



LINDEN LODGE SCHOOL

Standard 20 Visitors Report

February 2020

Independent Visitor Report- Standard 20

As defined by The Residential Special Schools – National Minimum Standards effective from 1st April 2015.

Standard 20 - Monitoring by Independent Visitors.

20.1 The governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who is independent of the management of the school, to visit the school six times, spread evenly, over the course of a school year and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. Where the school has an individual proprietor, that person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the head teacher (or school equivalent).

20.2 Most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include:

- checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of reasonable force, risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children;
- evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded;
- assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and
- opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitor (in private if they wish).

20.3 Written reports of all monitoring visits are provided to the head teacher (or school equivalent) and where applicable the governing body, organisation, or partnership. Reports are also provided to each member of that body (or the appropriate committee of that body), within two weeks and as written by the visitor without amendment or summary. Monitoring reports should be retained by the school and made available during an inspection.

20.4 The head teacher (or school equivalent), governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school carries out, and records in writing, once each year:

- a review of the operation and resourcing of the school's welfare provision for boarding pupils, in relation to:
 - its Statement of Purpose;
 - its staffing policy;
 - the placement plans for individual children; and
 - an internal assessment of its compliance with these standards.

Where appropriate such a report may be incorporated within a review of the whole school.

INDEPENDENT VISIT – 10th February 2020.

This was another excellent opportunity to observe the very personalised care and support each young person receives whilst staying at Richley House.

I arrived at about 3.30pm and left at 7.10pm. This gave me the opportunity to meet individually and collectively with the new Head of Care, the Deputy Head of Care and the Headteacher, as well as a number of staff and most importantly with the young people at the home.

The atmosphere across Richley House was very calm and settled. All of the young people were greeted well upon their return from school, with the staff showing a genuine interest as to how their day had been.

The communication and interaction between the staff and young people is always managed well. The staff team are professional but this is delivered in a nurturing and caring way.

All the young people that I met with, spoke to and observed seemed very settled, composed and relaxed within the home and with the staff caring for them.

I had very re-assuring conversations and discussions with members of the senior team regarding the initial observations of the new Head of Care.

The staff I spoke to were very confident and knowledgeable about the young people in their care. This all reinforced my professional opinion that the management and staff teams are very child focussed and provide a very good residential experience for all the young people who come to stay at Richley House.

They continue to provide a high-quality level of individualised care and support for a very diverse group of young people. The young people truly benefit from having adults around them that prioritise their needs and genuinely care for them.

I do believe that this experience of living away from home and staying at Richley House is an enriching encounter for each young person.

The young people that I met at this visit, were very relaxed within Richley House and in the company of the staff caring for them. This is always a positive and pleasurable experience.

Within Richey House and the outside space, there is a good balance between structure and freedom afforded to each young person.

The staff are vigilant but this is done in a such a way that each young person is supported to be as independent as they can be and supported to develop new skills and to become increasingly self-reliant.

In discussions with the Head of Care, Deputy Head of Care and the Headteacher we were able to reflect on the Ofsted report and consider potential changes and improvements that could be made within Richley House, in a planned and timely fashion.

Many of the young people now remember me from previous visits and are keen to spend time in my company. I had a very heartening conversation with B, who wanted to talk to me about his concerns for another young person who also stays at Richley House.

He was worried that she may hurt herself when she gets distressed at night-time in her room. He was not making a complaint about the noise that was quite upsetting for him, rather expressing concern and empathy for E. We agreed that I should mention this to the Head and Deputy Head of Care and the Headteacher. He said he was pleased that he had spoken to me and felt better in himself, but was primarily concerned that E might hurt herself.

This was a lovely trait and I praised B for talking with me, I also went back to see him prior to my departure. This was to check that he was okay and to let him know I had passed on his concerns to the relevant members of staff.

Attendance

Any unauthorised absences? ~~Yes~~ No

There have been no unauthorised absences from Richley House or whilst in the wider community.

The communication within and across Linden Lodge is good. The home and school also have a positive relationship with parents/carers and other professionals involved in the lives of the young people who come to stay at Richley House.

The staffing levels were good within Richley House and this also supports the appropriate levels of supervision and support provided to the young people. This is both within Richley House and for any trips organised within the wider community

Sanctions

Any major sanctions since the last visit? ~~Yes~~ No

In discussion with the Head of Care and other members of staff, I was informed that there had been no sanctions or consequences imposed since my last visit.

As the relationship between the young people and the staff caring for them is built on mutual trust and shared experiences, the use of sanctions or consequences are very natural and reflect "good parenting."

The staff are aware of each young person's needs and behaviours and manage this in a proactive way.

The staff are very attentive and caring. This has created an environment and culture within the home, whereby the young people are treated with respect and empowered to be involved in their own care and the decision making around the home.

Physical Interventions

Any physical interventions since the last visit? ~~Yes~~ No

There have been no Physical Interventions within Richley House since my last visit.

The level and quality of the supervision and engagement, given to each young person, ensures that any potential distress or negative feelings/behaviours being exhibited by a young person are managed effectively and diffused quickly and in a caring manner.

Within Richley House there is a consistency of approach provided to each young person. This structure is important when caring for a number of young people with a wide range of individual, medical and physical needs. The strength and quality within the staff team is that this consistency is not oppressive. The way this is delivered by the care staff and received by each young person promotes the building and maintenance of the trusting relationship between everyone at Richley House.

The links between the home and the Behaviour Support Team are being strengthened, this too will promote the positive relationships within Richley House.

Complaints

Any complaints/concerns since the last visit? ~~Yes~~ No

No formal complaints had been received or made within Richley House since my last visit.

Risk Assessments

Any risk assessments undertaken since the last visit? ~~Yes~~ No

Not assessed - This is an area I will focus on at my next visit.

Individual Care Plans

Were care plans up to date? Yes No

The care plans, viewed at this visit, clearly identified the individual targets and outcomes for each young person.

I am confident that the outcomes and targets set in EHCP 's are also incorporated within the care plans.

I was informed that as care plans are reviewed and updated, the outcomes etc will be re-assessed and be more specifically linked to each young person's behaviour support plan.

Environment

Were there any premises issues? Yes No

The identified loose and broken slats on the pathway through the outdoor play equipment, noted in my last report, still require repairing.

The indoor and outdoor environments continue to be well maintained. There are some routine maintenance issues that need to be completed within the home. Along with some areas that would benefit from redecoration.

The areas that require repair or redecoration are entirely due to the extreme and constant wear and tear to the physical environment, not due to any wanton or deliberate damage. The staff and young people are respectful of the home's fittings and furnishings.

It was also positive to see some of the Notices created by a young person on display, sharing a little bit about himself and why he would appreciate a quiet environment. Especially in respect of closing doors quietly.

Safeguarding

Any safeguarding / child protection issues relating to residential pupils? Yes No

I was not made aware of any "safeguarding" issues relating to the staff or young people at Richley House.

There are clear policies and procedures in place within Richley House and the school.

Notices are in place and in conversation with staff, I was assured that they knew the relevant policies and had received training in various aspects of safeguarding.

This is all strong evidence to support my assumption that, in my professional opinion, the young people at Richley House are and will be, appropriately safeguarded and protected from harm.

Medication records

Were medication records up to date and double signed? Yes No

The new system for the administration and recording of medication continues, following the initial trial period.

With the Health Care Assistants primarily responsible for the administration of medication, this increases the time available for the care staff to interact with the young people staying at the home.

I have still not received a response to the following questions, outstanding from my previous reports:

There was going to be a review of the Clinical Governance and Safeguarding by the Local CCG.

and

The home was also looking for a Pharmacist to undertake a Medication Review within the home.

Have these been achieved?

Also:

The current Medication Policy needs to be updated to reflect the changes within Richley House regarding medication administration etc. The current policy was due for review in September 2019

Has this been achieved?

There was also a timely reminder to parents and carers in respect of Medication being sent in "from home". This was in the January Newsletter:

"We would like to take this opportunity to remind you about the importance of following policy and procedure regarding medication. It is parents/carers responsibility to ensure their child attends school with the correct medication for the duration of their stay. Medication needs to be in the correct packaging, in date, and have the original prescribing label as provided by the pharmacy. We are aware that on occasion's medication changes this needs to be communicated as soon as possible and evidenced by a letter from the GP or prescribing consultant."

Staffing, Supervision and Appraisal

Were staffing levels good? Yes No

Were residential staff supervision and appraisal notes up to date? Yes No

In my professional opinion, there are always sufficient staff on duty to support the number and needs of the young people staying at the home.

More important is the commitment and professionalism of the staff working at the home. They work hard to ensure that each young person has the individual support they require to ensure they are well cared for whilst staying at the home.

Within the care team, there has been a strong commitment from the managers and staff to undertake the Level 3 Diploma in Child Care. This is proving to be very successful.

The Head of Care has also shared with parents some details of her appointment and the newly formed management team at Richley House. The following is an extract from the newsletter that went to parents:

“I am extremely pleased to be joining Linden Lodge School. For the past twenty-five years professionally and personally I have had the pleasure of being part of children and young people’s journey with complex disabilities.

Also joining the team is James Long and Remi Sobogun as Deputy Heads of Care. James comes with a wealth of experience working with children with disabilities and Remi joins us with a nursing background.

Working alongside Danny Sinclair and myself I am positive with strong team work and enthusiasm we are going to make a positive impact ensuring the children and young people get the best possible experience whilst staying at Richley House.”

Food

Was the food of good quality and adequate portions? Yes No

The food that was provided was well prepared with choices available.

Each young person was being supported to make choices of the meal they wanted. They were then enabled to either eat independently, or if required, given greater assistance and support as needed.

Security

Was the site security good? Yes No

The security and safety measures across Linden Lodge and specifically within Richley House, are appropriate and proportionate to ensure the safety and protection for both the adults and young people living and working there.

The signing in system is professional and friendly.

From my last two visits:

Please can it be confirmed, does each young person now have their own ID card so they can “swipe” themselves into particular areas?

Activities

Were there appropriate activities taking place? Yes No

There is always a wide range of activities taking place or planned for the young people staying at Richley House.

Some evenings are now “themed” and form part of a regular pattern of activities available. There are also impromptu activities planned, along with trips out into the community.

On the evening of my visit, the young people were engaged in “music making” after dinner. I was told that this, along with the Karaoke evenings, are the two most popular evening activities.

As the weather improves and the evenings stay lighter for longer, there will be outside and community-based activities planned.

Pupils

Did the pupils appear happy & content? Yes No

I was able to spend some time with the young people and staff on both the ground and first floor.

All the young people that I met appeared very happy and relaxed within the home.

A really positive aspect of the home is the warm welcome that I receive from the young people and staff alike.

The young people are very engaging and questioning of my role and of me personally. They are naturally inquisitive and this is a very good trait to be developed.

They pursue questions and follow up on answers. Equally they are very open about themselves.

The friendly “banter” between the adults and young people helps to promote a relaxed atmosphere within the home.

Staff interaction

Was the staff interaction positive? Yes No

The environment within Richley House is extremely positive with lots of energy that creates a very stimulating milieu for everyone to experience.

The staff team are attentive towards each young person, without stifling their natural abilities and desire to increase their independence.

I observed the positive relationships that are clearly visible between the adults and the young people working and living at Richley House.

The staff team are very good at giving positive praise and encouragement, both verbally and with physical touch as confirmation to acknowledge and support this.

Personnel Files

Were any residential staff personnel files checked? ~~Yes~~ No
If so, how many?

Was the required information evident? ~~Yes~~ No

Due to time constraints, I was not able to review any staff files at this visit. This will be rectified at my next visit.

I am confident that the appointments of senior managers within Richley House was done in line with best practice and “safer recruitment” protocols.

There is also going to be a more focussed and therefore hopefully a more fruitful recruitment campaign for new staff. The adverts for these posts will also include comments from young people, in respect of the people they would like to care for them. There will also be a planned “open day(s)” to alert people to the prospect and opportunity of becoming a care worker at the home.

Hopefully, with the attractiveness of being a member of the care team at Richley House, some of the agency staff will also see this as a positive career choice, especially with the opportunity to gain a professional qualification.

General Observations

Richley House continues to provide an exceptionally positive experience for the young people who come to stay at the home, whilst attending Linden Lodge.

Within the home great emphasis has been placed on creating an environment that gives each young person the support they need, whilst encouraging them to increase their own independence and self-help skills.

The newly created Senior Management Team within Richley House will have the capacity to make significant positive changes and practice improvements across the home and school. These will enhance the already very positive experiences of the young people who come to stay at the home.

The current and planned commitment to developing the staff through training will be another improved strength of the home.

The Head of Care has been very proactive in the written contributions made in the Staff Newsletter and also in her letter to Parents and Carers.

L Miles

Lance Miles
Standard 20 Independent Visitor

L Miles Associates - Independent Social Work Consultancy

2nd March 2020