

The Loddon School

Wildmoor Lane, Sherfield-on-Loddon, Hook, Hampshire RG27 0JD

Inspection dates

10–12 July 2018

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| Overall effectiveness | Outstanding |
| Effectiveness of leadership and management | Outstanding |
| Quality of teaching, learning and assessment | Outstanding |
| Personal development, behaviour and welfare | Outstanding |
| Outcomes for pupils | Outstanding |
| Sixth form provision | Outstanding |
| Overall effectiveness at previous inspection | Good |

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Pupils thrive at Loddon. They make exceptional progress in all aspects of their learning. Consequently, they are very well prepared for life beyond school.
- Leaders are highly ambitious for pupils. They expect and get the very best from staff. Leaders have made significant improvements to the curriculum since the last inspection. They are putting in place an even clearer way to ensure that all staff have the highest expectations of pupils.
- Pupils' personal development is exemplary. Highly knowledgeable, multidisciplinary teams make life-changing differences for pupils. Pupils make significant gains in their physical and mental health.
- Pupils' behaviour improves significantly over time. Highly effective teaching ensures that pupils learn the appropriate communication strategies that they need to thrive.
- Leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met.
- Staff have exemplary insight into the abilities of individual pupils. Assessment is outstanding, including the analysis of pupils' unwanted or unsafe behaviours. There is nothing that leaders and staff do not think about or provide for pupils.
- Safeguarding is highly effective. Trustees, leaders and staff have absolute clarity about the additional vulnerabilities of Loddon pupils. Leaders have created a culture where adults are able to contribute fully and challenge each other where they feel things could be improved.
- Older students are fully integrated into the school. Thus, all of the exceptional features of the school apply equally to the sixth form.
- Large numbers of staff join the school to train and learn each year. New staff are not as confident or effective in their interactions with pupils. Established staff play the role of 'experts' exceptionally well.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to make sure that pupils make the strongest possible progress by ensuring that:
 - new staff develop the confidence and knowledge that they need to be even more effective
 - the new system about what to expect from pupils is even more explicit, completed and fully implemented in practice.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders have expert knowledge with regard to understanding and meeting the needs of pupils who have complex special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They have created a learning culture among staff. Consequently, established staff are highly effective in all facets of their work with pupils.
- Leaders are highly ambitious for pupils. They recognise the unique abilities in each and every pupil. Leaders' unwavering moral compulsion to offer pupils the very best learning experiences has led to a significant improvement in the curriculum. Leaders have increased the prominence of arts and sports within the school. Loddon pupils are now award-winning performers with local and national recognition.
- Leaders want and expect the best from all staff. Almost all staff are fully behind leaders' drive to continually improve the life chances of pupils. Many staff say that staff morale has improved. Poor performance or breaches of the clear guidance for staff regarding their conduct are swiftly and appropriately managed.
- Parents could not be more positive about Loddon. They all have unique stories about the 'transformation' that they see in their own children. They say, 'Loddon is the standard by which all special schools should be judged.'
- Leaders have significantly increased the visibility of pupils beyond the school gates. They want pupils to play an active role in the wider community and for the community to see and value pupils' talents. Leaders have increased extra-curricular activities to ensure that pupils do not become overly familiar with the school's grounds. Highly personalised curricula ensure that when pupils are confident, they are given regular opportunities to explore shops, restaurants and gyms.
- Leaders' knowledge and diligence ensures that all independent school standards are met.

Governance

- Trustees know their school very well. They have absolute clarity about pupils' abilities and vulnerabilities. Trustees provide effective support and challenge to senior leaders. They have great ambition for the school and have exciting plans to improve the extensive grounds and further safeguard the financial viability of the school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The safeguarding policy on the website has due regard for the latest guidance from the government.
- Staff, including those currently being inducted, are very clear about what they have to do to help keep pupils safe. Leaders and staff have thought carefully about pupils' dignity when attending to their personal care. They also ensure that policies and procedures help keep pupils and staff safe.
- The meticulous recording of pupils' unwanted or unsafe behaviours helps keep pupils and staff safe. Leaders analyse patterns in behaviour to make informed judgements about what may be leading to changes in behaviour over time. Leaders and staff then make

changes to learning spaces and the curriculum to help ensure that pupils are happier and safer.

- Leaders are not complacent. They feel things can always be better. Leaders take any learning from every incident and then ensure that changes are made to improve staff training and briefings.
- Leaders have created a strong whistleblowing culture. Staff know that they are often the voice and always the advocate of pupils. As a result, staff report any concerns they have appropriately. Leaders seek and act upon advice from the designated officer who works for the local authority as appropriate.
- Assessment of risk is exemplary. Staff think deeply about any possible risks to pupils, including when they are off the school site. Their thinking is well-recorded, and adults take all possible steps to reduce risk.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Assessment is exemplary. Multi-agency assessments before pupils join the school are critical to pupils' success. Almost all pupils have not been happy or successful in their previous specialist provisions. New pupils settle very well. Formal reviews of pupils' progress and next steps have unerring clarity about pupils' abilities and talents. Staff have exceptional insight into pupils' abilities and learning needs, including their sensory requirements and the substantial progress they make over time.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and respectful.
- Staff are highly effective in helping pupils to manage transitions. The highly personalised curriculum and extensive grounds mean that pupils get many deliberate opportunities to learn how to stop what they are doing when it is not productive and move on to something else.
- Staff are highly flexible in their approaches to pupils, including when pupils are simply not ready to access what staff have planned. Staff will take learning to pupils or adapt their planned learning to meet the needs of new pupils who join experiences.
- Staff are very effective in their use of communication systems. Storytelling is engaging and captures pupils' interests. Pictures and/or symbols are effectively used to give pupils choice. Experienced staff are effective in using Makaton to sign and develop pupils' early spoken language.
- Staff have very high expectations of pupils. They will look for all relevant opportunities to foster pupils' independence.
- The extensive learning environment outside is delightful. It provides a multitude of learning opportunities. Many pupils flourish while learning outside. Great thought has been given to the design and use of outside spaces, such as the sensory garden.
- Established staff adopt the role of 'expert'. They instinctively help and explain things to new staff. New staff are not as confident in their interactions or clear enough about what pupils are doing or why.
- Leaders recognise that pupils' willingness to access learning and interact can vary hugely during the course of a day. They have developed an even more effective way to make

clear to all staff what one can expect pupils to do on a 'good' or 'bad' day. These prompts are not fully in use yet.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils' physical and mental health flourishes at Loddon. Pupils who exhibited highly disengaged or aggressive behaviours towards themselves or others make huge strides in their personal development over time. Some pupils are able to have their medication reduced as a result of being more content and less anxious.
- Therapeutic teams are integral to the work of the school. For example, pupils are systematically provided with a wide range of fruit and vegetables to try. Food science expertise ensures that pupils who were 'fussy' eaters before they started school gradually get exposed to, accept, and enjoy, a more balanced diet.
- Curriculum improvements and leaders' ambitions have ensured that pupils spend much more time outside of school. Pupils participate in regional sporting competitions, work with artists and musicians and perform Shakespearean plays at local theatres. Pupils' pride in their achievements is best seen through the attention they give to photographs and videos of themselves in action.
- Leaders and staff give careful consideration to ensuring that pupils do not become over-reliant or fixated on individual members of staff. As a result, pupils become more resilient and independent over time.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Detailed assessment of need, expert teaching and strong gains in communication skills mean that pupils are much more able to self-regulate their behaviours over time.
- Staff know pupils very well. They are skilled at knowing when pupils' levels of anxiety are rising. Staff are highly effective at helping pupils to calm down.
- Parents cannot speak highly enough of the patience that staff show in working with pupils whose behaviour can be consistently challenging. Parents speak of the 'perfect balance' that the school strikes between being 'consistent but relaxed'.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Loddon makes a substantial difference to the quality of pupils' lives, particularly in learning communication and other basic life skills.
- Pupils who were not happy, or whose behaviours were not easily managed in other schools, thrive at Loddon.
- Pupils make significant gains in their ability to communicate, through the exchange of symbols, Makaton, and, in some cases, speech.

- Pupils' ability and desire to persist at tasks increases significantly over time.
- Pupils learn key strategies to be successful learners. For example, learning how to move from one place or experience to another without becoming over anxious. Pupils learn how to indicate that they have finished something or do not like something. This has a significantly positive impact on pupils' behaviours.
- Pupils make strong progress in their self-help skills. Over time they become much more willing to attend to their personal hygiene or to let others help them without becoming hugely distressed and anxious.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their next stage of education over time. They develop an enjoyment and/or tolerance of being outside of school. They are able to travel on school or public transport. Pupils learn some key concepts; for example, handing money over in shops in exchange for goods. Older pupils become confident to eat a meal in local restaurants.

Sixth form provision

Outstanding

- Older students are fully integrated into the life of the school. Consequently, the wide-ranging strengths in teaching, personal development and outcomes seen in other years equally apply to the sixth form.
- Leaders have improved the curriculum and assessment of students' progress since the last inspection. Students can now gain accredited qualifications in recognition of their journey to greater independence. Students learn critical self-help skills, which prepare them for life after school. Effective staff training ensures accurate assessment.
- Students are given well-considered and appropriate work experience and careers advice and guidance. Some students tend to animals or the school grounds. As students' confidence grows, they make a positive contribution to the wider community; for example, by delivering magazines locally.

School details

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| Unique reference number | 116589 |
| DfE registration number | 850/6005 |
| Inspection number | 10047017 |

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

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| Type of school | Independent special school |
| School category | Independent school |
| Age range of pupils | 8 to 19 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in the sixth form | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 28 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 13 |
| Number of part-time pupils | None |
| Proprietor | Mrs Marion Cornick |
| Chair | Mrs Marion Cornick |
| Headteacher | Dr Gill Barrett |
| Annual fees | £244,950 |
| Telephone number | 01256 884 600 |
| Website | www.loddonschool.org |
| Email address | info@loddonschool.co.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 15–17 July 2015 |

Information about this school

- The current headteacher joined shortly after the last inspection.
- The Loddon School is a special school that provides year-round education and care for pupils with autistic spectrum disorders compounded by extreme and challenging behaviour.

- Many pupils have additional disabilities such as epilepsy and very severe communication disorders. Pupils' attainment is well below that typical for their chronological age. The school only admits pupils who have the most severe learning difficulties. Every pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. All pupils have been excluded from their previous special schools, or their previous school has been unable to meet their current needs on their EHC plan.
- The school was established as a charitable trust in 1988 and currently has 28 pupils on roll. Almost all are boys. All pupils are funded by their home authority. Almost all pupils are children looked after.
- The aim of the school is to provide for the needs of the pupils through a multi-disciplinary approach so that pupils can achieve as much independence in adult life as possible.
- The school is set within 10 acres of grounds, which include animal paddocks, an orchard, allotment, outdoor exercise gym and play equipment, a sensory room and playground, and a nature and cycle trail. There is an indoor swimming pool.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school was last inspected in July 2015.

Information about this inspection

- Meetings were held with senior leaders to review self-evaluation documentation, including those capturing pupils' progress over time.
- Interactions between staff and pupils were jointly observed with the principal over the three days.
- Meetings were held with middle leaders, representative of trustees and members of the therapeutic team.
- Parents' views were evaluated through six responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and free-text comments. The inspector spoke to some parents face-to-face and some by telephone.
- Staff views were considered through 39 survey returns, formal meetings and through informal conversations.
- Documentation relating to all the independent school standards was evaluated.

Inspection team

Mark Cole, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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