

Laleham Gap School

Laleham Gap School, Ozengell Place, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 6FH
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Laleham Gap school is situated in Ramsgate, Kent. It is a residential special school, maintained by the local authority. The school provides care and education for boys and girls who may have Asperger syndrome and/or speech and language difficulties and who are aged between 10 and 16 years. The residential provision is located within the main school site. It provides overnight accommodation for up to 24 residential pupils.

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 July 2017

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| Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account | outstanding |
| How well children and young people are helped and protected | outstanding |
| The effectiveness of leaders and managers | outstanding |

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 15 November 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Residential pupils are helped to make substantial progress in vital areas of their lives by a dedicated staff team that is supportive and highly attuned to their individual needs.
- Care staff maintain high standards of communication with their school colleagues and the parents and carers of residential pupils. This helps pupils to transfer the steady progress they make in the residential setting to the classroom and family living.
- Residential pupils enjoy consistent routine and structure and regularly participate in a rich range of community activities. This helps them to develop confidence and accelerates their social development. They become increasingly able to engage in learning and develop clear aspirations for the future.
- Care staff are very sensitive to issues that are likely to impede residential pupils' success in the adult world. They are ambitious and work hard to support them to make progress in these areas.
- Care staff demonstrate a deep sense of care and affection for residential pupils and are strongly focused on keeping them safe and ensuring their well-being. A firm and clear safeguarding culture, together with effective safeguarding arrangements, provides the structure and guidance which enable staff to maintain these in a consistent and professional manner.
- Skilled and experienced care staff work closely together as a team and are supported by dynamic and inspirational leaders. This contributes significantly to residential pupils experiencing stability and developing a sense of belonging.

The residential special school's areas for development:

- Current recording and review processes do not adequately capture the progress that residential pupils make.
- The embedded approach to care is not clearly described in the ethos of the school.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Further develop the statement of principles and practices for the care of residential pupils, so that it more fully describes the care ethos and provides a clearer guide to staff and pupils on the school's approach to care.
- Further develop methods for measuring, reviewing and reporting on the progress of residential pupils, against the objectives of their placement plans.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Care staff rapidly develop a detailed understanding of each residential pupil and are able to provide them with sensitive and highly individualised care. Good staffing levels and careful rota arrangements provide residential pupils with real continuity and stability in their daily care. These factors enable residential pupils to make considerable progress in developing strategies that help them to integrate socially, engage with formal learning and increase their independence.

One residential pupil, who was previously on the verge of disengaging completely from education, has succeeded in completing five GCSE examinations. Another has moved from being emotionally unsettled and unfocused on his education to becoming aspirational and completing his GCSEs, and is now moving on with great enthusiasm to college to follow a vocational course. When asked how he had benefited from residential care he said, 'It's been massive. I have come so far. Without this I would not have had trust and confidence in teachers or learned any social skills. I would have got into multiple fights and would have been excluded from my old school.'

Residential pupils are provided with the best possible opportunities to engage with schooling because care staff provide them with a solid base from which to access learning. One residential pupil said, 'They teach us to have a good lifestyle like good eating and personal hygiene, and we have rules and structure and are not tired or hungry when we go to school.'

Care and teaching staff collaborate closely to stay alert to factors that may disrupt learning or the stability of care for residential pupils. Care staff demonstrate enthusiasm and ambition for the academic and vocational progress of residential pupils and celebrate their achievements.

Care staff are highly motivated to understand the wishes and feelings of residential pupils. This creates a climate in which pupils feel free to express themselves, and they make good use of their formal and informal opportunities to do this. These include discussions at mealtimes, residents' meetings, the complaints procedure and key working sessions. Care staff are secure in their roles and embrace both positive and negative expressions by residential pupils as opportunities for growth and development.

Considerable and sustained efforts by care staff help residential pupils to master important personal care activities and to understand and adopt healthy lifestyles. Care staff display a sense of determination in working with teachers, parents and carers in supporting residential pupils to achieve their full potential for successful participation in the adult world. An innovative programme, devised in a highly collaborative manner and including significant input from residential pupils, helps to

systemise and track the steady progress that they make towards responsible independence. An equally innovative 'independence week', in which care staff take a step back in their roles, serves to affirm the progress that residential pupils have made.

Care staff are adventurous and creative in encouraging residential pupils to engage in new activities, and they supporting their interests. A rich range of fun, social and recreational activities is made available to residential pupils during their spare time. Pictorial records reflect diverse activities, such as fishing, fencing, den-building, cooking, go-karting, drama and paint-balling. Residential pupils engage in these activities, make significant progress in their social development and cultivate feelings of competence and self-confidence.

Considerable effort is made by care staff to provide residential pupils with the best possible experience of moving in and out of residential care. Continuity of care is promoted through very close liaison with parents and carers. Pre-admission procedures are highly individualised and flexible and focus strongly on understanding the communication and care needs of each residential pupil. When issues arise, care staff and parents and carers collaborate to solve problems. Milestones and developments are shared between home and school, and achievements are celebrated together. This partnership working supports parents and promotes a sense of security and continuity for residential pupils.

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

The school as a whole has developed and maintains a system of safeguarding arrangements, which exceeds statutory and other government requirements. These arrangements are underpinned by a culture that reflects a deep sense of respect and value for pupils and holds their safety and well-being at the core of all activities. This culture extends fully into the residential unit and is integrated into the additional activities associated with daily residential care. A recent, externally commissioned safeguarding audit conducted of the whole school found only very minor areas for improvement.

Individualised risk assessments provide staff with clear and meaningful guidance to keep residential pupils safe across their full range of activities inside and outside the school.

Potentially harmful behaviours by residential pupils are countered through a combination of open discussion, challenge when necessary, adherence to a positive daily routine and a transformative approach to behaviour management. Pupils also have their own rooms with ensuite bathrooms, and this provides them with privacy and further contributes to the settled living environment.

There have been no incidents resulting in the restraint of residential pupils, or of

them going missing, since the last inspection. Four low-level sanctions have been applied in this intervening period. Recorded incidents of challenging and potentially harmful behaviour show that these are successfully managed by the skilful application of de-escalation strategies.

The safeguarding knowledge and expertise of care staff is maintained through relevant and routinely updated training. This includes the specialist areas of child sexual exploitation, online activities and radicalisation. Care staff also display awareness and insight into the heightened areas of vulnerability for children who have complex needs.

A combination of good risk assessments and confident staff who know residential pupils very well, allows them to engage in developmentally appropriate risk taking and helps residential pupils to build competence and confidence for the future.

The school's designated lead for safeguarding demonstrates a comprehensive understanding and knowledge of effective safeguarding practice. Recording and administration are of a high standard, and links with key external agencies, such as those concerned with allegations against staff, child sexual exploitation, e-safety and radicalisation, are strong and well maintained. The school's approach to safeguarding is comprehensive and includes response to concerns that may arise outside of the school or that may extend to other members of a family, not directly involved with the school. Procedures are followed closely, and this includes the practices of safer recruitment.

The school has developed a comprehensive e-safety policy that provides all staff with relevant information and clear guidance about how to help pupils to keep themselves safe when involved in online activities. The policy embraces the value of the internet and recognises online activities as being an integral part of pupil's lives. It also emphasises education about the hazards of online activities and is underpinned by effective filtering and monitoring systems in the school computer network.

The purpose-built school provides a safe and secure site for pupils, and good standards of health and safety practice are maintained across the site. The visitors' policy is closely adhered to, and visitors are properly identified, kept safe and are supervised across the site when necessary.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leadership within the residential unit is strong and respected and inspires an experienced and cohesive staff team to strive for improvement and innovation in the care and support of the residential pupils. The head of care has high expectations of the staff team's standard of practice and fully supports innovation and the contributions of staff to maintaining and improving standards.

Leaders have a keen sense of the unit's strengths and weaknesses and are readily

able to articulate these. Plans are in place to address areas requiring improvement and increased stability. Strengths are being exploited where relevant. For example, aspects of innovation in personal skills development, achieved in the residential unit, are being transferred to the school setting.

In the school as a whole, there is a discernible openness and absence of defensive behaviours at all levels. Strong links are maintained with external partners and parents and their input is welcomed where relevant. The independent visitor to the school reported feeling welcome and unhindered during her regular unannounced visits to residential pupils. The parent governor responsible for residential care said that she experiences a sense of unguarded inclusion during her visits and finds the staff positive and cooperative. This culture of openness and inclusion contributes to the health of the organisation and helps to maintain the strong safeguarding culture.

The leadership and staff team are strongly focused on the agreed placement plans for residential pupils and the identified areas for change and progress. These are addressed during all phases of daily care as well as in key working sessions. There is clear anecdotal evidence to support the progress that residential pupils make, but further development could improve the measuring and review processes to provide more objective evidence of the gains that residential pupils make.

The head of care and his team are confident about their model and approach to care, and there is a clear expectation that residential pupils who move in will make steady and significant progress from their starting points in all areas. While expectations are high, the approach is sensitive and highly individualised and sensitively paced in accordance with each residential pupil's abilities. Staff are guided by an ethos and philosophy of care, but how this is achieved is not described as well in the statement of boarding principles as occurs in practice.

Staff receive regular supervision of a good standard and this includes the opportunity to reflect on their practice and identify areas for development. Annual appraisals are comprehensive and staff participate fully in this process. Targets are relevant and meaningful. The head of care expressed the need to keep staff stimulated and engaged in their own development to maintain the high standards achieved and to guard against the dangers of complacency.

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 difference 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

school 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 Children Act 1989 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 national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC023691

Head teacher/teacher in charge: Les Milton

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Inspector

John Pledger, social care inspector (lead)



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