

Inspection report

The Loddon School

Independent special school

DfES ref no: 850/6005

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 27 February – 2 March 2006

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Loddon School, established as a charitable trust in 1988, is an independent residential special school, which provides year-round living and education for 28 learners with complex autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Learners are aged from 8 to 18 years and have severe or profound learning difficulties with attendant behaviour difficulties. The majority have been excluded from other special schools. All have little or no capability to communicate using speech. Learning is based upon the curriculum Personalised Learning for Life Using Supportive Strategies (PLLUSS). This has been developed by the school.

There is a strong emphasis on learners improving their self-esteem through strategies to communicate and manage their behaviour. Every learner receives individualised teaching, which is supported by a range of other therapies.

The Loddon School's purpose is: *'To provide value in the education and care of children with autism, severe learning disabilities and associated complex restrictive behaviours, by giving each child an enhanced quality of life in partnership with parents and through creative design, development and delivery of positive working methods.'*

Summary of main findings

The Loddon School is a highly effective school, which has some outstanding features. This is a compassionate school with a positive ethos, in which the needs of learners are paramount. It fully achieves its statement of purpose. The school provides an outstanding level of care and welfare and a good quality of education. It meets all the requirements of the regulations. The school benefits from the very good leadership, expertise and effective management skills of senior staff. The needs of learners are served very well by a dedicated staff. The curriculum, whilst still under development, provides good challenges for learners. This is highly organised, with the identification of sequential steps in learning, which enable learners to make good progress. The assessment of learning and personal development is good; this is derived from the detailed recording of learners' responses in lessons and other activities. Learners take an enthusiastic and willing part in what they do. This too contributes to the good progress they make. The school is very successful in introducing learners to living in the community; a major part of this success is the outstanding provision for promoting personal development. This equips young people well for their next stage in life and enables them to be more tolerant of change.

What the school does well:

- it provides good teaching and learning, through a well managed and entirely appropriate curriculum as well as through supportive therapies;
- it regularly reviews its own practices and procedures, which result in good staff development within the PLLUSS curriculum;
- it provides consistent management of learners' behaviour and responses throughout the waking day;
- it monitors learners' progress well and uses assessments to plan further learning;
- it makes very good provision for the personal development and care of learners enabling them to develop social skills through provision of a wide range of visits to the community ; and
- it reduces the anxieties within learners which encourages them to behave well.

Next Steps

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- raise the level of academic achievement for learners through better identification of contributions to core skills within activity planning;
- further improve staff development and training to raise awareness of opportunities which might develop learners' basic skills in literacy and numeracy; and
- improve the impact of recording learners' achievements by ensuring that judgements are made consistently against agreed criteria.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides a curriculum very appropriate to the personal and academic needs of the learners it serves. Most have significantly low attainment levels. They have additional disabilities such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, epilepsy, tuberous sclerosis and sensory impairments. Learners frequently exhibit severe challenging behaviour.

A specialised curriculum, (PLLUSS), supports learners in developing functional skills, which enable them to take part in a range of activities. These reduce anxiety and increase learning. Every learner is provided with an individualised programme, which follows the PLLUSS principles. The curriculum is based on the acquisition of skills and experiences and taught through the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) Unit Award Scheme, with some activities based on National Curriculum subjects.

A considerable strength of the curriculum is the detailed way in which it is planned. Each learner has three essential areas of learning. These encompass long term learning needs, behaviour management needs and preferred activities. Each area is broken down into short steps and included on the daily schedule for every learner. These plans are known as '*spiders*', *because they represent strands of individual activities and support for each learner*. Skills in communication form a major element. The school develops these well through the use of pictures and pictorial symbols. Where this is implemented rigorously the impact on learners' ability to communicate is most marked.

Each learner is supported by an individual staff member who is responsible for the daily implementation of the programme. Classrooms are used as base rooms for some activities but much of the learning takes place away from these. To facilitate this each learner carries a rucksack, which contains all the materials needed during the day.

The comprehensive provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) is planned and implemented very well. School assemblies are used to structure the day and recognise learners' achievements. Meal times contain individual targets for learners and at break times the dining room is transformed into a café. An outstanding aspect of the PSHE provision is the impact which it has on the capability of the learners to make choices and manage changes between activities.

A strength of the curriculum is the school's programme for animal care. The range of animals includes pigs, sheep and ponies. All of these are selected because of their quiet temperaments. Learners relate very well to the animals and take a full part in their care.

All learners have statements of special educational need. These are used as starting points in each of the individual programmes and are consistently reviewed.

Links with parents are good. This is confirmed by the responses parents made in their questionnaire returns. Learners are prepared well for their next steps in life.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and learning is generally good and at times outstanding. The detailed preparation of lessons adds significantly to their effectiveness. There is no formal school day because opportunities for learning are presented at all times.

The central provision for learning is through the PLLUSS curriculum. This is implemented through activities such as swimming, drama, community visits or sessions, which provide structured language opportunities. In structured language for example, learners are asked to name individual objects and relate these to written descriptions. Rewards appropriate to the individual are used to encourage responses and these are further checked for accuracy through simple techniques such as placing the reward under an object, such as a cup, and asking the learner to *'Look under the red cup.'*

All sessions offer good opportunities for learners to succeed. They are made more effective because small steps in learning are identified for each learner and staff work towards these as objectives. All planning takes previous learning into account and new objectives are chosen, once skills have been mastered. Learners achieve well and records indicate they make good progress over time. In individual cases the progress they make is outstanding when compared to their original starting points. Weaknesses in teaching only occur where staff make insufficient reference to the agreed objectives or miss opportunities to develop academic understanding.

The best sessions are those where staff enable learners to achieve on their own behalf and where they provide time for learners to respond. The work undertaken on the school's mini-farm is outstanding. Learners take a full part in running this enterprise. They muck out the stalls and stables as well as accompany staff to local feed merchants to purchase animal fodder. Another outstanding area of learning is when learners assemble for morning and afternoon break in their café. Each selects a photograph of their preferred refreshment and presents this at the servery. This activity encapsulates the skills of transition between activities, communication and choosing. Additional social skills such as waiting their turn and clearing away after the break are also developed.

The assessment procedures are very good and these enable the school to provide clear evidence of the good progress made by learners. Individual sessions are recorded in terms of what each learner achieved. These observations are recorded centrally, allowing progress to be tracked. Further improvement to this could be made if the recording was made more consistently against the previously agreed success criteria.

Staff work as close teams supporting individuals throughout the waking day. They become central figures within a learner's life and this enables each one to form positive relationships. Some learners are exceptionally challenging in their behaviour but the responses and dedication of staff are exemplary. Staff use simple, though effective management techniques, to which learners respond. These are

based on previously identified rewards, which they know the learner appreciates. Use of praise is also liberal and appropriate.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners

There is outstanding provision for promoting all aspects of learners' personal development. The school achieves this partly because of its ethos, but also formally through whole school events, group sessions and learners' individual planning 'spiders'. Planning at all these levels is very finely tuned to extend and consolidate learners' previous experiences. The impact of the school's work in promoting personal development is evident in the young people's attitudes, behaviour and emerging awareness of their immediate environment as well as their tolerance of change.

The school works very successfully to develop opportunities for learners to experience and understand things that are not part of their everyday lives. This social and spiritual dimension occurs through whole school assemblies, visits away from the school and in activities provided within lessons.

Learners with such profound and complex communication difficulties have very limited appreciation of social relationships and the impact of their actions on others. The school focuses very strongly on trying to develop communication strategies in order to enhance social skills and understanding of basic moral issues. Learners' 'spiders' specify individual areas of learning, and these are supported extremely well by the PSHE programme of work. This incorporates topics such as sex and relationships education. Carefully planned visits away from the school provide excellent opportunities to rehearse skills in the community. Visits to places such as the fire station, recycling centre, dry ski slope and bowling alley also enable learners to develop an understanding of the society in which they live.

Learners are presented with a very impressive array of events aimed at introducing them to their own and other cultures. A calendar of school assemblies is very well planned. This recognises other world faiths in addition to Christianity. Whole school 'special' days, such as Buddhism Day, reinforce such learning. The PLLUSS curriculum also gives learners opportunities to discover cultural features as varied as Australian musical shakers, Roman mosaic tiles, art in the style of Hundertwasser, and features of British history through visits to Porchester Castle.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the learners

The school takes very seriously its obligation to secure the welfare, health and safety of its learners. It is extremely vigilant in implementing the detailed policies through very secure procedures. A range of audits relating to different aspects of health and safety is carried out regularly and routinely. Learners are always supervised very closely. There is very high ratio of adults on site both during the day and at night. A qualified First Aider is always on duty. All possible steps are taken to ensure that learners are cared for, monitored and supported at all times. A detailed policy and associated planning, along with carefully constructed risk assessments, ensure their safety when they are away from the school.

Extremely detailed and comprehensive child protection procedures are in place. Very effective procedures promote positive aspects of learners' behaviour. All staff are trained in physical intervention techniques, should they be required. The school does not impose sanctions, but does record all critical incidents in appropriate detail. An admission register is maintained in accordance with the regulations. The school fulfils the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is meticulous in its procedures to ensure that all staff have been appropriately vetted. All newly appointed staff are required to confirm their identity and medical fitness for their post, and to provide evidence of their qualifications. References are followed up routinely and all staff are subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level. A number of staff from overseas are employed. In these cases, the school follows the required procedures and makes contact with the authorities in their home countries to ensure their appropriateness to work with children.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is well maintained and suitable for its purpose. Originally a country home situated in large grounds, the school has been expanded and now provides a range of buildings which support education, therapies and residential provision. The school also has residences elsewhere in the locality. The grounds are used very effectively to support the curriculum.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school works closely with parents and provides a good range of information. The responses made by parents through the questionnaire issued before the inspection indicated that they are pleased with the information they receive. One parent in a written response commented '*The staff at The Loddon have been fantastic – they've taken their time to get to know our daughter – who's now much more relaxed*'.

Parents receive regular reports about their children's progress. These are written three times each year and form part of the annual review process. They provide full information about each learner's personal development and academic achievements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has satisfactory procedures for handling complaints. A majority of parents indicate that they understand these.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	The Loddon School		
DfES Number:	850/6005		
Type of school:	Residential special school for learners with autistic spectrum disorders		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of learners:	8 – 18 years		
Gender of learners:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time learners):	Boys: 24	Girls: 4	Total: 28
Number of boarders:	Boys: 24	Girls: 4	Total: 28
Number of learners with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 24	Girls: 4	Total: 28
Annual fees (boarders):	£164,270		
Address of school:	The Loddon School Wildmoor Lane Sherfield on Loddon Hook Hants RG27 0JD		
Telephone number:	01256 882394		
Fax number:	01256 882929		
Email address:	k.rookes@loddonschool.co.uk		
Headteacher:	Karen Rookes		
Proprietor:	The Loddon School Company		
Reporting Inspector:	Tom Smith		
Date of inspection:	27 February – 2 March 2006		

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