the challenges of their lives.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- The statement of purpose is not conveyed to children in an age-appropriate format.
- Exploration of the gaps in candidates' employment histories are not recorded in every case.
- Annual reviews of the residential provision do not address the staffing policy or an internal assessment of compliance with the national minimum standards.
- Children are not encouraged to have their views recorded directly in the records.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 20.4 The head teacher (or school equivalent), governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school carries out, and records in writing, once each year: a review of the operation and resourcing of the school's welfare provision for boarding pupils, in relation to: its Statement of Purpose; its staffing policy; the placement plans for individual children; and an internal assessment of its compliance with these standards. Where appropriate such a report may be incorporated within a review of the whole school.

### **Recommendations**

- Develop a guide for children that describes, in terms suitable for their age abilities, the aims of the residential provision and how to make a complaint.
- Always encourage children to have their views of major sanctions recorded in log entries.
- Ensure plans, assessments and entries on other documentation are dated and identify their author.
- The school should always identify any contradictory or incomplete information in potential recruits' previous employment history and record the explanations given to account for them.

## Inspection judgements

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

The residential provision is situated in purpose-built accommodation and is extremely well suited to the children's needs. It is spacious and affords many different rooms for children to use, including one for computer games and one for air hockey (the table having been bought at the children's request). This maximises the space available due to rooms no longer being occupied as bedrooms.

Children are encouraged to maintain healthy lifestyles. Gym equipment is available for them to use and physical activity is successfully encouraged through such things as attendance at sports clubs. Children are resistant to widening the range of fruit and vegetables they eat, mainly due to their diagnosed conditions. Staff find ways of gently encouraging a better diet without unnecessary confrontation, for example by having fresh fruit cut into portions at breakfast time.

Key-work sessions cover diet and other issues important to children, such as personal hygiene, homework and relationships with peers. These all help children to develop their understanding and ability to manage individual difficulties, or to mark successes. A considerable amount of work is done to help children reflect on their experiences, particularly in reviews of how their week has been and progress with targets. Children will often complete these independently of staff.

Targets are set by staff in the light of education, health and care plans, the views of parents and in collaboration with children. This results in a significant investment by children, who have on occasion wanted to set extra aims for themselves.

Achievement records (books that detail the skills children have attained) allow children to see their own progress – or, indeed, point out where recording has not kept up to date with what they can do. Children are justifiably proud of their growing abilities.

An annual 'independence week' in which children budget and plan all their meals is an innovative way of staff assessing, and children experiencing, how far they have come since the last one. One parent said that, even though 'residency and I work in tandem to develop my son's independence at his pace', she was still 'surprised at what he was able to achieve' during the week.

Some children come to the residential provision chronically and severely debilitated by the experience of trauma and/or the impact of their diagnosed condition. Placement here has averted a high probability of family breakdown and the likelihood of long-term physical and mental health problems. A professional said, 'Staff have worked wonders. I see my child is a million times better now.'

Children's confidence grows as their independence increases. This leads to a greater capacity for children to manage their anxieties, to engage in education and to think about their futures.

Not all children's paths are ones of continuous, smooth progress, but staff are alert

to any decline in emotional well-being or mental health. They and managers act to address this, if necessary by advocating strongly on behalf of children to obtain services from other agencies.

One young person has spent time away from the school to receive specialist help, but staff have kept in contact with him, including visits at a considerable distance from the school. This has sustained relationships and increased the chances of a successful return. Staff have worked continuously with the young person's family and other professionals to a point where a reintegration is now possible. The young person's mother said that managers and staff had 'dealt with the situation brilliantly' and she 'could not fault their professional, friendly and personable approach'.

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

The home's risk assessments are well documented with clear indications of the severity of risk and what staff need to do to reduce the likelihood of an occurrence. Currently, these assessments do not routinely cover the possibility of child criminal exploitation, but none of the children have shown signs of being particularly vulnerable to this.

Staff help children to understand the importance of keeping themselves safe. This includes when online, in the community and when involved in physical activity. If children want, for example, to ride bicycles, they have been encouraged to think through potential risks and write their own assessments before doing so. This excellent practice means that children have a greater appreciation of the benefits of wearing helmets and knowing how to mend punctures than if staff told them to do these things.

Staff identify and respond to children's needs extremely well, putting in place suitable strategies to meet them, for example the need to experience social interactions and explore friendships with other children of the same gender. This has led to the creation of a girls' group.

Children have strong individual relationships with staff and could name two or more members of staff that they felt confident to confide in. Those children asked said that, if they had any concerns or a complaint, they would speak to one of these staff members first, and then either the head of care or headteacher if they were not happy with the response. Children were also aware of the independent person and that they could approach him too.

Information is available on a noticeboard and a guide for children about how to complain, but both are 'wordy' and one child said that he had never looked at either.

Staff deal with safeguarding concerns promptly and appropriately. One recent disclosure of an historic incident did reveal that practice some years ago was not as robust as it should have been, but current practice is sound. This was shown in a 'textbook' response to the single missing episode.

The school has a safer recruitment policy in place. The application of this was good, other than in two examples of interviewers not recording an exploration of gaps in

employment history. There is no evidence that this led to the school employing unsuitable people.

A behaviour management policy describes the circumstances in which staff may use reasonable force, but did not make it clear that 'the maintenance of good order' should not apply to the residential provision. This was rectified during the inspection.

The residential provision is, however, very settled, with no incidents of physical restraint and only one sanction imposed since the last inspection. In relation to the latter, staff spent considerable time helping the young person think about his behaviour and staff recorded his growing understanding of this well. Nevertheless, the young person was not encouraged to record his views directly in the incident log.

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

Leaders and managers ensure that the residential provision is meeting the aims and objectives set out in the statement of purpose extremely well. There is, however, no equivalent to the statement, such as a pupil's guide, that communicates these to children.

There is a wealth of experience among the staff, which leads to consistency and highly skilled help for children. Nevertheless, staff remain open to developing practice further and ensuring that they have the necessary knowledge and understanding of each child to fully meet identified needs. Plans to close the residential provision in 2021 have not led to any lessening of commitment; conversely, managers and staff are determined to maintain the standard of care given to each child until all have left. More than one professional commented that residential staff were far from being 'complacent'.

Staff work collaboratively with children, their families and other disciplines to develop methods of working and agree targets that are consistent and effective. One professional said, 'If all teams were as open to discussion and liaison and challenge as the residency staff are, interagency working would be a lot easier.' The girls' group is an example of how staff utilise the expertise of colleagues and, this has opened the experience of attending to the wider school population.

Staff consider equality and diversity issues with children as matters arise naturally from questions or comments. Recent discussions have included what it means to be gay, belief in God and the reasons for unemployment. Children who have a faith are supported in the practice of their religion, including visible reminders to take the time to pray.

Case files are up to date and accurately record pertinent issues for each child. However, some documents and entries on forms are either undated and/or do not make the author clear. This makes current relevance and accountability difficult to establish.

Although there have been recent changes on the governing board, the members pay close attention to the welfare of children in the residential provision. They are

assisted by helpful monitoring reports written by an independent visitor and visits made by governors themselves.

An annual review is made of the residential provision; however, when it was recently revised the elements required by Standard 20 were largely omitted. This has not had any discernible impact on the quality of care provided.

Staff feel fully supported in their roles; they draw on each other's experience and confidence to challenge themselves and each other to provide the best service that they can. Formal supervision is well recorded and helps each staff member to reflect on practice, consider their professional development and work through any team-working issues.

Parents spoken to regard the residential staff as, in the words of one, 'wonderful, dedicated and professional' adding 'they really understand my child and her needs'.

## **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 differences 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:** SC023691

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Les Milton

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

**Telephone number:** 01843 570598

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## **Inspector**

Chris Peel, social care inspector



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