

Royal School for the Blind

Inspection report for residential special school

Unique reference number	SC040720
Inspection date	9 March 2009
Inspector	Nick Veysey
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Royal School for the Blind Liverpool Church Road North LIVERPOOL L15 6TQ
Telephone number	0151 7331012
Email	lesley.poole@rsblind.co.uk
Registered person	The Royal School for the Blind
Head of care	Joseph Byrne
Head / Principal	Joseph Byrne
Date of last inspection	11 October 2007

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The Royal School for the Blind provides education and accommodation for young people with visual impairment and a wide range of complex special needs including learning and physical disabilities. The school provides places for up to 60 young people from the age of two to 19 years.

The school has residential provision for up to 30 young people during weekdays in term time. There is a variety of boarding arrangements available depending on the needs of the child, ranging from one to four nights each week. The school provides residential accommodation in four separate units on the site.

All parts of the school are accessible to all young people and much thought has been given to the lighting and décor to enhance the environment for visually impaired young people. Facilities within the school include a swimming pool, a soft play area, a multi sensory room, an outdoor adventure playground and an outdoor mobility circuit. Teaching programmes are developed using either non-visual or low-vision methods, which encourage young people to develop their tactile skills and any residual vision. As well as print enhanced by visual aids, some young people use Braille as a reading medium and others use the 'Moon' system.

The school has a multi-disciplinary approach, which includes the involvement of specialist staff, including nurses, physiotherapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists and mobility therapists.

The school has access to its own transport. Also, its location enables young people to access facilities in the community easily. They are close to bus stops, a train station, leisure centres, swimming pools, youth clubs, shops, museums, parks and other schools.

There are currently 26 young people staying overnight at the school and many of them took part in the inspection.

Summary

At this full inspection all the key standards were inspected. The main focus of the inspection was to find out how well the school meets the needs of young people boarding there.

This is an outstanding school that meets the national minimum standards (NMS). The school provides a safe and stimulating environment that encourages young people's learning and personal development. Young people enjoy attending the school, feel supported and well looked after.

Staff are caring, highly skilled and competent. They have created a warm friendly atmosphere where young people feel valued and know they will receive advice and support if they have any problems. Young people's welfare is enhanced by the staff's excellent understanding of their individual needs and the support they need. All parts of the school are very good at sharing information about young people's experiences and needs to make sure that they are being cared for properly.

Young people are extremely well supported to deal with the challenges they face, develop confidence in their skills and abilities, and to play an active part in the community.

However, the school does not always clearly show young people's views when monitoring the quality of care.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the school was asked to keep more detailed records relating to medication, work carried out with young people, and preparation for adult life. A great deal of work has been carried out to improve the recording of young people's experiences and progress. Staff now keep accurate records about young people's medication, and show in great detail how they support and encourage young people to become more independent. There has been a significant improvement in showing how staff consult with young people about the running of the school and the residential groups.

Also, the school was asked to make sure safety inspections were carried out on the gas boiler and installation and the portable electrical appliances. This has been completed showing that all the relevant equipment is in suitable working order and does not present any risks to health and safety.

At the last inspection the number of staff qualified to at least National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in caring for children and young people did not meet the level set in the standards. Although the school still does not meet the standard, they are making good progress towards the target by enrolling staff on the course.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people live in a healthy environment. Young people with complex health needs receive a high standard of individualised care and support. Their physical and emotional health needs are clearly identified and their well-being is promoted. Individual young people have comprehensive plans showing their health needs, the arrangements for meeting them and the treatment, support and advice they have received.

Staff monitor young people to make sure they are healthy by encouraging them to attend routine health checks and by ensuring they get medical treatment when they are unwell.

The school has strong links with specialist health and advisory services to make sure that young people get suitable support with specific health issues, such as diet, sensory impairment, epilepsy and disabilities. Young people also have access to specialist services in school, including physiotherapy, occupation therapy, mobility and speech, and language therapy.

Staff deal with health issues sensitively. They make sure young people get excellent support to promote healthy lifestyles, including healthy eating, physical activity and sexual health, in ways that are sensitive to young people's culture, religion, gender and disabilities. The school places great emphasis on helping young people understand their own health needs and taking appropriate responsibility for managing their physical and emotional well-being. There are

many excellent examples of young people making significant progress in managing their own personal care.

Medical and care staff are suitably trained and competent to meet a wide range of complex individual health needs including managing epilepsy and tube feeding. Also, staff with first aid qualifications are on duty at all times to make sure appropriate action is taken to safeguard young people in the case of an emergency.

The school has very robust systems in place to ensure that the arrangements for medication are safe and promote young people's welfare. Staff make sure that young people only have medication specifically prescribed for them and take it in line with the prescription instructions. Medication is securely stored in suitable cupboards. Staff keep detailed records of any medicines stored in the school and the administration of medicines to young people.

Young people enjoy healthy and nutritious meals made from fresh ingredients that meet their individual dietary needs. Staff clearly understand what makes a healthy and balanced diet. They encourage young people to develop healthy eating habits by providing good advice about nutrition and eating healthy portions. Meal times are well organised and sociable occasions.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Young people feel safe staying at the school and are protected from harm. Young people's privacy and dignity is promoted. They have single bedrooms and enough space where they can relax easily and spend time alone when they wish. Staff respect young people's privacy consistent with good parenting and the need to protect young people. Confidential information is held securely in the office. Young people provide suitable support with their personal care that promotes their independence and dignity.

Young people are able to make a complaints in a meaningful way. Information about the complaints procedure is available in a range of formats making it accessible to young people with different communication needs. Staff are excellent at identifying when young people are feeling unhappy or sad through non-verbal clues and changes in behaviour. They quickly try to find out what is the matter. This way young people's concerns are taken seriously and promptly addressed.

Young people's welfare is actively promoted and safeguarded. They are appropriately supervised by vigilant staff and free from bullying. The school takes appropriate and decisive action to safeguard young people and work effectively with the relevant external agencies. Staff fully understand about their roles and responsibilities to promote and safeguard young people's welfare. They are familiar with the school's safeguarding policies and are suitably trained in child protection relevant to the complex needs of the young people at the school. They provide an excellent level of supervision for young people based on their age, understanding and disability, to make sure they are safe in school and in the community. Also, they give young people excellent advice and support about personal safety.

Staff work effectively with young people to ensure they do not go missing. The school has suitable systems in place for reporting serious incidents involving young people to the relevant agencies. Staff keep accurate written records of all serious events and the action taken by staff to protect young people.

Staff use comprehensive individual behaviour plans to support young people throughout the school. As a result young people have clear and consistent boundaries and know what is expected of them, and what is unacceptable. Staff use highly effective communication skills to encourage young people to develop socially acceptable behaviour. They place great emphasis on praising young people when they do well and appropriately rewarding them.

Staff help young people deal with their anxieties and frustrations in a positive way by engaging in suitable activities and talking about how they are feeling. Staff challenge unacceptable behaviour constructively and assist young people to learn to manage their behaviour and solve problems.

Young people study and live in secure and safe environment. The school addresses health and safety issues with a range of thorough risk assessments. They identify hazards in and around the school as well as risks faced by individual young people, including activities and challenging behaviour. Staff carry out regular health and safety checks including fire safety systems to make sure that the school is a safe place to study, work and live.

The vetting of visitors and people wishing to work at the school is very thorough to make sure young people are protected. Staff working at the school have had an appropriate Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The residential provision actively supports and promotes young people's education and personal development. Young people get excellent support when they need it. Staff have a detailed knowledge of young people's individual education and learning needs. This enables them to work effectively with young people to help them develop their skills and build confidence in their abilities.

Staff see education as important and have created an environment that supports and stimulates young people to learn through leisure and educational activities. Also, staff encourage young people to develop their social and communication skills by taking part in a wide range of group activities in school and in the local area. Young people play an active part in the cultural life of the city. For example, young people train with a football club every week, have strong links with the Philharmonic Orchestra, and are part of the Merseyside Heritage Project. This involves consulting on the design of a new museum in the city to make sure it accessible for people with sensory impairments and disabilities, and helping to devise sensory trails at another museum, Speke Hall.

Staff throughout the school are exceptionally good at sharing information with each other about young people's needs and the support they require. Staff spend a lot of time individually with young people. Young people are able to talk to staff about problems and receive individual support when they need it. There are many excellent examples of young people getting advice and support with a wide range of possible needs, including healthy lifestyles, personal care, making decisions, dealing with problems and personal safety.

Staff are committed to enabling young people to develop their skills and abilities and achieve a good quality of life. One said 'our aim is to make sure they are the best they can be'. Staff are very knowledgeable about young people's individual needs and personalities. This enables

them to work out how best to support young people with specific issues. Staff have a good understanding of how issues of equality and diversity, such as, cultural background, gender and disability relate to individual young people.

Staff actively seek suitable services to help young people and their families experiencing problems. They are tenacious at making sure young people get the support they need.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school's records provide an excellent insight into the individual needs of young people and plans in place to meet them. Young people have comprehensive written placement plans identifying their needs including those relating to culture, religion, communication and disability. Staff put the plans into practice and keep detailed records about young people's progress and experiences. Young people's education and placement plans are reviewed regularly to make sure that they are up to date and continue to meet their needs.

Young people are able to contact families and friends to help them maintain relationships. Staff make sure that the arrangements for contact promote and safeguard young people's welfare. They work closely with young people's families to let them know about their progress, if there are any concerns about their welfare and involve them in decisions about the education and care provided.

The school gathers sufficient information about young people before they move in to ensure that the school is able to meet their needs and assess their compatibility with other young people. Young people start at the school in a planned and sensitive way. Staff are good at helping young people settle in making sure they know what is expected of them, what to do if they are worried and their way around the school and local area. Young people's progress is reviewed regularly to ensure that the school is the right place to meet their needs.

Young people are involved in preparing for leaving school and know where they will be moving to. Staff provide emotional and practical support for young people leaving. Staff contribute to the assessment of young people's needs to ensure that young people continue to get the support they require.

The school places great emphasis on encouraging all young people to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run. Young people feel they have a say about what happens through the school council, group meetings and individual discussions with staff. Staff enable young people to develop confidence in their social and communication skills. Staff are highly skilled at encouraging young people to express opinions, make decisions and contribute to the life of the school. For example, young people are currently helping to choose a new car for the school.

Staff praise young people for their ideas, encourage young people to listen to other people's views, respect other points of view, take turns, and make sure that everyone has the opportunity to say what they think. Staff also record the non-verbal comments made by young people. In this way staff are able to achieve a suitable balance between wishes and needs of individual young people and those of the group.

Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff based on affection, trust, honesty and respect. Staff are patient, helpful, and enjoy spending time with young people. They very much see young people as individuals and encourage young people to develop their personalities. Staff have very clear professional and personal boundaries with young people consistent with good child care.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school places great importance on helping young people become as independent as possible and preparing them for adult life. The school provides young people with a variety of experiences to enable them to work constructively with others, learn how to manage their difficulties effectively and succeed in many different situations.

Staff encourage young people to develop their skills and confidence through involvement in a range of education and activities that meet their individual needs, abilities and interests. Staff are creative and resourceful in building young people's confidence in their social and life skills. Young people are supported to try new experiences and take controlled risks, such as using public transport and taking part in activities in the community. Young people are encouraged to take more responsibility for themselves suitable to their age and understanding. Also, they are encouraged to develop their personal care, safety, organisational and social skills.

Young people enjoy homely and comfortable accommodation. The residential accommodation is decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard. Young people have personalised their bedrooms and have enough personal space to meet their needs. The accommodation is suitable for young people with a wide range of sensory impairments and disabilities. Suitable aids and adaptations are in place to enable young people to move around the school safely and access the facilities.

Young people wear their own clothing outside school time. They bring pocket money from home and choose how they spend it. Staff help young people to look after their own money. Also, they give young people good advice on the use of toiletries to enable them to develop their personal care skills.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school is professionally and efficiently run by effective senior managers who promote clear vision and values, that provide a safe and stable environment for the young people studying and living there. The school is committed to sustained improvement in the quality of care it provides.

Strong and thorough systems are in place to review the quality of care, identify areas for improvement and take action to ensure that the school meets young people's needs and promotes their welfare. This involves a School Governor visiting the school regularly to check records, assess the physical condition of the buildings and talking to young people about their experiences. However, young people views are not recorded in the written report of the visits.

The promotion of equality and diversity in the school is outstanding. Evidence supports a consistent commitment to delivering equality and diversity in practice. The school provides

education and accommodation for young people with a wide range of complex behavioural, learning, medical, emotional and social needs. Staff recognise young people as individuals with different needs, backgrounds, interests and views. They ensure that young people receive an individual service designed to meet their personal needs. Staff throughout the school have an excellent knowledge of the young people they are working with ensuring their needs are consistently met. The school values the rights of individuals to respect and dignity and created an environment where people's differences are accepted. The school also encourages young people to be active members of the community.

Young people know what support they can expect from the school and how they will be looked after. The children's guide provides important information about the school in ways that is easily understood by young people with different communication needs. Also, the school has a clear and accurate written statement for parents and placing authorities of how the school operates and plans to meet young people's needs.

Young people are looked after by highly competent and enthusiastic people, who have suitable skills and experience to meet their needs. Staff have opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge through a comprehensive training programme. However, the number of staff with a suitable qualification does not meet the standards.

The staff reflect the gender and cultural backgrounds of the young people living in the school and provides positive adult role models for young people. They are caring and provide a supportive and stimulating environment for young people with a wide range of complex needs. The number of staff on duty at any one time is excellent and meets the needs of the number of young people living in the home.

Staff are positive about the level of support and guidance they receive. Professional staff supervision takes place regularly within the timescale recommended in the standards. Also, team meetings take place weekly to discuss and review individual young people, the running of the school, staff development and training, and look at ways to improve the service they offer.

The school's written records provide a comprehensive picture of individual young people's needs, development and progress. Young people's records are well written, organised and contain up to date information about them including the relevant documents from placing authorities.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that a minimum of 80 per cent of the care staff have completed an NVQ at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People or the equivalent (NMS 31.4)
- ensure that the governing body seeks young people's views about the quality of care they receive (NMS 33).