

# Pontville Residential School

Pontville School, Black Moss Lane, Ormskirk, Lancashire L39 4TW

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Pontville is an independent school that specialises in supporting pupils with autism spectrum disorder, Asperger's syndrome, and speech language and communication needs between the ages of 5 to 19 years. The school is situated in a residential area on the outskirts of Ormskirk. The residential provision can accommodate a maximum of 12 children and young people. At the time of the inspection, four children and young people were staying for four nights a week, Monday to Friday, during term time only.

The head of care has been in post for five years and has a relevant qualification as required by the national minimum standards (NMS).

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 16 to 18 November 2021

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 2 October 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children and young people receive high-quality individualised care and support from staff who know them very well. This helps children and young people to make exceptional progress from their individual starting points. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the difference that staff have made to their child's lives emotionally, socially and academically.

Children and young people are growing in confidence and learning important new skills to support greater independence. Children and young people told the inspectors how proud they are of their own achievements. Excellent relationships with staff give children and young people the reassurance and confidence to take on new situations and challenges. For example, one young person is an accelerated reader and a reading champion for his form.

All children and young people have comprehensive care plans that detail their individual needs, strengths and targets for development. Care plans include the targets identified within Education, Health and Care Plans. Staff work closely with teachers and the in-school therapy team and contribute to the half termly team around the child meetings. This supports consistent practice and responses.

Children and young people are supported to actively participate in day-to-day decisions about their lives, as appropriate. For example, they are encouraged to read and contribute to their records. One child has written in his plan that he does not want to move bedrooms because he sees his bedroom as his 'sanctuary'. There is a representative from children who stay in the residential accommodation on the school council. This ensures that they play an equal part in sharing views and concerns.

Children and young people can contribute to activities and have a say in how their residential experience is planned and carried out. They benefit from a wide range of social and recreational activities, including volunteering in a local charity shop, attending a choir and other social groups. Children and young people told the inspectors that they liked making friends, taking part in activities and developing their independence. One parent said, 'The confidence [my child] has now and the ability to get on with people; he has learnt tolerance. I genuinely don't worry about him during the week.'

Staff work cohesively with parents to ensure consistent approaches when children and young people are at home. Communication between the home and school is a key strength. One parent commented that her child no longer requires as many visual prompts 'because he understands routines and can do things more independently'.

Children and young people who are new to the residential provision are welcomed with careful and considered planning. Equally, when children and young people leave, staff promote positive endings.

Feedback from parents is extremely positive and includes:

- '[My son] is like a different boy since going there. He has friends and he is learning new skills such as cooking, turn-taking, he is making friends. This is something we thought he wouldn't do.'
- 'Staff know [my son] well and know the family well. This is his home from home. I would recommend it. He has a better quality of life here.'
- 'Staff know [my son] inside out. The attention to detail is second to none. They have great relationships with him and us.'

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

Proactive safeguarding practice means that children and young people have a strong sense of safety and well-being. Comprehensive risk assessments give very clear instruction to staff about potential triggers, strategies to use and descriptions of behaviours at every level of escalation. Children and young people are supported to take age-appropriate risks as part of their development of independent living skills.

Children and young people feel protected and are protected from harm. They clearly enjoy their time in residency and as a result there have been no incidents of physical restraint, consequences or missing from care. Children and young people are supported to learn strategies to help them manage their own anxieties and emotions, including meditation, mindfulness and writing their frustrations down. A clear culture of respect, praise and positive relationships is firmly embedded throughout the school.

All staff are trained in safeguarding and they understand their roles and responsibility to safeguard all children and young people. Concerns are reported to the designated safeguarding team without delay. There is a professional working partnership with the designated officer. Updated training on government guidance ensures that staff are aware of the latest guidance.

Recruitment and vetting procedures are effective. The physical environment is safe and secure. Any matters relating to safety and maintenance are promptly addressed by the maintenance team.

The school remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including the residential provision. This provided children and young people with continuity of care and education.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

Leaders and managers are inspirational, confident and ambitious for children and young people. They have high expectations of their staff to change and improve the lives of children and young people. Consequently, the residential provision is very much an integral part of the school and provides a high-quality service that enhances the experiences of all children and young people.

Leaders and managers monitor each child and young person's progress and can clearly demonstrate the positive impact that the school has had on their progress and life chances. Children and young people have access to a range of specialist support, including speech and language, occupational therapy and psychology services. The clinical team is essential to the residential provision. This gives staff regular opportunities to seek advice and support about strategies to use.

The head of care uses her self-evaluation form effectively to reflect on past developments, set new targets and consider any areas for improvement. The head of care has ensured that the residential provision continues to build on its strengths. Partnership working is a key strength across the whole school. Parents spoken to said that communication is strong and that they feel valued.

Key board members provide rigorous challenge and hold leaders and managers to account. An independent person regularly visits the residential provision. The independent person meets with the head of care, staff, and children and young people. She reports on the quality of care and safeguarding arrangements to ensure that the high standards of care practice are maintained.

The performance of residential staff is routinely supported through regular supervision and team meetings. Practice is informed by research and continues to develop from a strong and confident base. The school was recently awarded the Autism Specialist Award Advanced Status 2022, which is the highest accolade from the National Autistic Society. This ensures that they sustain the highest quality of care for children and young people.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC061727

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mrs Justine Sims

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspectors**

Michelle Bacon, Social Care Inspector (lead)  
Sophie Thomson, Social Care Inspector

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