

# The Loddon School

Inspection report for Children's Home

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## About this inspection

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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality  
Good: this aspect of the provision is strong  
Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound  
Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

The Loddon School provides education and residential care for up to 28 pupils, eight to 19 years of age who have severe and complex learning difficulties, associated with autism. All have communication difficulties, a number have additional disabilities and all exhibit challenging behaviour to varying degrees. The school operates as a charitable trust and is approved by the Department for Education and Skills. It provides a 52-week a year service and is therefore registered as a children's home. Of the children, 12 are accommodated in the main house that is organised into three residential units. There are three additional units, one accommodating four young people, a two-bedroom lodge and a six-bedded unit designed for older pupils. The school has extensive grounds that are well used for horticulture and animal management, as well as leisure activities. It has its own indoor swimming pool.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This was an unannounced key inspection conducted by two inspectors over two days and covered all the key standards of the care provided. All these standards and some others were met and there were outstanding features in every outcome area.

The school makes an impressive commitment to young people in a number of ways. Staff pay attention to every possible area of each young person's skills and choices. This means that they have considerable success in helping the young people to improve their capacity to relate to others.

The diversity amongst the young people and their families is reflected in the diversity amongst the staff group. Also, the different cultures represented within the young people and the staff are actively celebrated.

The judgements in this report have been made using new benchmarking guidance that was implemented in April 2008. Information about this guidance can be found on the Ofsted website. The new basis for making judgments is not directly comparable with that used previously.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Coach House is currently being refurbished which includes the bathroom area that had chipped tiles at the last inspection. Other improvements are noted in the relevant outcome areas.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The Loddon offers a wide variety of foods, some of which are from non-English cultures. Staff make great efforts to expand the range of foods that the young people are willing to eat. The chef is well informed about the individual needs of the young people. A recent Environmental Health Officer awarded the school the highest grade possible, a gold award for their kitchen.

The school nurse reports continuing good support from others in the health service, locally, with other professionals and departments cooperating fully with the school's suggestions as to how best to treat their young people. The nurse has been joined by a part time colleague. She keeps up her registration and professional training but does not currently have formal clinical supervision. This means that she may not be aware of all relevant changes, but also lacks support from a nurse at a more senior level.

Storage and administration of medicines are good. Staff keep all necessary records, with the exception of the recording of medications returned to one particular unit. The nurse does monitor storage and administration in all units, but does not keep a written record of this monitoring. This means that, should anyone have to operate in her absence, they may not know what information she had gathered. In turn, this could cause some discontinuity for the young people.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Staff show great concern about maintaining the privacy and dignity of the young people in their care. There have been no complaints since the last inspection, and the Loddon has adapted the garden of the off-site house to limit disruption to neighbours.

The Loddon has nominated a new safeguarding officer. She already has a great deal of knowledge and experience in this area. The home ensures that all staff receive good training on safeguarding, with frequent updates. This includes clarity about when and how to record any evidence of injuries or accidents. Staff record these incidents very thoroughly. They also record when there has been an incident that may result in an injury becoming apparent later. This is important, given that the young people cannot explain injuries themselves and means that there is less uncertainty for staff and parents.

The home has a small unit, called the Positive Behaviour Support Unit, which records and analyses, in exceptional detail, the behavioural records of each young person. This allows them to get a clear picture of the effectiveness of behaviour management techniques and medications for each young person, in terms of their progress towards the goals defined in their care plans.

Staff complete thorough risk assessments for individual young people and review them three times a year. The fire risk assessment is carried out by an external company, as is testing of electrical equipment. Staff check that water temperatures are controlled by thermostats and this is monitored by the senior management team. Staff have not, however, updated the workplace risk assessments recently. This creates a risk of environmental factors causing problems. Some bedroom doors are propped open when closing them would create a problem for the individual young person. This report recommends discussing the issue with a fire officer to ensure that there is no fire risk to the young people.

The Loddon is exceptionally good at recruiting staff from a wide range of countries and backgrounds. They perceive this as enriching their practice and knowledge. Recruitment processes are thorough and if staff do not have good enough English to work directly with the young people initially, they work on the domestic team until it is adequate. This allows them to come to understand how the Loddon works and get to know the needs of particular young people, by observation, before starting on the care staff team.

The manager reports problems with the amount of time taken to complete Criminal Records Bureau checks; but that otherwise recruitment has not worsened or improved since the last inspection. There is a thorough process of checks made of permanent and agency staff and a record is kept of all necessary information, including application forms, interview notes, references, medical questionnaires and any certificates for training and qualifications.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Absolutely all areas of support to the young people are highly individualised. They have access to an independent visitor and to culturally appropriate activities. Their bedrooms also reflect their cultural backgrounds when appropriate. The speech and language therapist carries out an initial assessment of all the young people at the Loddon and makes regular monitoring visits. As well as having her own sessions with the young people, her assessment informs the programs implemented by staff, especially in relation to communication.

In the week preceding this inspection, an inspector carried out the three yearly education inspection and also concluded that the school was good. All care plans have individual education plans which tie in closely with their behavioural goals. Individual files show any education awards that have been granted.

The Loddon School operates on a 24 hour curriculum basis. All staff are involved in the education of the young people, with each activity being linked to the behavioural and educational goals identified in their care and education plans. Each young person has a timetable with activities that are suited to their needs and preferences. This includes the young person's choice of location.

There are lots of outdoor activities available in the grounds of the Loddon, for example riding on the horse and cart and looking after various farm animals. Staff keep the grounds looking exceptionally inviting and beautiful, and young people often choose to go out there in fair weather. Equally, staff take young people out on a variety of activities and trips in the community whenever possible.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Staff at the Loddon conduct outstandingly detailed assessments of the young people in order to develop plans which will best help them. Care plans, therefore, contain a great deal of information about young people's communication skills and needs, as well as their preferred activities. Equally, there is analyses of the behaviours that limit the young person's ability to function in the community, and what responses from staff might most easily reduce those behaviours. Care plans also contain short-term and long-term goals and staff amend these at regular intervals so that it is possible to trace progress in an on-going way.

Staff also ensure that records are kept of all the necessary contact details. In addition to the statutory annual reviews, they have an extra two reviews every year to help everybody keep track of progress and problems. In this way, it is possible for them to ensure that all staff actions are appropriate to each young person's current needs. This enables young people to get the best possible benefit from their time spent at the Loddon. One social worker said 'There is excellent preparation and consultation for reviews'. Another social worker says 'Behaviour plans are very comprehensive and shared well'. Yet another says 'The Loddon are extremely effective at communicating well in reviews'.

Social workers also praise the relationships that the home establishes and maintains with families. This is done, partly by home visits, partly by phone calls and partly by welcoming parents' visits. The Loddon also invites parents to particular events, such as a picnic day, and encourages them to help staff organise cultural weekends. These events use music, clothing, food and other ways of celebrating their cultures.

Transitions into and out of the home, need even more planning and time than for most young people. Staff, therefore, consult very thoroughly with families and social workers so that the moves are staged in as many small steps as necessary. Some young people are able to move into a sister company for adults, when local authorities allow it and parents want it.

Over the years, staff have increasingly made use of the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS). All staff now carry a selection of PECS pictures and photos to facilitate immediate communication. This allows staff to establish what young people want and sometimes what they are feeling. Equally, it allows staff to explain what is about to happen. All of this means that young people are better

enabled to stay calm. The system of using PECS is now firmly established in the dining room, for tuck shop as well as meals.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Staff follow care and education plans designed to reduce behaviours that prevent activities in the community. This and the promotion of communication and relationships, helps prepare young people for moving into adult services. One social worker says 'The Loddon works very hard to promote independence'. Amongst the older teenagers there are a few who shop for food, with staff, and then return to the unit to cook it. The model of combined care and education provides exceptional opportunities for the young people to make progress towards maximum independence given their particular circumstances.

All young people have bank accounts and pocket money, and wherever possible they are facilitated to use local shops. One social worker says 'Young people are encouraged to pay for their own purchases and those of the school, at local shops'.

Given the age of the main building, all the accommodation is as good as it could possibly be. The amount of space and the nature of the furnishings, allow active youngsters to enjoy themselves safely. All bedrooms are personalised to reflect the backgrounds and personalities of the young people. Staff keep bedrooms clean and tidy and there are a number of communal rooms for relaxing and enjoying preferred activities. There is also some new outside play equipment being installed. The trustees ensure that refurbishments are carried out as necessary and have already made great improvements.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

One member of staff has been working on improving the Statement of Purpose. It is still a work in progress but now better reflects what the school does and is written in a way that makes it easier for parents and local authorities to read.

All staff report feeling supported by management, such that they can discuss problems at any time. One member of the senior management team reported being delighted with the new principal, because 'She is such an advocate for care'. This attitude backs up the ethos at the Loddon, where care and education are not seen as distinct areas of the young people's lives.

The Loddon ensures that all care staff either have the necessary NVQs or are studying for them. Several staff are NVQ assessors and three care managers are now working towards the registered managers award. All the care managers already have the NVQ3 award.

The head of care expressed concern about the number of vacancies and has looked into various ways of filling them. She reported that the senior management team are looking into new methods to improve recruitment and retention of staff. On the other hand, evidence that a higher proportion of staff stay for many years in the job and that many return after breaks in service, suggests that the job experience is generally positive. Staff also report that the turn over is handled well in relation to the young people, with staged introductions to new recruits. Certainly, all staff spoken to during inspection, report feeling very happy in their work; and comment positively about the team spirit at the Loddon. Also, managers insure that young people do have the level of supervision specified in their care plans.

There is a high standard of training in this home, with training schedules drawn up for all staff. Topics include those that are statutory requirements and many that are especially relevant to young people with autism. There is a particularly extensive and well recorded induction programme.

There are regular monitoring visits by trustees, who visit particular units unannounced during otherwise announced visits to the school. An independent advocate provides an excellent, more individualised, additional level of monitoring. The head of care consistently maintains her own monitoring and receives weekly monitoring reports from the care managers and the school nurse. One of the factors that makes the organisation outstanding is the fact that both the head of care and the principal are highly involved in day-to-day care. This makes them both very accessible to staff and knowledgeable about the young people's progress, which means that young people receive consistent, confident and relaxed support.

Staff keep all required information in secure files, which are kept in a locked office.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Recommendations**

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

- include a column for medication returned from home in medication records. NMS 13
- ensure that the nurse receives regular clinical supervision. NMS 13
- create a written record of the nurse's monitoring of the storage and administration of medicines. NMS 13
- review generic risk assessments regularly. NMS 26
- develop a system for external monitoring of the water thermostats. NMS 26
- seek advice from the fire officer in relation to open bedroom doors. NMS 26