

The Loddon School

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC012021
Inspection date	02/08/2012
Inspector	Bridgette Lowe
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Residential special school (>295 days/year)

Setting address	The Loddon School, Wildmoor Lane, Sherfield-on-Loddon, HOOK, Hampshire, RG27 0JD
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Registered person	The Loddon School Company
Registered manager	Joy Audrey Wake
Responsible individual	Marion Lesley Cornick
Date of last inspection	12/01/2012

Service information

Brief description of the service

This home provides education and residential care for up to 30 pupils, from 8 to 19 years of age who have severe and complex learning difficulties, associated with autism. The home operates as a charitable trust, and being a school as well, it is approved by the Department for Education.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **outstanding**.

Young people benefit from living in the school units which provide highly individualised and personalised care. Extremely sensitive and well-planned transitions into adult services ensure young people achieve the best possible outcomes. Young people thrive in learning independent living skills through excellent care practices and support from staff. Staff are extremely well trained and effective in managing young people with complex behavioural and communication difficulties. The strong focus on positive behaviour management and developing young people's communication has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the majority of young people's challenging behaviour.

Excellent safeguarding and health and safety arrangements ensure young people's welfare is given the highest priority. Young people's health needs are very well met by a vast range of professionals. Young people are supported by a committed and dedicated child-centred staff team. Extremely effective and rigorous monitoring ensures the management team continually review and improve the quality of care and provision for young people. This ensures the best possible outcomes are achieved for all young people. Young people live in a well-maintained environment. However, one unit was not maintained to the same standards as other young people's units. This did not impact on the high standard of care afforded to young people.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- continue to provide a comfortable and homely environment that is well maintained and decorated. This relates to Eagles Unit works and programmes of redecoration being undertaken in a timelier manner. (NMS 10.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **outstanding**.

Outcomes for the young people continue to be outstanding. Since joining the school, young people have grown significantly in their confidence, independence and ability to access a vast range of activities. Parents are very positive about the care and support their children receive and the developments they have made since joining the school. One parent commented: 'This is the best thing that has happened to my child; I could not ask for anything more. I just wish they could stay here when they are an adult.'

The development of the waking day curriculum has increased opportunities for young people and enabled young people to achieve in all activities they access. For example, young people are able to undertake tasks such as self-help skills and independent living skills at a pace that is individual to them. This has resulted in young people being able to achieve and complete daily activities in a successful manner. Young people's highly individualised programmes are seamless, commencing from the moment they wake until bedtime. This has resulted in young people developing and progressing with their communication, self-help and independent living skills and behaviour in a highly positive manner. Young people also achieve in areas such as animal care and horticulture. All achievements, however small, are celebrated and rewarded with young people gaining accreditation for new skills learnt.

Young people are empowered to make choices about their daily programme of activities, enabling them to feel more in control of their daily lives. This has resulted in fewer incidents of challenging behaviour and young people being able to access many more activities they feel comfortable with. One parent commented, 'I cannot thank the school enough; my child can now do things I never dreamt that they would be able to. They are so much more independent, their communication has come on tenfold, and their independent living skills are better than some teenagers!'

Young people access a vast range of stimulating activities both within the school grounds and in the community. Young people benefit from attending clubs organised at the school such as the culture club. This has provided young people with opportunities to try new foods from other countries, dance and dress up in clothes from countries around the world. One young person discovered liking hummus as a result of this club extending their range of tastes and foods further. Many young

people are able to transfer the skills learnt at the school into the community. For example, the school's café teaches young people to make choices, wait their turn and collect their choices in a safe and structured environment. Young people have then successfully been able to access cafes and restaurants in the community as a result of this learnt skill. Many families have found this an invaluable skill and has enabled them to access the community with their child in a positive way.

Young people's health is given the highest regard. They benefit from a vast range of professionals working closely with the school to ensure their physical and emotional well-being is central to their care. The school's staff comprise psychologists in the behaviour support team, school nurse and full-time care assistant, as well as a large number of well-trained staff in first aid. All staff work successfully with external consultants to ensure young people's health needs are identified and successfully addressed. The school has been proactive in resourcing an optician who has been successful in testing all young people's eyesight. This is a positive development, especially in light of the challenges young people present. This has resulted in those young people with eyesight problems being managed more effectively to ensure this does not impact on their daily lives. Young people are positively encouraged to take part in a healthy lifestyle. Some young people are now able to access community leisure facilities, as a direct result of the work and support undertaken at the school. Young people previously self-restricting their diet are now trying more food varieties, resulting in healthier and more balanced diets.

Quality of care

The quality of the care is **outstanding**.

The school excels in their delivery of care and support to young people. The individualised care afforded to young people is of the highest standard. This is mainly due to the extremely dedicated and knowledgeable staff and the positive relationships that exist between young people and staff. Staff have consistently high and realistic aspirations for young people, ensuring they reach their maximum potential in all areas of their lives. Staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of the needs of all the young people, which was echoed by parents and social workers alike. The child-centred staff team enables young people to behave in a positive and appropriate manner. One parent commented: 'It's like one big family.' Another parent commented: 'I wouldn't want my child to be anywhere else; the staff are brilliant and I am more than happy with the care my child receives.' Young people were observed using humour and positive communication interactions with staff, demonstrating they feel confident and relaxed in staff company.

Individualised and person-centred planning is key to the success and the high quality care young people receive. Excellent individual education and care plans (IECPs) detail all the areas of care and support staff will provide. IECPs are completed in a very comprehensive format that is easily read and fully informs staff practice. Staff are extremely proactive in gaining the view of multi-agency professionals that are known to individual young people. This effective working partnership enables staff to incorporate key information and strategies when planning young people's care. This

multi-agency working ensures the staff team work consistently with young people to ensure the best possible outcomes are achieved. Plans are regularly reviewed and revised as and when needed. The school has an excellent annual review format that can now be accessed securely on their school website by parents and professionals with this knowledge. Social workers have complimented the school on this resource and many compliments have been received by the school for their extremely accurate and useful documentation. Extremely detailed planning and review ensures staff are very well informed about the care and support to be provided to young people.

The school has developed its own curriculum to meet the needs of the young people. The Personalised Learning for Life Using Supportive Strategies (PLLUSS) enables young people to have personalised education and care delivered through an individualised programme. There is a very clear focus on developing young people's independent living skills that has resulted in young people learning new skills such as shopping, self-help skills, cooking and home management skills such as washing and cleaning. The school has recently been successful in achieving an outstanding grade judgement in their Ofsted education inspection. The school was reported as providing an outstanding quality of education, enabling the majority of pupils to make outstanding progress.

Young people benefit from living in a residential special school that provides year-round education and care. The environment provides them with spacious grounds, a nature walk, which young people have helped develop, and horticultural and animal care opportunities. There are seven units altogether, with one being off site but near to the school site so young people can access all the resources available in the school grounds. The premises and accommodation are maintained to a high standard. However, one unit appears tired in its appearance, both outside and inside decoration. The school has a works schedule that highlights the need for this work to be completed; however, the work does not appear to have taken place in a timely fashion. This shortfall does not detract from the high standard of care that is afforded to young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **outstanding** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Young people's safety is given the highest regard. Extremely well-trained and knowledgeable staff ensure that young people are safeguarded to the highest degree. High staff ratios ensure any challenging behaviour is managed in a positive and successful manner, reducing opportunities for any targeting behaviours. The school policy is that the use of physical intervention is as a last resort for the protection of young people. Excellent behaviour analysis by the positive behaviour support team ensures there is a real commitment and drive to continue to reduce any challenging or self-injurious behaviours. The school is successful at demonstrating a continued reduction in young people's challenging behaviour. The majority of young people were very calm, engaging in activities and happy.

Observations were that incidents of anxiety or challenging behaviour were successfully managed, ensuring young people were not unsettled for any length of time.

Excellent and detailed risk assessments inform staff practice. Staff are not risk adverse, but work in a manner with young people that enables them to try new experiences in a safe and planned fashion. This has proved very successful for young people who may have previously found accessing the community or social events quite distressing. Young people are protected by effective health and safety measures.

Young people are protected by comprehensive recruitment procedures. Robust checks are undertaken on staff prior to their commencement of employment. Rigorous monitoring highlighted the fact that the school was not verifying references once they were received. This is now embedded in policy and recruitment procedures, thus further safeguarding young people's welfare.

Parents were very positive and reassured that their children's health and safety are given the highest priority. Parents commented: 'I wouldn't want my child to be anywhere else. They really understand my child's need and behaviour; he has come on in leaps and bounds.'

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **outstanding**.

An extremely committed and strong management team ensure that young people and their families receive an outstanding service. The school welcomes young people's families and those close to them, supporting them to spend time at the school and in the units to ensure young people benefit from continued family contact. This demonstrates the school works well with families in the best interest of the young people. One parent commented that they are always made to feel very welcome when they visit their child, and was extremely grateful for the support the staff give to the family.

The experienced Registered Manager ensures the staff team continually strive for development and improvement. Teams comprise living and learning managers, mentors, team coordinators, and living and learning assistants. These staff teams come with a wealth of experience and skills, with both qualified care and teaching staff working alongside each other for the benefit of the young people. There is an extremely effective induction process that ensures staff are fully equipped for the role. This encompasses a four-week shadowing process with regular feedback and review to ensure staff are confident and skilled in supporting young people with complex needs and challenging behaviour. Continuous and high quality training and supervision ensure staff are able to reflect on their care practice and are equipped with the relevant skills and knowledge to deliver the high standard of care and support to young people which the senior management team expect.

Children's services managers compliment the Registered Manager's robust monitoring, with a monitoring and support role which is continuous throughout the day and night. This has proven to highlight areas for improvement and has driven care practices, further enhancing the standard and quality of care and support young people receive. The staff team demonstrate that they are extremely committed to providing a safe and stimulating environment for the young people in their care.

Recent months have shown a number of staff have left the school's employment, putting pressure on the staff team and lowering morale among small numbers of the team. The school has responded swiftly and proactively, with a big recruitment drive underway to fill the gaps, and have listened to staff concerns, with staff awards and incentives in place to increase staff morale. This demonstrates a commitment to the staff to ensure staff morale and numbers do not impact on the quality of care afforded to young people.

The senior management team continue to build on previous positive inspection visits. The recommendation made at the previous inspection visit has been responded to in an excellent manner. The school has submitted an application to build two new purpose-built homes within the school grounds, thus further improving the standard of accommodation for young people. Two units have been redecorated and one unit has had a laundry room designed and installed to provide more independent living skill opportunities. This demonstrates a real commitment by the school management team to continue to improve the quality of provision for young people.