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LINDEN LODGE SCHOOL

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Standard 20 Visitors Report



March 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.

## **INDEPENDENT VISIT – 30<sup>th</sup> March 2021.**

After careful planning with the Head of Care, it was agreed that this could be an announced visit.

I arrived at 4pm and left shortly after 7pm. This was another very successful, positive and enjoyable visit.

The visitor entry system, that is now in place, was very welcoming and professional.

The greeting from staff at the main reception and when I walked across to the main building and then onto Richley House, was as I had been accustomed to, very welcoming and professional.

The School and Richley House clearly continue to follow and review the Government Guidance and their own individual Risk Assessment, to ensure a clear response to the COVID-19 restrictions and ensures they are applied appropriately.

The staff and young people that I spoke to, all adhered to appropriate “social distancing” and followed the necessary guidance to keep themselves and others safe.

Being able to meet with the young people was very refreshing and confirmed my professional opinion that the young people are well cared for within Richley House.

The first part of my visit was a pre-arranged meeting with the HR Manager and then onto Richley House.

I was met warmly by the staff on duty at Richley House and had the opportunity to talk with many of them during the course of this visit. I also had the opportunity to spend time with many of the young people staying at Richley House during my visit.

I was able to see and hear about the excellent changes, within Richley House. The most impressive was the “Waking Day Curriculum,” which was described and shown to me by the Deputy Head of Care and the Head of Sixth Form.

In my view this epitomises the much closer relationship and opportunity for continuous learning between the School and Richley House.

It creates a positive way for the staff to demonstrate a consistent and excellent way that they communicate with each young person, creating a very individualised, caring and learning environment for them. It also has an element of fun whilst learning, whilst directly linked to the targets in each young person’s EHCP.

There was a very positive and energised atmosphere within Richley House and this positivity was projected onto the young people. All of whom I met and communicated with, seemed to be really enjoying their time within the home.

During this visit, I also had the opportunity to meet with the Head Teacher, Head of Care and the Designated Safeguarding Lead.

## **Attendance**

Any unauthorised absences?

~~Yes~~

No

From talking with the Head Teacher and the Head of Care, I was advised that the School and Richley House had successfully continued to be open for those students for whom it was felt safe for them to return.

For those students, where the risks were assessed to be too high, they were supported via home learning or virtual classes.

## **Sanctions**

Any major sanctions since the last visit?

~~Yes~~

No

Each young person's health, behavioural and emotional needs are well understood by the staff caring and supporting them.

From what I observed, the adults in whatever role, set and model "good parenting" and set clear expectations and boundaries.

The staff team, within Richley House, know each young person well and are adept at removing any anxieties for a young person, ahead of it impacting on their behaviours.

From talking with staff within Richley House and the School, they have strategies and agreed ways of consistent responses, that are highly successful at encouraging positive attitudes within each young person. This creates an environment that actively prevents the need to implement sanctions.

Since my last report there had been no incidents whereby a young person had received a recorded sanction for negative behaviours.

The staff also provide emotional support and are skilful at enabling each young person to self-manage/self soothe their own emotions. As a result, young people are able to learn ways to calm down or re-focus when becoming unsettled.

## **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 staff teams collectively know each young person extremely well and through this

focus and understanding, are able to notice changes in behaviour or small cues in presentation, that may be indicative that a young person needs additional support to maintain their well-being or acceptable levels of behaviour.

From what I was able to observe of the young people staying at Richley House, I would conclude that they develop a strong sense of security and trust in the adults caring for them. This allows them to enjoy positive relationships with staff and their peers. It also supports them thriving, educationally and socially with Linden Lodge.

## **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.

The Head of Care has developed various ways to elicit the views, wishes and feelings of the young people who come to stay at Richley House. Equally, there are systems in place to ensure parents, families and other professionals are kept informed of any changes and have the opportunity to respond or raise concerns.

The young people staying at Richley House are also supported to challenge and request services from others. This has included posing questions to the Head Teacher and contacting the maintenance and support teams within Linden Lodge for repairs to be completed. These are all important life-skills and increases their own individual levels of independence and self-determination.

## **Risk Assessments**

Any risk assessments undertaken since the last visit? Yes      No

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.

## **Individual Care Plans**

Were care plans up to date?

Yes

No

In talking with the staff, they are committed to providing each young person with positive adult role models. In doing so, this helps the young people living at the home to develop and maintain trusting and respectful relationships with others around them. The quality of the relationship between the young people and adults, permits the former to make positive progress.

The staff team are very attentive and provide, at times differing, levels of supervision and support so the individual young people are enabled to make progress at their own pace, which embeds the learning of new skills etc.

The staff I spoke to were all aware of each young person's targets and goals. Along with this, they were also aware of the areas of behaviour being monitored and the agreed ways of providing support and guidance, to be consistently delivered.

The "Waking Day Curriculum" supports and enhances the use of EHCP targets to maximise the impact of care and support plans.

## **Environment**

Were there any premises issues?

Yes

No

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

The use of technology continues to be used effectively to enhance the learning and increased independence for the young people at Richley House and preparing them for their future lives.

## **Safeguarding**

Any safeguarding / child protection issues relating to residential pupils?

Yes

No

From talking with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and the 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.

I had a very reassuring conversation with the DSL who, very ably and with confidence, described the implementation and oversight of Safeguarding within Richley House and the School.

During this visit, I was appropriately challenged as to who I was, the purpose of my visit and who I was there to see.

The school's safeguarding policy is published on its website, with policies and procedures in place, which are accessible to staff and others. There is "safeguarding" training in place for new and existing staff.

I would suggest the information and policies, contained within that published on the website, is reviewed and updated. Those on-line have passed their specified review date and I believe some personnel listed may have changed.

This also needs to include a check on other policies, to ensure that any reference to the Children's Commissioner reflects the new postholder to this role.

The DSL and Head of Care were confident that all staff are in no doubt of how to deal with disclosures and child protection concerns. The staff training appears to be comprehensive and covers a multitude of useful topics related young people's welfare and safety.

There are systems in place to ensure that the assessments and responses to safeguarding concerns are consistent. The DSL monitors all paper and electronic (MyConcern) reports made and there are weekly meetings of the Safeguarding Team to discuss these, from both an operational and strategic viewpoint.

The DSL also has good links with the LADO for Wandsworth. The DSL also makes a regular visit to Richley House and is available for both staff and young people.

The staff I spoke to conveyed a sense of warmth, acceptance and empathy towards the young people they cared for. In my view, they look to create an environment that provides each young person with a very personalised level of care and support. This then gives each young person consistency and stability whilst at the home, which in turn supports them to attempt new tasks or activities, with the experience that they will be supported to succeed.

Staff told me, that should they have a concern relating to any aspect of the care or practice within the home, they would raise this directly in the most appropriate manner.

It was unfortunate that the planned meeting with the School Governor with the responsibility for Safeguarding could not be achieved due to timing issues. Hopefully this can be achieved at my next visit.

## **Medication records**

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

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.

I will review this area of practice in more detail at 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~~

My impression of Richley House is one where the staff team look to recognise risks and how best to manage them, without being too restrictive. This enables each young person to develop a sense of safety and well-being that is personal to them.

From what I observed, the staff team work inclusively with the young people living there. They look to provide a positive mixture of free time and structured activities.

From talking with staff at this and previous visits, it is easy to evidence the attentiveness that the staff give to each young person.

In respect of training, this is being carefully managed by the Senior Staff Team. They have a good system in place to monitor the progress that staff are making towards the Level 3 QCF and have systems in place to provide the necessary support to ensure completion of modules etc.

## **Food**

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

The food being served to the evening meal looked both appetising and nutritious.

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.

For young people needing additional support to eat their food, this is provided in an unhurried and caring way. The staff provide this without any fuss and it is seen as just part of mealtimes within Richley House.

For the young people that need more specialist support to consume their food, this too is completed in a very confident and caring manner.



## **Security**

Was the site security good?

Yes

No

The precautions taken regarding visitors is maintained in a very sensible and pragmatic manner.

The risk assessments in place are reviewed and implemented to promote safety and envisaged to keep everyone safe.

All the entrances are secure and access to areas of the home and school restricted as necessary.

## **Activities**

Were there appropriate activities taking place?

Yes

No

As I arrived at Richley House, everyone was outside for the presentations being made to a number of staff who had successfully completed their Level 3 Qualification and for the Deputy Head of Care his Assessors Award.

This celebration was indicative of the attentiveness of Richley House in recognising successes and achievements and very nicely mirrored those provided for the young people.

The young people all actively participated with the cheering and clapping for the gifts and recognitions being given to their members of staff.

I was told that tomorrow a very similar event will be held for the young people.

There have also been Easter Egg Hunts held and planned for the young people. All of these events adhere to the appropriate levels of social distancing.

The young people had also raised £81 for Comic Relief by making and selling some arts and crafts, as well as some cakes. This demonstrates the consideration given by everyone at Richley House in supporting others less fortunate.

Throughout, Richley House a number of activities were happening. This ranged from listening to music, singing, art and crafts, as well as the now almost expected "Karaoke," which is a particular favourite of most of the young people.

The staff team continue to look for activities that are both enjoyable and provide some learning within the House and as Covid-19 permits, in the wider community.

Within the website for Linden Lodge, there is a specific "Residential Hub" highlighting aspects of life within Richley House.

## Pupils

Did the pupils appear happy & content?

Yes

No

My impression is that the young people living at the home feel understood and cared for, by staff who know them well and who are intuitive and sensitive to their individual needs. Each young person lives within a home and with adults that give them time, support and the opportunity to independently work through their daily routines. This includes managing their personal care, making choices and other self-help targets.

The overall well-being of each young person is being continually assessed and supported, by a staff team that understands the young people's need for physical closeness and reassurance.

From talking with members of the staff team, they understand and continue to use a very "positive parenting" approach in establishing and maintaining mutually respectful relationships with each young person.

Staff work hard to identify and recognise the progress each young person makes. This is rewarded with positive physical/verbal affirmations.

Within the home there is a focus on the nurturing aspect of the care provided.

Whilst spending time with the young people, I was able to observe the staff working well to engage with each young person. This included taking opportunities to ensure that each young person could make progress towards maximising their potential and increasing their levels of independence.

The staff I spent time with were also extremely good at recognising the smallest of achievements that each young person had made, especially in relation to adhering to social norms and agreed behaviours.

I could also observe the staff team's continuous and strenuous efforts to involve each young person in decision making and choices relevant to them or concerning the home and in line with their care planning.

Within the young people's group there is an embodiment of truly accepting, empathic, supportive and caring relationships.

This was in evidence during my visit to the top floor, when W made space on the sofa for J to join him and then offered to share the microphone with her, so they could both participate in the karaoke singing. This was very typical of the positive relationships within the young people's group, but also indicative of those within the staff team and that promoted by staff, in their relationships with the young people in their care.

## **Staff interaction**

Was the staff interaction positive? Yes No

Overall, I would conclude that the staff team work hard to provide consistency in the levels of care, response and expectation given to each young person, in a very individualised way.

My observations of the relationships within the home, between the young people and adults, are best described as warm and supportive. They are developed, in most cases, over a number of years.

This supports the capacity for the young people to develop a good sense of themselves and the ability to form meaningful relationships with others.

## **Personnel Files**

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

Was the required information evident? Yes No

I was able to have a very positive and reassuring meeting with the HR Manager, during which I was able to view and talk about the Central List, recruitment process and read through the three staffing files of the most recent staff to commence work at Richley House.

Later in my visit, I was also able to meet and talk with one of the new staff members. They seemed very at ease with the young people in their care and were able to confirm that, from their perspective, the recruitment process was challenging and robust.

In discussion with the HR Manager, I looked through the staff files. They all contained the correct and expected paperwork and checks in place to evidence that the necessary verifications had been completed.

The Head Teacher also makes regular audits and checks on staffing files, alongside those made by the HR Team. This is demonstrative of the improvements and now quality of the staffing files and practice within the entirety of Linden Lodge.

## **General Observations**

In my professional opinion, the Head Teacher and Head of Care continue to be very

determined to improve and embed the best possible care practice within Richley House.

There is also an increased collegiate approach and partnership between the care and educational components of Linden Lodge. This is now equally supported by the other multi-disciplinary teams within the School. This is evident within the attention to detail and inclusiveness in developing the "Waking Day Curriculum".

From what I have heard and observed, I would conclude that the Senior Leadership Team of the School and Richley House have an enquiring nature and reflective approach in the delivering of services to young people.

This now permeates through their respective staff teams. The members of staff, that I have met during my visits, are continually and increasingly more able to talk about the care plans and targets of the young people, with confidence and genuine respect.

They are also happy to discuss and reflect on their own care practice values.

## **L Miles**

Lance Miles  
Standard 20 Independent Visitor

*L Miles Associates - Independent Social Work Consultancy*

19<sup>th</sup> April 2021