

SC012021

Registered provider: The Loddon Foundation Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This home provides education and care for up to 30 pupils, from eight to 19 years of age, who have autistic spectrum disorder, severe learning disabilities and/or associated complex restrictive behaviours. The school operates as a charitable trust and is registered with the Department for Education.

Inspection dates: 12 to 13 December 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 19 May 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection:

None.

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Children, most of whom have struggled in other residential special schools, make exceptional progress. They engage with their learning, find new ways to communicate other than through challenging behaviour and grow in confidence and self-esteem.
- Children are in good health. Staff work with specialist health professionals, such as a dentist, to support children in appointments they find extremely difficult.
- Senior leaders have been successful in recruiting a high-calibre staff team. They continue to develop innovative and creative ways to attract and retain staff. They ensure that staff have comprehensive training relevant to the needs of the children they care for.
- Staff demonstrate a thorough understanding of each child's individual needs. They see their work as a vocation and enjoy being with the children. The staff approach, using a personalised learning approach across a 24-hour curriculum, is successful. Children have a positive learning experience and acquire useful skills for life.
- Education, care and therapy teams are fully integrated. The entire team focuses on the needs of each child, communicating across the disciplines so that there is a consistent approach.
- Key staff are leaders in behaviour management, training others in a positive range of options to avoid crisis. They analyse incidents and provide meaningful statistics that inform practice.
- Placement plans are succinct, clearly informing staff of each child's needs. They contain realistic goals and show how progress is measured. Children make exceptional progress in their communication, personal care and the development of their life skills.
- Safeguarding practice is outstanding. The protection of children is embedded in practice across the entire team.
- Senior managers show exceptional leadership. They are inspirational, confident and ambitious. Their monitoring is excellent. They have their 'finger on the pulse', identifying weaknesses and taking action when necessary. They think strategically about the future and commission experts to help them to plan for the decade ahead.
- Key staff work with other professionals exceptionally well. They have worked with a university to develop a vocational degree in working with children with special needs.
- Senior staff show great innovation in their practice, for example researching with a university how children who have autistic spectrum disorder and severe learning difficulties can understand their spirituality.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Protocols for pro re nata (as and when required) medication are not in place in all cases.
- Staff who are responsible for the supervision of others do not fully reflect discussions on practice in the supervision records.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
19/05/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
16/09/2016	Full	Good
11/03/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
17/07/2015	Full	Good

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Medicines must be administered in line with a medically approved protocol. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 35, paragraph 7.15)
In particular, ensure that there are protocols for pro re nata medication.
- The record of supervision should provide evidence that supervision is being delivered in line with regulation 33 (4)(b). ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.3)
In particular, this relates to practice-related discussion.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Staff see children's abilities and not their disability. They have great ambition that children can develop to their maximum potential in every area of their lives. Staff guide children rather than doing things for them. They encourage children to practise their independent skills. Children develop aptitudes that will be of lifelong benefit. Progress is significant. One particular example is a child who used a wheelchair on admission and now has no further use for this. The child is now able to run with her peers. A member of staff talked about a child who had painted a Christmas decoration and hung it on the tree. She described this as a 'magical' and a 'tear jerking' moment, such was the significance of the child being able to do this. A parent said: 'We are delighted with the home, they cannot do enough. It is a joy to see my son so happy.'

Children live in a calm environment where they are cared for by a professional, diligent and competent staff team. Children, most of whom have been unsuccessful in special schools, become much more confident in their learning, communication and self-esteem. They learn other ways to communicate instead of using challenging behaviour. A member of staff said: 'All the staff work to improve the children's lives; this is clear in the way everyone is so proud of all the little and large steps of progress each child makes.'

Children are in excellent health. The school nurse maintains an oversight of their health needs. She works with staff to ensure that children access key health appointments. Staff use, for example, social stories, picture exchange communication systems or desensitisation methods to support children to attend health appointments they find difficult, such as the dentist. A parent said: 'Staff spend significant time discussing health concerns and attending medical appointments.' Staff are trained in emergency protocols, such as the administration of emergency medication in the event of an epileptic seizure. Staff keep children in excellent health in other ways. For example, children exercise in

the extensive grounds or in the weekly exercise club and swimming in the home's own pool. Staff use their skills to support children, some of whom have sensory needs around food, to eat a healthy diet. For example, they use a 'juice bar' where children make their own healthy drinks.

Staff are well versed in medication administration. They ensure that children get the right medication at the right time under the auspices of the school nurse. Although health professionals have prescribed pro re nata (PRN) medication for some young people and staff manage this appropriately, there are no formal written PRN protocols in place. This is not in strict accordance with guidance.

Children enjoy positive and fun relationships with staff who demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of their individual needs. It is obvious that staff enjoy being with the children and this is their vocation as well as their job. Staff demonstrate remarkable patience and understanding of children who, because of their disability, invade their personal space or present with behaviours that challenge.

Staff are creative in their approach to children who struggle with everyday appointments, such as the dentist or hairdresser. For example, they employ a hairdresser to come into the home to comb a child's hair to help them to become comfortable with the sensation. Children are then able to go on to have their hair cut.

Staff use individual supportive strategies to engage children in their own particular learning style so that they want to repeat the experience. Children experience a positive communication-centred environment where staff hear their voice. Staff help children to find ways to replace unwanted or restrictive (challenging) behaviour. As a result, their education attendance is outstanding.

Staff treat children with dignity and respect. They give children who require a high level of supervision because of their disability the space and time they need. The approach to equality and diversity is exceptional. For example, senior leaders consider that children who have severe learning difficulties and autistic spectrum disorder can experience spirituality. They work with other professionals in a university to research this thinking. Staff help children to consider others with special needs in less economically developed countries. They have developed a relationship with a school in Zambia, for which they provide training and resources. Staff support children to raise funds for children with similar needs but fewer resources to meet them.

Staff show a remarkable commitment to promoting family relationships. They provide training in low arousal and distraction techniques to families. They encourage home contact and are on hand to assist if required. Three members of staff stayed in a car near a parental home to offer assistance if needed, because a child had previously destroyed the environment. Parents are able to enjoy time with their children in a way that they once thought was impossible.

Children make full use of the extensive grounds. They are able to care for small animals, use the play equipment and swimming pool and walk around the estate where they find

the natural environment calming. Children utilise a range of activities in each home as well as in the school, such as the sensory room. Those who have a short attention span develop their self-occupancy skills. Staff fulfil the aims and objectives in the statement of purpose for a 'waking curriculum'. A parent said: 'There are great facilities to ensure that my child can partake in activities that interest him, and the staff build a schedule that ensures he enjoys plenty of these activities alongside his education.' A professional said: 'Children are free to make their own choices when appropriate and have the freedom to learn where they feel comfortable, in beautiful grounds and supported by fantastically trained, wonderful members of staff.'

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

A particular strength of the home is the approach to behaviour management for children who have presented historically with extreme challenging behaviour. The charity has been a pioneer in the development of a positive range of options to avoid crisis. It provides training nationally for other professionals in this 'whole person' approach. It also provides training for parents. Staff are extremely well trained in prevention, early intervention and calming strategies and they deploy these techniques before considering the use of any form of physical intervention. Senior managers are meticulous in their approach to analysing individual incidents as well as trends across all the homes. They have a deep understanding of children with severe communication difficulties who are trying to make their needs known through their behaviour. They are successful in listening to and meeting those diverse needs, for example by moving a child to a bedroom further away from a corridor.

The manager is the designated safeguarding lead and his role is well known throughout the complex. He has developed additional paperwork since the last inspection to provide a clear chronology of any child protection issues. Senior managers have developed the digital technology so that all staff can easily raise a concern. This is evident in practice. A safeguarding culture is embedded in the home so that all staff feel able to raise anything they are concerned about, confident that senior managers will take them seriously and take the necessary action swiftly. The senior management team discusses and reflects on safeguarding issues on a monthly basis. It ensures that lessons are learned and changes procedures, forms or training where necessary. Staff document the things that children say. They do not presume that statements made by children who have autistic spectrum disorder and learning difficulties are inaccurate. Managers pore over such documents to consider whether there are any safeguarding concerns that the child is trying to communicate.

Key staff have excellent arrangements in place to keep children safe in the event of a fire. They ensure that fire equipment is maintained and properly serviced and that children participate in trial evacuations. Staff gain information from previous placements about children who may struggle in the event of the fire alarm going off.

Key staff follow safer recruitment practice. They ensure that all the necessary checks are in place before employing an individual. These include checks for applicants who live overseas. Other key staff have responsibility for the health and safety of the

environment. They keep comprehensive records to ensure that equipment is safe and certified. They keep an overview on accidents and report any trends to the management team.

Staff are fully aware of the risks posed to children who may go missing. This is extremely unlikely given the staff ratios and site security. Nevertheless, staff do not compromise the safeguarding culture. They identify the children who are likely to run due to their autistic spectrum disorder and have clear strategies to keep them safe.

The manager has excellent links with other safeguarding professionals. He is professional and transparent in his approach, discussing any concerns and seeking advice. He takes effective action in the event of an allegation, keeping the child and staff member safe. He ensures that relevant agencies are informed, including Ofsted.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The home is in the hands of an experienced, qualified and competent senior management team (SMT). The team models a culture of placing each child at the centre of practice. The new home manager has made an application to register with Ofsted. The SMT makes decisions thinking of the impact on the children in their care. Their enthusiasm and commitment is infectious. They are ambitious about and confident in the future of the home, commissioning experts to give advice about the future fabric of the buildings and grounds over the next decade.

Members of the SMT are forward-thinking and well-respected leaders. They are innovative in their approach. For example, they have developed a vocational degree with a university in working with children with special educational needs. Plans are well under way for undergraduates to work in the home, with study leave built into their programme. The SMT has developed relationships with other professionals since the last inspection, such as through the child and adolescent and mental health service. A psychiatrist is available to give advice and provide helpful reading material, for example on the emerging sexuality of a young person with special needs. Psychologists, employed by the home, provide training for other local schools, helping them to understand autistic spectrum disorder and challenging behaviour. A university arranges for its students, such as speech and language students, to have a placement at the home.

Senior leaders have been creative and innovative in their approach to recruiting high-calibre staff. They have interviewed and recruited overseas candidates who are extremely well qualified and experienced. In some cases, they have provided accommodation to attract the right applicants. There has been a significant improvement in the quality, level and retention of staff, and this has had a direct positive impact on the quality of care. Children are cared for by members of a high-quality team who understand children's individual needs, are committed to their role and, as a team, provide a consistent approach.

Staff undergo extensive training that is pertinent to the needs of the children. They

describe their training as excellent and are confident that they have the skills they need. A member of staff said that managers are 'very supportive of professional development'. Staff speak highly of the new manager and the quality of their supervision. They say that they are able to discuss issues and reflect on practice. The manager does not routinely record these reflective discussions in the supervision notes.

A strength of this home is the fully integrated approach between care, education and therapy teams. Senior leaders have been successful in valuing everyone's contribution and celebrating the progress of the children in their care. Of particular note are the night staff who are valued equally to other staff. They are trained to the same standard and are equipped, for example, to engage in play therapy when a child is unsettled at night. Senior leaders have exploited well the use of digital technology to ensure that staff have access to the most up-to-date information and are 'singing from the same hymn sheet'. Children who require predictability and consistency excel. A member of staff said: 'We all work together, we all roll into one team.' Another member of staff said: 'I feel privileged to work here.' A parent said: 'I have nothing but praise for the staff there, it is a great place and they do wonderful work.'

Managers develop exemplary placement plans. Plans are succinct and up to date, giving staff clear guidance on each child's needs, behaviour support and risk reduction measures. Staff demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the plans that they apply in practice. For example, they use the picture exchange communication system (PECS) books to gain a child's view. The books are individually designed for each child depending on their level of communication. Staff ensure that parents have a PECS book that relates to the home environment, for example who the child will see at Christmas. This minimises children's anxiety. Staff keep superb records of progress using a simple format of 'then, now and next' with pictures to evidence starting points, current achievements and future goals.

The SMT is proficient at monitoring the home. Leaders have put in place a broad range of internal systems to ensure that the quality of care is the best possible. They use an independent visitor to assess objectively their performance and especially the experience that children have in the home. They are not defensive when there is criticism from other professionals or parental complaints. They use this to actively drive forward improvement. This is a home where the SMT knows the strengths and weaknesses. It strives to achieve the highest possible standard.

The SMT keeps the statement of purpose under regular review. This clearly defines the aims and objectives. Leaders demonstrate an attention to detail; for example, they specify the arrangements for visitors on Christmas Day, to ensure that children who may struggle with this season have the most positive experience.

Children live in warm and comfortable homes. Some of the buildings are new and custom built, others are older but are cared for exceptionally well. Maintenance staff attend to any repairs promptly, retaining the homely environment.

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 children's home 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 Care Standards Act 2000 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 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC012021

Provision sub-type: Residential special school

Registered provider: The Loddon Foundation Ltd

Registered provider address:

Responsible individual: Marion Cornick

Registered manager: Post vacant

Inspectors

Keith Riley, social care inspector

Amanda Harvey, social care inspector

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