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LINDEN LODGE SCHOOL

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Standard 20 Visitors Report



February 2021

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## Independent Visitor Report- Standard 20

As defined by The Residential Special Schools – National Minimum Standards effective from 1<sup>st</sup> 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.

***The following is derived from my separate, virtual MS Team meetings with the Head Teacher, HR Manager and the Deputy Head of Care, along with other staff and young people within Richley House. These all took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021.***

***I have also had the opportunity to see a copy of the Head of Care's self-assessment of how Richley House meets the National Minimum Standards.***

Due to the on-going risk assessment regarding visitors to Linden Lodge, this was a further virtual visit. The risk assessment is based on the safety advice and Government guidance regarding the need to take sensible and reasonable precautions to protect everyone at the school and Richley House. This is also to support the Government and PHE national request to make all efforts to limit any spread of Covid-19.

The school re-opened in January for a number of students and reduced overnight stays have been re-commenced successfully at Richley House.

Within Richley House there have always been comprehensive risk assessments in place to keep each young person safe and well. This now includes individual and collective risk assessments specific to Covid-19. These risk assessments are regularly reviewed and specifically identify the procedures to follow for any young person displaying symptoms of Covid-19.

Both Richley House and the school immediately take account of any updated guidance provided by the Government, Public Health England (PHE) and Ofsted. They ensure it is complied with and also disseminated in accessible forms to everyone connected to the school.

In talking with the Head Teacher and other members of staff, there was a real positivity in how they described the confident and constructive changes that had been made, not only in response to Covid-19, but also within Richley House for the benefit of the young people staying there.

The young people I saw, within Richley House, all looked very happy and at ease with the staff caring and supporting them.

From what I was told and could observe, the young people were certainly enjoying themselves and the staff were working really hard to keep an air of normality within Richley House, with activities being offered that were new, interesting and had an element of learning also attached to them.

I remain impressed by the on-going resilience and determination of the staff and young people to overcome the challenges and changes in their daily routines due to Covid-19.

## **Attendance**

Any unauthorised absences?

~~Yes~~

No

From talking with the Head Teacher, I was advised that currently there were sixty-three students physically attending the school, with the remainder of the students accessing home learning or virtual classes.

Richley House had remained open, with currently only the ground floor and top floor being used to provide overnight stays. On the day of my visit there were ten young people staying at Richley House.

It is envisaged that after the half -term break, all three floors will be in use.

Within Richley House, every bedroom is now sole occupancy. This has reduced the number of young people that can stay. However, this is a necessary precaution in order to keep everyone safe and well when they stay overnight.

In my conversation with the Deputy Head of Care, it was confirmed that all young people who had been expected to stay overnight had done so. The decision as to who could stay overnight continued to be based on clear risk assessments and careful planning in relation to which young people could access Richley House.

## **Sanctions**

Any major sanctions since the last visit?

~~Yes~~

No

From talking with the Deputy Head of Care, he described the tolerance and acceptance by the young people to the changes within the school and Richley House as truly admirable. The use of social stories and other communication tools, had really helped each young person to understand what was happening, the changes being implemented and why.

The behaviour and attitude to these changes from the young people has been exemplary. Again, since my last visit, there had been no behaviour or incident that necessitated the imposition of any sanction or consequence being given to a young person.

There is an expected positive behaviour culture established and maintained within Richley House. This is partly due to the very individualised and a highly personalised level of care and support each young person receives from a very genuinely caring staff team.

During the course of my visit, I was able to observe the staff talking to the young people with respect and taking time to listen to them and hear their views on a range of topics.

## **Physical Interventions**

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

There were no incidents whereby staff had to physically intervene to keep a young person safe.

The positive behaviour culture and policy is now embedded within the care practice of the staff at Richley House. This is also supported by having a settled staff team that want to be at Richley House and to enhance and benefit the lives of the young people that come and stay within the home.

I was able to observe the staff team taking time to explain things to each young person and also treating them with respect and dignity, when asking if it was okay to leave them and talk with me.

This was done very naturally and again indicative of the genuine care and regard the adults within Richley House have towards the young people in their care.

## **Complaints**

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

I was not informed of any complaints having been received or made, with regard to Richley House, since my last report.

Although not raised as a complaint, I was told about an incident regarding a young person who was potentially unwell and how this was recorded. This has been highlighted as something for "lessons learned". This was openly shared with me by the Head Teacher and Deputy Head of Care. Although not serious, the incident did highlight the need to review some of the record keeping made and the need to make it more individualised.

This is indicative of the more reflective approach taken within Richley House.

## **Risk Assessments**

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

From talking with the Deputy Head of Care and the Head Teacher, the risk assessment and protocol in relation to dealing with and managing Covid-19, across the whole of Linden Lodge, is continually being reviewed.

Each young person who comes to stay at Richley House has a range of risk assessments completed. These are bespoke to them and cover a range of activities and areas, which now also includes Covid-19. All of these are reviewed as necessary.

## **Individual Care Plans**

Were care plans up to date?

Yes

No

I was told, during my conversation with the Deputy Head of Care and included in the NMS Self-Assessment Plans, that each young person's "plans" are "viewed as 'live documents' which are reviewed regularly and updated accordingly."

Each young person also has an Individual Health Care Plan in place, that is regularly reviewed and updated.

Within the Individual Care Plans, the "All About Me" is regularly updated and the care staff ensure this section is written with the young person, as a true reflection of how they see themselves and what they want people to know about them.

From talking with staff at this visit, it was apparent that the young people within Richley House are afforded "a voice" to make contributions to all aspects of their care and decisions within their stay.

This also, importantly, includes the opportunity talk about their wishes and feelings too.

## **Environment**

Were there any premises issues?

Yes

No

As this was a virtual visit, I only saw limited areas within Richley House.

From what I could see, there were no obvious issues with the physical environment. I was not made aware of any outstanding maintenance issues.

It was confirmed by the Deputy Head of Care, that the strict and conscientious cleaning regime continues to be in place within Richley House.

I was told that some of the positives and learning from the increased use of technology are being incorporated within Richley House.

"Alexa" has proved to be a very useful addition to the home and there are plans to utilise this further on each floor. This will include increased technology to manage the lighting within Richley House, enabling young people to interact more within their own physical environment, giving them more choices and control.

## **Safeguarding**

Any safeguarding / child protection issues relating to residential pupils?

Yes

No

This remains the same as my last report.

From talking with the Deputy Head of Care, I was not made aware of any

“safeguarding” issues, relating to the staff or young people at Richley House, since my last report.

All of the precautions and risk assessments in place across Linden Lodge are very sensible and in line with advice from PHE, the Government, Ofsted and the local Clinical Commissioning and Governance Boards etc. These were discussed with the Head Teacher and Deputy Head of Care; they are working well and have enabled the school and Richley House to continue to provide education and social learning throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The staff have access to appropriate PPE and information regarding Covid-19 and the need for heightened personal hygiene and social distancing has been shared with the young people in a range of accessible formats.

From talking with staff and reading through the NMS Self-Assessment, increased attention and support is being given to the “well-being” of each young person. Although this has possibly been accelerated due to the impact of Covid-19, it was also already a natural progression of the development of Richley House.

### **Medication records**

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

Due to the nature and timing of my virtual visit, it was not feasible to review these records.

The administration of medication continues to be responsibility of the Health Care Assistants (HCA's) and from what I was told by the staff in Richley House this continues to work well. The auditing and monitoring of these records remain the responsibility of the care staff.

In the Head of Care's self-assessment, it is also positive to read that “Pupils assist with the administration of their medication within the realms of their ability and understanding.”

The Deputy Head of Care confirmed that, since my last visit, there had been no medication errors or near misses.

For each young person medication is stored securely and there have been no problems in ensuring a good supply.

I was told that the local CCG is still considering additional Nursing support for Richley House, but currently there are more pressing demands and needs requiring funding in the wider community.

## **Staffing, Supervision and Appraisal**

Were staffing levels good? Yes No

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

I was able to see some of the staff and young people at Richley House; all were very happy and relaxed in each other's company.

The Head of Care was confident that the staffing levels within Richley House are being sustained in order to meet the needs of the young people who come to stay.

The members of staff that I spoke to were equally confident that the staffing levels ensured each young person who comes to stay at Richley House receives the necessary care and support they deserve and require to maximise their enjoyment and learning experiences.

The three new staff have started Richley House and from what I was told, following an induction and period of training, have all started very positively in their caring roles.

The care staff I spoke to confirmed that they are receiving supervision. They were very complimentary of the support provided to them both in their caring roles and associated "well-being" support, due to the impact of Covid-19.

The HR Manager described the care staff as "all pulling together," alongside the overall school. Also, she considered the care team as being part of a "strong and committed workforce" within Linden Lodge.

There are also plans to provide drop-in sessions for the night care team, to meet with the HR Manager to ensure they have an opportunity to share any concerns or to ask questions etc. This is a good example of the "inclusivity" that permeates across the whole of Linden Lodge for staff and young people.

## **Food**

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

I was told that the evening meal was a choice between Caribbean Chicken with rice or a vegetarian alternative. Due to this being a virtual visit, I was not able to see or sample the meal.

There is no change in how the food is prepared, delivered or menus planned.

The young people are always provided with a choice of meals, with specific dietary or health needs taken into account and provided for.



## **Security**

Was the site security good? ~~Yes~~      ~~No~~

I was unable to directly assess or view this, as this was a virtual visit.

However, the precautions taken regarding visitors all seem perfectly sensible and very much geared to keeping everyone safe.

## **Activities**

Were there appropriate activities taking place? Yes      ~~No~~

I was told that there continues to be a range of activities available both within Richley House and when weather permits, out in the grounds.

During my virtual visit, the young people all seemed very relaxed and at ease.

It is hoped, that after half-term, the reinstating of some activities will commence. I know, from talking with staff, the young people have missed the music workshops that were on offer. This is one that will be welcomed back as a priority for all.

The commitment of the staff to make each stay as enjoyable as possible for each young person remains a clear aim and at the forefront of the care staff's thinking and planning.

The Deputy Residential Childcare Manager was very praiseworthy of the care staff, describing them as a "dedicated" and "genuinely caring" staff team, who had proved themselves to be "adaptable" and "child-focussed," all wanting the "very best" for each young person in their care.

## **Pupils**

Did the pupils appear happy & content? Yes      ~~No~~

From what I could see, all the young people staying at Richley House, were having a great time. They all seemed very happy in each other's company.

Currently, each young person is able to stay four nights per week.

There is the intention to award certificates to each young person in recognition as to how well they have coped and continued to thrive throughout the changes and impact of Covid-19.

In conversation with the Deputy Head of Care and Deputy Residential Childcare Manager, it was really good to hear about the individual success and progress identified for every young person who comes to stay at Richley House.

The ways in which this progress is monitored and celebrated is becoming a strength within the care staff and Richley House.

## **Staff interaction**

Was the staff interaction positive? Yes ~~No~~

This was easy to identify and assess, even given the limitations of this being a virtual visit.

From what I could observe, each young person was able to spend time with a member of staff or just relax and enjoy themselves in the lounge/dining room.

The staff team, in my experience, allow each young person to make their own choices as to how much staff time they want. Equally, the staff team are very good at providing discreet supervision and oversight, to ensure young people are kept safe, but also enjoy a degree of independence.

Again, from what I was told, the staff team continue to be ambitious for each young person in relation to what they can achieve. The staff team support each young person to increase their own levels of learning, resilience and independence.

From conducting surveys, asking question and providing a safe environment, where it is “okay” to ask questions, each young person is able to express their views, worries and feelings in a safe way.

## **Personnel Files**

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

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

I was able to have a very positive and reassuring meeting with the HR Manager.

We were able to discuss a wide range of issues, from the extra pressures placed upon and felt across the whole of Linden Lodge due to Covid-19, the way “safer recruitment” was followed for the new members of the care staff that have started and the current and planned support mechanisms for the care team.

Although I was unable to check individual files, I am confident that they contain the correct information, due to the experience and diligence of the HR Manager and her staff team.

The recent Health and Well-Being survey gave some very positive and encouraging responses from the staff team.

In the Health/Well-Being section, 17 out of 18 staff felt this was either ‘very good’ or ‘good’ in the way they were supported and treated. In the responses regarding Physical Health, 14 felt this was again ‘very good’ or ‘good.’ There were also other positive comments recorded such as:

“always treated with dignity and respect” and staff felt they had a “good relationship with their line manager,” also they were provided with training opportunities.

## **General Observations**

Despite the limitations of my visits mainly being “virtual” throughout the majority of 2020, I am confident that the care and opportunities, provided to the young people, who access Richley House, continues to be very personalised and focussed to promote their overall well-being.

I heard about how resilient the young people had been in adapting to the changes to their previously well established and known routines. This is a credit to them and the staff caring and living with them.

Overall, it is easy to identify the “importance of residential” in the lives of the young people and their families.

It was good to hear that the integration between the care and other teams within Linden Lodge continues to improve. There are clear targets set, that are shared between care and school, with each team understanding the goals being set for each young person.

Another support mechanism being developed is input from a Clinical Psychologist to the care staff, to help them recognise and manage anxieties they may be experiencing.

The commitment and progress staff are making towards achieving their Level 3 qualification is to be commended in these challenging times.

Within Richley House, the staff and young people are also benefitting from the support from the Therapy Team and the Habitation Team.

Taking all of the above into account, in my professional opinion, the young people who come to stay at Richley House continue to receive a highly personalised level of care and support that ensures they are appropriately safeguarded and protected from harm.

## **L Miles**

Lance Miles  
Standard 20 Independent Visitor

*L Miles Associates - Independent Social Work Consultancy*

22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021