

Radlett Lodge School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number 919/6215
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Inspection number 342532
Inspection dates 2-3 December 2009
Reporting inspector George Derby
Social care inspector Kay Mehrtens

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of boarding was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Age group: 4-16

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Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.¹

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000² 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.

Information about the school

Radlett Lodge is an independent residential special school for up to 49 pupils established in 1974 and run by the National Autistic Society (NAS). It is situated in purpose-built accommodation near Radlett in Hertfordshire. It provides on-site boarding for pupils at The Lodge. Pupils can attend the school between the ages of four and 16. It is currently full and has pupils aged between six and 16, including 14 weekly boarders. All the pupils, of whom a majority are boys, have autism together with complex learning and behavioural difficulties. Each has a statement of special educational needs.

The school aims to focus on pupils' individual needs and, by providing a carefully structured curriculum within a positive ethos, to encourage all pupils to be as independent as possible. The school was last inspected in January 2007 and the boarding in December 2008. No children have been admitted to the Early Years Foundation Stage part of the school for three years.

Evaluation of the school

Radlett Lodge School provides an exceptionally high quality of boarding and education and pupils are kept extremely safe. Excellently led by a principal and senior team, their very high expectations result in staff who are exceptionally ambitious for the pupils. The boarding provision and school work seamlessly together to support pupils' all round development. Consequently, the pupils make excellent progress academically and personally. The teaching is excellent because it is underpinned by a very thorough knowledge of pupils' needs, excellent assessment

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

and highly detailed planning, all of which maximise pupils' progress. Improvement since the last inspection is good and all regulations are met.

Quality of education

The quality of education is outstanding, as is the curriculum. There are comprehensive schemes of work in place for all subjects and activities which meet the requirements of pupils' statements and the National Curriculum. Planning is excellent. It is monitored frequently by subject leaders who examine the impact of this on pupils' progress and modify it accordingly.

The seamless planning and working between The Lodge and school results in a high level of understanding about pupils' needs and activities which are comprehensively designed to meet these. The school's daily planning and the planning of boarding activities take full account of pupils' autism and through the support given, counter considerably the impact of the impairments that autism brings. Even the clubs at lunchtime, after school and residential activities take all this into account. For example, the games club at lunchtime run by the school's speech and language therapist, helps pupils to learn to take turns, understand rules and deal with winning and losing. This is all part of a highly detailed programme for personal, social and health education. All programmes are carefully related to the targets that pupils are to attain to help them move on to the next stage in their learning and personal development.

A key focus in the planning of activities is on 'learning to learn' and centred on the NAS approach of structure, positivity, empathy, low arousal and making links (SPELL). This is highly successful. Pupils on arrival to the school find it very hard to make sense of their environment and of what they are expected to do and learn. This approach helps significantly to provide them with order, to organise themselves; it also aids their flexibility of thought and their ability to cope with change.

Support for pupils' communication pervades every activity and is so well embedded in the work done; it results in pupils' outstanding progress. Whether they use symbols, or for the few who use spoken language, carefully crafted approaches and planning ensure that pupils can respond and understand that words have meaning. The development of pupils' literacy and numeracy, too, is of high priority enabling those who can, to write simple sentences and manage money, solve simple problems and tackle calculations.

Staff are highly aware of pupils' physical needs and how pupils need to expend energy, often to cope with their emotional stresses. In addition, the requirement for them to develop coordination, physical and sensory skills is met through the highly developed and excellent physical education curriculum. There is also a really good emphasis on health through the fitness programme and on understanding pupils' sensory needs. This is through excellent sensory assessment and activities which

promote an understanding of their body and how to cope with situations which involve touch and other senses.

A key development since the school was last inspected has been the expansion of the Key Stage 4 provision now that the school has Year 10 and 11 pupils. A very well designed programme which involves academic and vocational lessons and activities, while still focusing on tasks to meet their key needs, is skilfully in place. The Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programmes enable pupils to have options and choices. Pupils are excellently prepared for the future academically, socially and emotionally and in developing skills for life. The community based education programme makes a significant contribution to their practical understanding of the world in which they live.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. Nearly all the teaching seen during the inspection was judged to be outstanding. Through highly effective, organised lessons, pupils feel safe and secure and are enabled to learn. Pupils' independence is highly promoted and they are expertly managed. They develop responsibility for their own learning and record their activities through Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) symbols and on symbol timetables. Lessons are highly structured and exceptionally well planned and pupils are able to anticipate what comes next. This helps them to cope excellently with the transition to the next part of the lesson or activity. Work is highly matched to pupils' needs. Although staff use ICT to good effect and pupils watch the interactive whiteboard intently, the school has planned to increase the use of computers in lessons by pupils. Nevertheless, a small group use their communication aids to really positive effect. Staff take great care to maximise the way in which all pupils are able to make their needs known, whatever form of communication they use.

Pupils make outstanding progress because the school's systems for assessing pupils' needs, in the short term in lessons and over time, are highly developed. Their sensory and academic needs are particularly well assessed. Recording of pupils' responses is highly detailed and undertaken by a wide range of staff including therapists, care staff, teachers and assistants. Planning takes exceptionally good account of what the staff know about pupils' learning and development in The Lodge and in school. The school's tracking of pupils' progress is of high quality and reviewed regularly throughout the year. The school leaves no stone unturned in the pursuit of enabling pupils to make the maximum progress. Sometimes the very small steps of progress that a few pupils make are not easy to detect from the data collection; it is not always easy to identify precisely key areas of personal and communication development, as much of the data is subject based information.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' personal development is outstanding, spiritually, morally, socially and culturally. Each of these aspects is considered by the school with great care, and pupils make exceptional progress in their personal development because this lies at

the heart of the school's endeavours. Pupils gain understanding of their own feelings and learn appropriate ways of expressing them. The school is painstaking in helping pupils to learn and to abide by clear and simple rules. The school transforms its pupils so that they get great enjoyment from learning and cannot wait to come to school. As a result, school attendance is excellent.

Social communication and interaction are skilfully modelled by adults, building pupils' capacity to forge relationships and to work and play with others. The school provides an exceptionally rich range of activities to extend pupils' cultural appreciation and respect for diversity. Monthly cultural days this term have included a focus on Italy and Africa. The school is sensitive to the cultural needs and backgrounds of pupils, and encourages the sharing of experiences, for example, in celebrating different religious festivals.

An excellent programme of weekly visits out of school sets learning in context and expands horizons. It helps pupils to make a really positive contribution. Social and personal skills are practised in school and then applied on visits.

Pupils make outstanding progress in learning how to behave so that they can make the most of school life. They are guided to gain awareness of the impact of their actions, and positive behaviours are constantly described and reinforced. The PECS approach is used consistently to underpin expected behaviour. Pupils try hard to be polite and helpful. They develop massively in confidence; they begin to take initiatives and to make decisions for themselves, preparing excellently for the future.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

This is a school with boarding provision that keeps its pupils extremely safe, making them highly aware of the dangers around them and how to keep themselves safe. Welfare, health and safety are outstanding because procedures are excellent and there is comprehensive monitoring of all aspects such as fire safety, child protection, medication and health, and site health and safety. Staff training in all aspects of welfare, health and safety is extremely rigorous and three members of staff are trained at the higher level as designated senior persons for child protection. Risk assessment is very thorough and is in place for all activities in and out of school, in relation to personal needs, and for fire prevention. The key worker system promotes pupils' safe supervision and a very close focus on their personal needs; advocacy for pupils through this approach is excellent. The school complies with all requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2001.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All regulations are met. Rigorous procedures are in place for the recruitment and vetting of all staff. The single central register is comprehensively completed and Criminal Record Bureau checks are made on all staff, volunteers and proprietors, at an enhanced level.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's accommodation allows pupils to learn effectively, safely and securely. All regulations are met. Although the building is very compact, it has been adapted well and re-designed so it meets the changing needs of its increasingly complex population of pupils. Each classroom environment is set up in a highly organised way with pupil workstations and other designated areas for pupils to work at. In this way, the organisation takes very good account of pupils' emotional and social needs and supports them to learn in a very calm atmosphere. The sports hall is an excellent feature and the new Key Stage 4 separate accommodation is superb. By contrast, corridors in school are narrow and some rooms are small for the numbers of pupils and the supporting adults. There are no facilities to prepare meals at lunchtime in school and, as a consequence, pupils have sandwiches. The school is in the process of planning for a new school building.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

All regulations are met. Excellent, very thorough, detailed annual reviews of pupils' statements and other reviews of their targets inform parents of their children's progress. Close collaboration with parents, regularly sharing information with them and with other professionals, ensures that very close working partnerships lead to pupils' rapid progress. Pupils have excellent 'passports', mainly used in The Lodge, which inform those who work with them and visitors of how they best communicate. The school recognises that its pen portrait information for pupils could usefully follow the same approach, making pupils' needs immediately clearer to all.

Procedures for handling complaints

All regulations are met. Procedures for The Lodge meet the national minimum standards. The one formal complaint received by the school in the past academic year was properly concluded in March.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Although no children have been admitted for some time, the school is in complete readiness to admit such children. The school's Early Years Foundation Stage programme of activities meets requirements. It is not possible to make a judgement on the outcomes of children's learning and development or on overall effectiveness, although those children who have progressed through this stage to school have made excellent progress. Staff are well aware of all other requirements, such as those for children's welfare and for supporting their learning and development. The systems and procedures in place for the Early Years Foundation Stage, such as for assessment and recording of children's progress, are excellently led and managed.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of boarding at Radlett Lodge School is outstanding and the school meets all key national minimum standards. The recommendations from the last inspection have all been addressed. The provision for being healthy is outstanding. There are robust systems in place for the safe administration and storage of medication. Pupils' health needs are identified and good health is promoted. The school provides a very healthy, well balanced diet for the pupils and is working towards a healthy schools award. Meal times are structured to help pupils develop their communication, social and personal skills.

The provision for staying safe is also outstanding. Recruitment procedures ensure that all staff who come into contact with pupils have been thoroughly vetted. Staff are well trained in safeguarding policies, procedures and practice. Safeguarding is taken very seriously by the school and staff team. There are excellent systems in place that monitor and ensure pupils' safety. Comprehensive risk assessments exist for all aspects of safety of the premises, individual pupils and activities are well recorded and reviewed. Staff receive training in specialist behaviour management techniques that protect pupils and link to their detailed, individual behaviour management plans. The focus is very much on encouraging, developing and rewarding positive behaviour.

Helping pupils to enjoy their boarding experience and achieve their potential is outstanding. The structure and approaches used by both the residential and teaching teams ensure a seamless approach to enabling pupils to achieve in every aspect of their life in school. All of the staff work with the pupils in a caring, positive and highly professional manner. Parents are pleased with the care provided. Their comments are typified by, 'Staff are professional, caring, highly dedicated, approachable and this is evident in the way that they interact with the young people. There is a lovely atmosphere and the young people obviously feel safe and secure.'

The provision for helping pupils make a positive contribution to their life in school is outstanding. An assessment covering all aspects of the pupils' needs on entry to The Lodge is completed and regularly updated as part of an on-going process. Support plans address all aspects of pupils' needs. They contain detailed targets and strategies for staff that ensure a consistent approach to working with the pupils. Staff have an exceptional knowledge of the individual needs and difficulties of the pupils in their care. They support them to express their wishes, feelings and to make choices. The focus on enabling pupils to develop and effectively use their communication skills is impressive. Communication systems are in place that ensure parents are kept well informed of their children's progress and experiences during their time in boarding and in school.

The provision for economic well-being is good. The pupils live in a well furnished, decorated and pleasant environment. They are provided with lots of games, equipment and space to play and relax. Pupils are supported by staff to personalise their bedrooms. The living areas are bright and lovely displays and photographs of pupils having fun are evident throughout the building.

The provision of organisation is outstanding. Parents and pupils are provided with very good information, in user friendly formats, about the way that the school operates and the services provided. Parents are kept well informed about any changes to policy, procedures and practice within the whole school. There are excellent staffing levels, with either two-to-one or one-to-one staffing so ensuring that the individual needs of the pupils are well met. The commitment to staff training is commendable. Staff receive training on so many different topics relevant to the needs of autistic children and were observed to put learned theory into very effective, professional practice. Pupils benefit from a staff team that are effectively managed and well trained and committed to meeting their needs. The school has effective internal monitoring processes that include a detailed and well actioned school development plan. The whole staff team work well to ensure that pupils are well cared for, well educated and enabled to reach their potential.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The emphasis and practice on developing pupils' social awareness and inclusion are excellent. The whole school works together to enable pupils to enjoy as well as learn about different cultures through participation in celebrations of various cultural festivals. The individual needs of the pupils, especially with regard to their cultural and communication needs, are well met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

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

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development:

- ensure that the school's tracking systems can identify the smallest steps of progress that a few pupils make and that aspects of all pupils' personal development and their communication can be more easily tracked.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education	✓			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	✓			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	✓			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How good are the outcomes for children in the EYFS?				
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?	✓			
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?	✓			
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?				

The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision	✓			
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School details

Name of school	Radlett Lodge School		
DCSF number	919/6215		
Unique reference number	117646		
URN for social care	SC019505		
Type of school	Special school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	30 November 1974		
Age range of pupils	4-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 38	Girls:11	Total: 49
Number of boarders	Boys: 9	Girls: 5	Total: 14
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 38	Girls: 11	Total: 49
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 8	Girls:5	Total:13
Annual fees (day pupils)	£35,469		
Annual fees (boarders)	£63,154		
Address of school	Harper Lane Radlett Hertfordshire WD7 9HW		
Telephone number	01923 854 922		
Fax number	01923 859 922		
Email address	Radlett.lodge@nas.org.uk		
Principal	Mrs Lynda Perry		
Proprietor	National Autistic Society		
Reporting inspector	George Derby		
Dates of inspection	2-3 December 2009		