

— The Loddon School

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Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC012021
Inspection date	11/09/2013
Inspector	Bridget Goddard
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	Mark Ashley-Hacker
Date of last inspection	16/01/2013

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 as it is 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 **good**.

This home has many outstanding features notably in the exceptional progress young people make to develop skills, particularly self care and social skills. This is underpinned by the excellent quality of care staff offer, which is characterised by highly effective communication. Staffing ratios are high, and staff encourage young people to exercise choice wherever possible. This meticulous attention to young people's needs reduces their frustrations and minimises challenging behaviour. Behaviour management is usually highly effective with minimum use of interventions. However, there are a very small group of young people where restrictive interventions are insufficiently recorded, shared, and monitored. This limits opportunities to consider less restrictive strategies.

Missing episodes are extremely rare in this home, and lessons learnt from previous events have produced very effective systems. The home has effective relationships with safeguarding teams, and staff have good knowledge and practice in this area. The safeguarding policy requires some updating. Staff are very positive about the visibility and direction offered by the leadership team, and day to day management and organisation is also very strong. Training opportunities and training organisation are a particular strength. Local authority colleagues are positive about their experience of working with the home.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
17B (2001)	ensure that the behaviour management policy is reviewed with specific reference to the threshold for exceptional, short term use of door holding to manage behaviour, and how use of this practice should be reviewed with a view to minimisation, and its use regularly communicated to the placing authority (Regulation 17B (1) (a))	01/11/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the safeguarding policy is reviewed to ensure clarity and updated appropriately (NMS 20.2)
- ensure that all parts of the home are well-maintained and decorated. (NMS 10.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Young people make exceptional progress to develop skills, particularly self care and social skills. These are particularly important for these young people to ensure they live adult lives as independently as possible. Each young person has specific skills they are encouraged to develop. These are rigorously taught through a number of set phases, and successful learning is assessed by repeated observations. Young people then receive a certificate celebrating their achievement, which gives them and their families an opportunity to feel proud. Some young people now assist with their daily hygiene tasks, and others have been successful in tolerating walking with others without challenging behaviour or running off. The home's extensive and safe grounds mean that this skill can be practised and assessed repeatedly. As a consequence, young people now have much less restrictive lives in that they can safely go into the community. Parents say, 'my son's quality of life has improved 100%'.

Young people's complex health needs are very well met, both by specialist interventions and by everyday care which maximises young people's sense of well-being. This is very strongly enhanced by the educational opportunities offered to young people. There are no artificial distinctions in this home between learning and

living, and this means that each young person can benefit from a highly individualised but structured 'curriculum'. This is exceptionally successful in enabling young people to participate in learning opportunities throughout their waking day, particularly young people who have been unsuccessful in more traditional special schools. Parents say, ' 'Schooling' is about learning living skills at this school, and X does not have to be in a classroom all day, which has been the main problem in the past'.

Young people learn to communicate their needs effectively using a variety of methods which reduces their frustration and anxiety. This means they are more relaxed and less likely to show challenging behaviour. Highly effective communication practices also help young people exercise choice. For example, young people are now able to choose their favourites from a range of food and drink options creatively presented in a café style. As part of the whole cafe process, they also learn other valuable skills such as queuing and eating at a table. This enables some young people to eat out in the community for the first time, and therefore enjoy a much greater level of inclusion in everyday life.

Quality of care

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

The vast majority of young people display exceptionally positive relationships with staff and each other. Young people clearly thrive in a spacious setting with high staff ratios. Parents say, ' X is always kept very busy and encouraged to try new things and to join in with activities'. Highly individualised and comprehensive care plans mean that young people's complex needs are generally exceptionally well-met. Young people clearly benefit from 1-2-1 care for example, carefully cutting out pictures and then matching them. Sometimes, staff stand near and simply monitor for lengthy periods of time while a young person enjoys a session sitting in the highest position possible, vocalising and looking out. This clearly demonstrates excellent attention to respecting young people's wishes and choices.

Young people are also able to spend some productive time working in groups enjoying and learning alongside others. For example, young people strum musical instruments together, dance and successfully create collages. They are very attentive to the highly skilled, staff instruction and encouragement and respond very well. As a result many young people demonstrate skills far beyond what could be expected, for example performing on stage with others or doing a solo musical activity.

Staff do not limit young people's experiences because of their disabilities. Parents say, ' X has many sensory issues, but the staff are always coming up with new strategies in how they might best support her so that X is still able to participate in activities'. Staff have high expectations for young people and test these by offering an exceptionally wide number of opportunities both within the home and the community. For example, some young people are enabled to safely enjoy grounds and animal based activities, whereas others help deliver the parish magazine and

attend specialist, community youth clubs. Staff clearly take great pride in persistently enabling each young person to successfully develop personal skills and interests.

Staff are highly skilled at promoting young people's emotional well-being by for example, communicating effectively and thereby reducing frustration. Staff confidently use pictures, signing and clear body language and are well-supported in this by speech and language specialists. This means young people's frustrations about their needs not being understood are significantly reduced. Staff also use such therapies as hand massage to relax young people. Young people strongly influence this intervention by signing, 'enough' or 'more'. Young people generally have significant medication needs, and these arrangements are competently overseen by qualified nursing staff. Young people's physical health needs are well-met by routinely visiting professionals. Staff have recently identified an unmet need for psychiatric oversight of a very small number of young people. This need has now been met, and staff are actively considering ways of maintaining such an arrangement for any future need.

The home is well-located in private, spacious and well - kept grounds. The buildings are generally very well looked after, and offer a high level of equipment and comfort. This is particularly the case in individual young people's bedrooms. Staff not only keep these pleasant and clean, but also ensure they are individualised to match young people's preferences. This results in diverse bedrooms, some full of young people's interests, photos and toys and others without any personal objects. This effectively meets young people's needs. However, in some houses the general environment is tired and maintenance is sometimes delayed. However, parents note that, 'the houses are always kept very clean'.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people show that they feel safe by their trusting and responsive behaviour with staff. They live in a safe environment, and are well-protected from environmental harm by thorough health and safety practices. All staff, including grounds and domestic staff, receive regular well- focused safeguarding training and demonstrate good knowledge of what to do if concerned about a young person. This has been tested recently, and was effectively and safely managed by care staff and managers. The home has positive working relationships with local authority designated officers and is quick to seek advice where necessary and act on it. The home's safeguarding policy is outdated, and lacks clarity. This does not have an adverse impact on young people's care.

Missing episodes are extremely rare in this home. The home usually successfully balances allowing young people appropriate freedom with keeping them safe. This is managed with high staff ratios, vigilant care and excellent knowledge of young people. However, occasionally unpredictable events will happen and young people's whereabouts will be unknown for a short period of time. The home has learnt valuable lessons from such events and has made significant investment in resources

and staff training. Subsequent events have demonstrated the improved level of safety produced by these excellent initiatives. The home has good relationships with local police and an effective protocol for any missing episodes.

Staff are well-trained in a specific behaviour management system which emphasises understanding the young person as a whole and thereby avoiding challenging behaviour. This is generally an exceptionally successful strategy with a highly complex group of young people. Positive physical intervention is generally used sparingly, and appropriately recorded and monitored. Risk assessments are generally thoroughly completed. However, there is a very small group of young people where restrictive interventions are insufficiently recorded, shared and monitored. These interventions are used only for the shortest time possible, and when absolutely necessary for safeguarding purposes. They are looked at internally on a regular basis. However, they are not routinely shared with the placing authority nor is the practice detailed in the home's behaviour policies. This means that monitoring and discussion of alternative less restrictive strategies is insufficiently robust.

Staff recruited to the home are carefully selected and vetted. The recruitment process gives prospective staff a clear picture of expectations allowing them to self select at an early stage. This is followed up through vetting processes, which effectively challenge candidate's motivation and history. Successful staff then complete a well-planned induction process. This careful approach to recruiting and inducting new staff helps keep young people as safe as possible.

Leadership and management

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

The home benefits greatly from a highly committed and dedicated leadership team who are both very experienced and knowledgeable. This team meets together regularly, and carefully monitors both routine and unusual events in the home. Events in each house are considered based on a standardised reporting system, and all incidents are reviewed. The leadership team's monitoring is very well-supported by the Regulation 33 visitor who offers appropriate and informed challenge. Generally overall monitoring is highly effective, but recently there have been some exceptional issues. This has resulted in a shortfall in responding appropriately to restrictive care practices. The leadership team accept this is a shortfall, and have already taken prompt and thorough steps to remedy this.

Staff are very positive about both the visibility and direction offered by the leadership team. They say, 'The leaders are not afraid of change, they challenge every practice if it is in the best interests of young people'. The board of trustees have made several important changes since the last inspection, including changes to the governance arrangements. The organisation has now appointed a Chief Executive Officer based on site, who will act as a fixed point of contact between the board and the home. He has already driven through some key systems changes relating to human resources and finance. This has already produced a more systematic approach to such areas as staff terms and conditions. The leadership team has also

led improvements that directly positively impact on quality of care. For example, night staff are now linked to house teams and have opportunities to see their young people awake and about. This helps ensure that all young people receive highly consistent and informed care. There is an excellent development plan in operation to inform and monitor future changes.

Day to day management is also very strong. Staff time with young people is meticulously planned, initially on a termly and then on a weekly basis. Sometimes, changes may be necessary on the day and although there is a high level of pre-planned organisation there is sufficient flexibility for this to happen without chaos ensuing. This is highly effective management which is successful in minimising adverse impact on young people who do not thrive on unpredictability.

Supervision and appraisals are routinely carried out and there are effective systems to monitor their frequency. Staff consistently say that they are well-supported, which helps them offer a high standard of care to young people. Training opportunities and training organisation are a particular strength. The staff group is very large and diverse, and training is tailored towards meeting individual needs. There is a very good programme of core training and induction arrangements are especially strong. Training monitoring and feedback tests knowledge gained, and lessons from this inform future events. Records are very well-kept and the vast majority of reviews are very detailed and thorough. Local authority colleagues are very positive about their experience of the home saying, 'this home serves as a template of how other homes should be run. I can think of no ways of operation that require improvement.'

About this inspection

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The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.