Education Scotland
Foghlam Alba

care inspectorate

Donaldson's
Linlithgow
West Lothian
3 December 2013

Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate (Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland) inspect schools in order to let parents[1] and young people know whether their school[2] provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with staff how they can improve the quality of care and education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask senior managers and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which young people are involved. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of care and education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of care and education in the school. We describe how well young people are doing, how good the service is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and young people work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support young people. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.educationscotland.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from young people, parents and staff, and details about young people's examination performance. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals.

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[1] Throughout this report, the term 'parents' should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.
[2] The term 'school' includes the nursery class or classes where appropriate.

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1. The school

Donaldson's is situated in Linlithgow. It is a grant-aided residential special school administered by the Donaldson Trust, which draws children and young people from 15 Scottish and two English local authorities. It also has a separate nursery which is in partnership with West Lothian Council. The roll of the nursery is 33. Children normally progress from the nursery to local schools. There were 17 children at the primary stage and 42 young people in the secondary when the inspection was carried out in May 2013. Twelve young people have co-ordinated support plans (CSPs). Young people's attendance was in line with the national average in 2012.

The inspection was continued during the period August to October 2013 to undertake further evaluative activities. These further activities related to governance, and communication between the Board, school and parents.

2. Key strengths of the nursery and school

- The outstanding quality of children's experiences and outcomes in the nursery.
- The nursery's capacity to meet children's learning needs.
- Accommodation, resources and the contribution of specialist staff to the education of children and young people.
- The support provided to young people by staff in the residence.

3. How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

In the nursery, children are highly motivated and are learning and achieving very well. They are happy, settled, and benefit from very positive relationships with staff. Children showed curiosity and perseverance as they investigate soil, plants and tadpoles. They are confident, independent and able to make choices and decisions about their play activities. Children take pride in keeping their playrooms tidy. They look after the toys and equipment and follow simple routines. Children learn to care for their environment and enjoy learning about birds. They are able to choose and use a wide range of material to create pictures and collages. Children enjoy their learning and say that 'it's great fun'. This enthusiasm and high level of interest permeates the work of the nursery. Nursery children are making very good progress in early language and mathematics. They listen well and can engage in extended conversations. They use books to find information and can recall familiar stories and rhymes. Many can write their name and identify letter sounds and words. Children use scales accurately to weigh and measure. They are learning how to keep themselves healthy and safe. They are developing very good skills in early science, art and music and they display confidence in using a range of physical equipment.

In the school, children and young people have positive relationships with care, education, specialist staff and with each other. In the

majority of primary and secondary classes, children and young people are enthused and motivated by the learning experiences. They communicate very well with each other and with staff using British Sign Language (BSL), speech and technology. Most children and young people behave appropriately. They are attentive and eager to do well in their learning. Children and young people respond well to praise and make good progress when teachers explain clearly what they are going to learn and what is expected of them. In a minority of lessons, they have opportunities to make choices, work together and evaluate each other's work. We have asked staff to ensure that children and young people can benefit from such good practice more frequently across the school. In the residence, there are weekly 'team talk' sessions through which young people are consulted and influence the work of the residence. There are limited opportunities for them to have such an influence across the school.

Children and young people experience success in a wide range of sports and leisure activities organised by care and education staff. These include football, swimming, horse riding, skiing, art and craft activities associated with making the 'Linlithgow Marches' float and a school cafe. Excursions and residential experiences are helping to develop young people's self-confidence and life skills. School certificates are awarded to young people, and successes are celebrated frequently in school assemblies. However, a limited range of young people's wider achievements are accredited by external awarding bodies.

In the school, most children are making good progress in developing their literacy skills from their prior levels of attainment. Most are making appropriate progress towards the targets set for them in their individualised educational programmes (IEPs). Almost all children and young people are developing very well their skills in BSL. A number of young people are very confident and skilled in this language. At the secondary stages, most young people can answer questions, give their views and contribute very well in class discussions. Young people are developing their numeracy skills in mathematics lessons and are able to apply them in other subjects. Most children and young

people are making good progress in health and wellbeing. Young people achieve a range of Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) course and unit awards. Over the last three years, a majority have gained course and unit awards over five or more curriculum areas. The number of Standard Grade and Intermediate 1 course awards has increased over this period. Young people perform well in art and design and social subjects.

4. How well does the school support children and young people to develop and learn?

Children in the nursery receive an outstanding level of support. Staff provide a nurturing and supportive environment which makes each child feel special. They plan stimulating activities which take very good account of each child's individual needs. Staff provide higher-achieving children with a very good level of challenge in their play activities. The nursery curriculum is broad, well balanced and firmly based on play. Nursery staff are developing Curriculum for Excellence very well, and children have a stimulating range of experiences. Staff show skill in assessing each child's progress in learning. They have well-developed plans to involve children more in evaluating their own work.

Overall, the quality of support for children and young people in the school is good. In the majority of classes, tasks, activities and the pace and challenge of lessons are well suited to most young people in the group. Care staff match evening activities very well to the needs and interests of young people. A few teachers are highly skilled at planning lessons which enable young people to make very good progress in their learning. Teachers and support staff help young people to understand and predict what is required of them through the very good use of signing and pictures which are used extensively in classrooms and throughout the school. The work of teachers is supported by highly-skilled specialists. In almost all cases, the processes for identifying children's and young people's learning needs are very effective. All young people have profiles arising from joint

assessments involving therapists, specialists and teaching and care staff. Staff review annually pupils' progress and agree the next steps in learning. All children and young people have targets set in literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing. Some of these targets need to be clearer and written in pupil-friendly language. The school has comprehensive behaviour management strategies but staff do not apply them consistently across the school. The school has good partnerships with local schools and most parents.

School staff are making some good progress in implementing Curriculum for Excellence. The curriculum is broad and balanced and promotes children's and young people's educational, physical, social and emotional development. It has an appropriate focus on developing skills for learning, life and work and on preparing young people to progress from school. The curriculum from P1 to S3 emphasises the development of language and communication skills. The senior stage provides a range of flexible courses and programmes to meet the needs of all young people. An important feature at the secondary stages is the well-planned programme of deaf studies. Staff are developing links across subject areas and children and young people find the chosen topics interesting and enjoyable. Staff promote literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing across most aspects of learning. Children and young people can apply numeracy and social skills when they use money in local shops. Friday morning activities provide opportunities for choice and personal achievement in the curriculum. Almost all seniors have opportunities for work experience, enterprise and a residential experience.

5. How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

The nursery manager has strong leadership and management skills. Staff use very effective procedures to develop aspects of the playroom. They have a very clear idea of the strengths and areas for development. Staff are reflective and committed to ongoing improvement. They seek the views of parents and children and make changes as a result of their comments.

Senior school managers monitor teachers' plans, lessons and individual children's and young people's targets. These approaches need to be more rigorous in order to have a greater impact upon young people's learning experiences and to sustain continuous improvement. Although improvements have been made to the school development planning process recently, there is still a lack of clarity in the targets, who is responsible for delivering them and how they will do this. Some teaching staff consider that communication amongst staff in the school and with the Board of Governors needs to improve; that there is a lack of clarity in senior managers' roles and responsibilities; and that direction from senior managers is not clear. There have been tensions between some senior managers and staff. This has led to poor understanding and sharing of information on a range of issues relating to care, education, finance and resources. The school has identified the need to ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities for implementing the policy for child protection. Leadership and management are very effective in the residence. Residential staff have brought about significant improvements in the last two years and these have resulted in improved experiences and outcomes for those young people in their care.

The school had not maintained up-to-date records of fire evacuation drills.

6. Governance and communication

There have been important weaknesses in governance in the school, and in communication between the Board, the school and its stakeholders. Board members are keen to support the school. The Board's Education and Care Committee had planned to work with staff in the school and the residence to develop a programme of improvement. Governors have recognised the need to ensure all staff understand the purpose of these activities to ensure they bring about the improvements intended. Board members have not had a shared understanding of their governance role. The Board has not had effective mechanisms for holding the school to account for the quality

of education and care it provides. It has not been directly involved with the school's procedures for dealing with complaints from staff or parents or with child protection and safeguarding issues. The Principal had ultimate responsibility for these matters. Under the leadership of the new Convenor, the Board is now well-placed to clarify its role in key areas of the school's work.

7. What happens next?

The school needs additional support and time to make necessary improvements. We shall work with school staff and the Board of Governors to build capacity for improvement, and maintain contact to monitor progress. We shall carry out another inspection within one year of publication of this report. We shall then issue another report on the extent to which the school has improved.

We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and Board of Governors.

- Clarify approaches to the recording of fire drills.
- Improve the quality, relevance and age-appropriateness of tasks in school lessons.
- Improve the quality of teaching in some primary and secondary classes.
- Ensure rigour and effectiveness when monitoring and evaluating school lessons, teaching plans and the suitability of targets set within IEPs.
- Improve communication and leadership across the school.
- The Board needs to clarify its role; improve its communication with the school, parents and young people; and ensure that it fulfils its role of both supporting the school and holding it to account for children's safety, the school's performance and the quality of education it provides.
- The school needs to clarify its complaints procedures for parents and staff and ensure that the Board has an appropriate place in them.
- The school needs to continue to improve its child protection and safeguarding procedures by ensuring that there are clear lines of communication between the different parts of the service, and that the planned child protection co-ordinator's role is implemented.

Quality indicators help schools, education authorities/board of governors and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How good is our school?*. Following the inspection of each school, the Scottish Government gathers evaluations of three important quality indicators to keep track of how well all Scottish schools are doing.

Here are the evaluations for Donaldson's Nursery.

Improvements in performance	**very good**
Learners' experiences	**excellent**
Meeting learning needs	**excellent**

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of Donaldson's Nursery.

The curriculum	**excellent**
Improvement through self-evaluation	**very good**

Here are the evaluations for Donaldson's School.

Improvements in performance	**good**
Learners' experiences	**good**
Meeting learning needs	**good**

We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

The curriculum	**good**
Improvement through self-evaluation	**weak**

HM Inspector
Terry Carr
3 December 2013

Care Inspector
Iain Lamb

When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

excellent	means	outstanding, sector leading
very good	means	major strengths
good	means	important strengths with some areas for improvement
satisfactory	means	strengths just outweigh weaknesses
weak	means	important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	means	major weaknesses

Additional inspection evidence, can be found on the Education Scotland website at http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/DonaldsonsSchoolWestLothian.asp

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