

Royal School for the Blind

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Paul Gillespie
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Date of last inspection	9 March 2009

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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 16 young people staying overnight at the school and several 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 a good school overall with several outstanding features. The school provides young people with high levels of care and support. It continues to be a model of good care practice in promoting the welfare and development of young people who have visual impairments and a wide range of complex needs.

The school benefits from strong leadership. Staff are well trained, well supported and clearly committed to child-centred care. All staff throughout the school work together within the framework of detailed and effective care and support plans. These set out the needs and abilities of each young person and the support they need in order to enhance and promote their development.

Young people are cared for safely. The school excels at supporting young people to develop confidence in their skills and abilities and to play an active part in the community. Staff provide

young people with positive and practical support to enhance their communication and life skills and to prepare them for the transition to adulthood.

There is a clear focus on the continuing development of expertise and innovative practice to which all staff can and do contribute. Outcomes for young people are demonstrably good and the school can evidence significant progress made by young people in its care.

However, improvements need to be made in the auditing of medication and the verification of recruitment details for contracted staff. Additionally risk assessments should include an assessment of the likelihood and severity of any risk identified.

The overall quality rating is good.

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 ensure they sought young people's views about the quality of care they receive. This has improved with evidence of more consultation. This means young people regularly have the opportunity to see or speak with a member of the governing body.

There has continued to be progress in meeting the level of staff qualified to at least National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in caring for children and young people. The majority of staff are now either qualified or are undertaking the qualification. This means young people are supported by staff who have the necessary training to safeguard and secure the welfare of young people.

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 home also ensures that young people's health needs are particularly well met and are protected by having detailed and clear medical procedures. Medication is securely stored and records of any medication taken by young people are maintained. However the school's procedure requiring two staff signatory's for the administration of medication is not always followed.

Young people enjoy healthy and nutritious meals that meet their individual dietary needs. Staff 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 good.

The school's policies and practices promote young people's privacy and confidentiality very well. They have single bedrooms and are provided with appropriate support with their personal care in a way that promotes their independence and dignity. The accommodation provides space where young people can relax easily and spend time alone should they wish to. Staff respect young people's privacy consistent with good parenting and the need to protect young people. Confidential information is held securely and the approach to managing sensitive information is a key strength that helps safeguard young people.

Young people are able to make a complaint in a meaningful way. Information 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 respond quickly to ensure young people's concerns are taken seriously and promptly addressed.

Young people's welfare is actively promoted and safeguarded. 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 high 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.

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.

The staff team at all levels have a thorough understanding of risk assessment processes which are underpinned by promoting independence, choice and autonomy. They put comprehensive and thorough risk management and safeguarding policies and procedures into practice. For example, they ensure that young people have frequent opportunities to access community services and that they are safely supported to do so based on their abilities and level of understanding. However, although risk assessments are very thorough, identifying the likelihood and severity of the risk would further improve the robustness of the process.

Young people are supported by staff who are safe to work with them. The school recruits staff in accordance with agreed procedures. Although there is careful vetting and selection of staff more thorough verification of contracted staff should be undertaken. There is very good monitoring of visitors to the school which helps keep young people safe.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people's education and personal development is actively promoted. They receive excellent support with staff having a detailed knowledge of young people's individual education and learning needs. This enables them to work very effectively with young people to help them develop their skills and build confidence in their abilities.

Staff ensure there is every opportunity to learn through leisure and educational activities. They encourage young people to develop their social and communication skills by participating in a wide range of activities both within the school and the wider community. For example, young people attend weekly training sessions run by a professional football club as part of a community involvement project. There are also good links with a local youth club that young people attend.

Staff throughout the school are exceptionally good at sharing information with each other about young people's needs so they receive 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 so that they can reach their full potential. They are very knowledgeable about young people's individual needs and personalities and 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.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school has a very effective admissions process that ensures all the required information to make an informed decision about the placement is gathered. This means that young people start at the school in a planned and sensitive way. Staff are good at helping young people settle in. They make sure young people know what is expected of them and what to do if they are worried. Staff also ensure young people get to know 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 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 any decisions about the education and care provided or if there are any concerns about welfare. Parents and relatives are clearly appreciative of the support they and their children receive. One carer, for example said their child 'loves every minute of his school life and can't wait to get back after holiday's'. This is typical of how the school is regarded.

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, unit 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. The development of the 'Resi-newsletter' offers the chance to celebrate the achievements of young people and to raise the profile of the residential provision.

Young people enjoy positive relationships with staff based on genuine 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 them to express their personalities. Staff have very clear professional and personal boundaries with young people that are consistent with good child care practice.

Young people are provided with a range of opportunities to develop their potential and work to their strengths. They have individualised support that is based on detailed assessments of need and ability. Staff work with young people to set them specific and measurable practical targets for behaviour, learning and communication. Care plans cover all aspects of behaviour and development. They are detailed, well presented and child-centred. The evaluation and monitoring of progress of each young person remains at the centre of the support young people receive. This helps to guide future planning.

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 any challenges effectively and to succeed in many different situations.

Staff are very adept at encouraging young people to develop their skills and confidence through participation in a range of education and activities. 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. This means they regularly have opportunities to learn and 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 are encouraged to express their individuality by for example wearing their own clothing outside school time. They bring pocket money from home and can choose how they spend it. Staff help young people to look after their own money and offer good advice about developing personal care skills.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Every aspect of the care provided by the school is very well managed. There are good systems in place to monitor all aspects of care and practice within the school. There is also a strong ethos of team work delivered by staff who have considerable expertise and experience in supporting young people with their complex needs. The commitment to child-centred practice is a key strength and there continues to be a strong emphasis on continuous improvement driven by a strong leadership team.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The focus of the school is the development of each young person's individual needs taking into account their abilities and circumstances. Staff have the highest possible aspirations for each young person and work with them to maximise and develop their potential.

Young people are cared for by staff who themselves are well trained and well supported through regular supervision. They are aware of their responsibilities and are clearly committed to the young people with whom they work. Young people have the benefit of a warm and welcoming environment in which their needs and safety are given the highest priority.

Young people's records are detailed, well presented and demonstrate the esteem in which young people are held. 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 can be 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. This is regularly reviewed and is available in different formats.

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
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Recommendations

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

- maintain an effective audit trail of all medication administered (NMS 14.20)
- ensure that risk assessments include an assessment of the likelihood and severity of the risk identified (NMS 26.3)
- verify in all instances the evidence provided by contractors that the necessary checks have been carried out within the last 12 months on staff supplied to work at the school. (NMS 27.9)