



LINDEN LODGE SCHOOL

Standard 20 Visitors Report



March 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 – 18th March 2020.

Despite all the uncertainty and worry regarding the Coronavirus pandemic, I was still able to witness the very individualised and thoughtful care and consideration being displayed by the senior staff team at Richley House.

I arrived at 11am and was permitted entry to the reception area, where they had in place very stringent health and safety protocols to ensure the current Government guidance was being adhered to.

The protocol was clearly displayed and being implemented in a very professional, yet friendly manner. After signing in I was then able to visit Richley House, where I spent the next three hours in the company of the Head of Care and one of her Deputies.

This was a very good opportunity to see how they were managing in these very unprecedented and worrying times, yet still giving their attention to making sensitive and practical plans for the young people, who were due to stay at Richley House, to either return to their parents/carers after school today or, where this was not possible or practical, to stay a further night at Richley House.

The Head of Care is clearly a very experienced and confident Manager and Social Care Practitioner. With her experience of being a Registered Manager of a Ofsted Registered Children's Home, Linden Lodge and Richley House have a great opportunity to improve and to evidence the quality of care provided and have an excellent addition to the Senior Management Team of the School. I do hope that this is utilised and capitalised upon.

All the young people were at school during this visit and I was able to observe the school day being like any other on. It was clear the underlying atmosphere across the campus was still calm and settled, which is a credit to the professionalism and caring approach taken by the staff teams.

Both the Head of Care and the Deputy presented as being both confident and knowledgeable about the young people in their care. They were communicating well with each other, the school, Social Workers and other professionals, as well as families and carers. All of this was being done in a very managed and sensitive way to ensure each young person had plans made for them, that would keep them safe and appropriately cared for.

The School and Richley House were clearly in step with the advice given in a letter from Yvette Stanley, Ofsted's National Director, Social Care, which read:

“We realise that in the current circumstances you will be finding different ways to keep your children's homes and other social care services operating and to keep contact between children, their families, social workers and others. The best advice we can offer at present is our clear expectation that you continue to work closely with placing authorities and/or parents, to follow advice from Public Health England and, as ever, to keep children's wellbeing at the centre of decision-making.”

“... Ofsted does not have the power to lift regulatory requirements - this would require legislative change. We are in close contact with government officials as the situation develops. However, we expect all providers to continuously risk assess their actions to reflect the risks that COVID-19 poses and follow Public Health England advice.”

Attendance

Any unauthorised absences? ~~Yes~~ No

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

The school and Richley House were making plans for young people to return to their respective homes, where it was safe and sensible to do so.

The underlying health conditions of some of the young people would make them potentially very susceptible to the COVID-19 virus, which if contracted would place them in grave danger.

Therefore, Richley House was closing for all but a very few young people, who could not, on the day of my visit, return to their respective homes.

The communication within and across Linden Lodge overall, during this planning phase, appeared to be good. I was also able to hear some of the conversations the Head and Deputy Head of Care were having with the parents/carers and other professionals involved in the repatriating of the young people home earlier than planned or expected.

Sanctions

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

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

We were able to talk about the positive and trusting relationships between the young people and the staff caring for them. This had been particularly beneficial as it greatly assisted the way in which young people were informed about what was going on and why there had been certain changes in the way they were cared for or supported.

Physical Interventions

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

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

Again, with both the Head of Care and her Deputy, I had a very informative and constructive discussion about the notion of and use of physical intervention.

From their observations and own practice beliefs, we were in agreement that it is the quality of the supervision and engagement, given to each young person, in a very genuine and individualised way that virtually negates the need physically intervene, unless, a young person is at immediate risk or danger to themselves or others.

The preference within Richley House is that, should a young person show signs of emerging distress or display negative feelings/behaviours, this would be de-escalated or managed by the staff intervening early or by demonstrating genuine care and offering comfort to them.

I was told that the links between the home and the Behaviour Support Team continue to be strengthened, which has helped to maintain and 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.

The ethos and culture established within the home is to be very proactive in listening and addressing any concerns that the young people raise with staff or, indeed, if staff recognise a young person may have a concern or niggle that they cannot directly express by themselves.

Risk Assessments

Any risk assessments undertaken since the last visit? Yes No

This was an area that could be reviewed in some detail. I was told that a number of risk assessments had and were being updated. I was able to read through 17 PEEP's and a further 8 Risk Assessments.

There were some observations, shared with the Head of Care during this visit, which was very timely as these plans were going to be shared with families and other professionals.

The quality of the Risk Assessments was generally good with an appropriate level of thoughtful details included. The themes and observations for further review were:

- PEEP's could be more personalised and require a review date to be stated.
- An additional table to be inserted to indicate when they had been reviewed or updated.

- Some of the Risk Assessments need to be checked for the correct use of his/her and he/she relevant to the young person they referred to.
- Agree, explain and define some terminology, such as “unit manager” and “RW” within the risk assessments.

Individual Care Plans

Were care plans up to date? Yes ~~No~~

I was informed that each young person’s care and other plans were being reviewed. This is by way of a “Progress Study” to look at the various plans and identify where they need to be updated, as well as looking at ways to evidence and demonstrate progress and achievements made.

Once identified, the progress and achievements are celebrated with the individual young person and shared with their families/carers.

I was also able to read through many of the young people’s “My Learning Journey” and the individual Residential Handover Checklists. These were both very informative and I can see areas that have been progressed within these two reporting/recording documents.

Environment

Were there any premises issues? Yes ~~No~~

Overall, the indoor and outdoor environments continue to be well maintained and kept to a high standard.

As I walked around Richley House, I observed a high level of cleanliness throughout. The storage of food, both dry goods and items stored in the fridges, was well maintained and managed.

In discussion with the Head of Care, we also talked through the recent Fire Evacuation that took place. This was successful, but led onto a discussion regarding the established “Evacuation Area”, which is the outside playground to the side of Richley House. We agreed that it would be worth reviewing this area, partly due to it being an exposed area in cold or inclement weather; was it far enough from the building and was it sufficiently lit during the late evening or during the night?

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.

I had an interesting conversation with the Head of Care in respect of the use of “baby monitors” to assist in the night-time supervision of young people.

In the NMS for Residential Special Schools the only reference to monitoring equipment refers to CCTV which is;

“Any use of surveillance equipment (e.g. CCTV cameras) or patrolling of school buildings or grounds for security purposes does not intrude unreasonably on children’s privacy.”

Whereas the Guide to Children’s Home Regulations is more prescriptive:

“Any home using CCTV or other monitoring equipment should have a written policy describing how this will support the safeguarding and well-being of those living and working in the home in accordance with regulation 24. Homes must gain consent to any monitoring or surveillance by the placing authority in writing at the time of placement. The use of CCTV is regulated by the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 and the Surveillance Camera Code of Conduct (Home Office 2013).”

This is another example of the knowledge and experience that the Head of Care brings to her role and how it can be utilised within the school to exceed standards.

In my view, the “best practice” would be for Richley House to adhere to the latter expectation and guidance.

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

These records were all within the school, so I was not able to view them during this visit.

I was told that the Health Care Assistants (HCA) continue to be primarily responsible for the administration of medication. The HCA’s keep regular counts of medication and the Head of Care also carries out spot checks on this area of practice.

I was informed that the Medication Policy had been revised and is with the Board of Governors for ratification. It will be good to have this agreed and in place by the time of my next visit.

Staffing, Supervision and Appraisal

Were staffing levels good? Yes No

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

I was told by the Head of Care, that supervision was a priority for her and the staff team at Richley House. There was a supervision framework in place and good arrangements to ensure the waking night staff also received supervision and the opportunity to attend or contribute to Team Meetings, as well as attend training.

During this visit, I also had the opportunity to read some of the minutes from Senior Staff Meetings and Team Meetings. These were both informative and well recorded.

The notes and contents of two training days were also available. These covered some very pertinent areas of practice, namely;

- Issues of Communication and Communicating
- Reporting and Recording
- Work on PEEP's to make them live and personalised.

Food

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

This will be a priority area for reporting on at my next visit. As all the young people were in school at this visit.

The food available in each of the kitchens within Richley House, was stored appropriately and sufficient for snacks and drinks etc.

Security

Was the site security good? Yes No

The security and the health and safety measures across Linden Lodge were appropriate and proportionate to ensure the safety and protection for both the adults and young people living and working there.

These measures have been increased in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. This has been shared with parents, families and other visitors, via email, updates on the school website, posters and notices around the campus etc.

The message on the school website was very clear;

“Dear parents and carers

Thank you for your support with our actions in response to Coronavirus.

We are regularly seeking advice from Public Health England and the DfE to ensure that we are following all guidance. These are some of the steps we have taken:

- Increased vigilance and training on infection control including handwashing.
- Surveyed all staff regarding recent and forthcoming travel and taken the recommended steps
- Introduced increased visitor controls including questions regarding travel and ensuring hygiene processes are followed.
- Suspended public access to the Swim School
- Suspended trips and visits”

All of the above was very evident on the day of my visit.

Activities

Were there appropriate activities taking place? Yes No

All the young people were attending their respective classes within the school.

On display on the middle floor was the Residential Activity Time Table. This provides a degree of certainty and consistency for the young people but the list is not exclusive and many other activities are also on offer during the week

Pupils

Did the pupils appear happy & content? Yes No

I was able to observe the young people, within the school, at a distance. My assessment was that they all seemed very happy and relaxed. The staff supporting them were actively engaged in talking with them, assisting in the transitions between classes and whilst having a lunch break.

From talking with the Head of Care, I was informed how the young people staying at Richley House had been kept informed regarding the Coronavirus outbreak and the need to have even higher standards of personal care and hygiene.

Staff interaction

Was the staff interaction positive? Yes No

Although I could not observe this directly, in talking with the Head of Care and her Deputy, it was clear that the relationship between the young people and staff remains positive and mutually respectful. This has really been of great benefit in helping them to understand what is happening and how they have been impacted upon due to Coronavirus.

Wherever possible the care staff have taken the opportunity to watch "Newsround" and used "social stories" to keep the young people appropriately informed and aware of the local and wider issues.

Personnel Files

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

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

Due to Health and Safety measure in place across Linden Lodge it was not possible to cover this area at this visit.

I did discuss the Central List with the Head of Care and my suggestion would be for the care staff to have a separate "tab" within the spreadsheet held by the HR Team.

General Observations

Richley House has a very capable, experienced and knowledgeable Head of Care. I would implore Linden Lodge to maximise the opportunity to incorporate a seamless link to Richley House, by ensuring that the Head of Care has the opportunity to contribute to the development of Richley House and the wider service within Linden Lodge.

Clearly, from the previous Ofsted inspections of Richley House, they have commented on the benefit the young people have from being able stay at the home and the excellent progress they make within the school. This positivity demonstrates the added value that Richley House gives to many of the young people attending the school. That is why it is important for this added value to be visible across the school and Richley House seen as an important and inclusive part of school life.

As the Senior Team within Richley House develop their own strong and positive identity, it may be worth them remembering various stages of team or group development, not just for them but also for the teams below them.

One such model is the one that Bruce Tuckman created, his famous Forming,

Storming Norming and Performing model in 1965. It was used to best describe the stages of team development or the path to success. His stages provide an easy way to understand how groups change and develop. This may be relevant to other various aspects of teams and groups across Linden Lodge.



I have listed below some issues identified in previous reports, to which I would appreciate some feedback on and some areas identified at this visit that require further consideration:

- 1) Please can it be confirmed whether each young person now has their own ID card so they can "swipe" themselves into particular areas?
- 2) The identified loose and broken slats on the pathway through the outdoor play equipment, noted in my last two reports, still requires repairing.
- 3) There was going to be a review of the Clinical Governance and Safeguarding by the Local CCG. I was contacted by someone asking for advice, but I have had no further communique from them, is this still progressing?
- 4) The home was also looking for a Pharmacist to undertake a Medication Review within Richley House – has this been achieved?
- 5) I would suggest the Fire Evacuation Area for Richley House is reviewed – please see comments in the main report.
- 6) Further consideration to be given about a policy / agreement for the use of "baby monitors" within Richley House.

L Miles

Lance Miles
Standard 20 Independent Visitor

L Miles Associates - Independent Social Work Consultancy

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