

Mary Hare Grammar School for the Deaf

Inspection report for residential special school

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| Date of last inspection | 10 December 2008 |

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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

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| 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

Mary Hare School is a non-maintained mixed special school near Newbury in Berkshire for pupils aged five to 19 with severe and profound hearing loss. The mixed ability primary centre is on a separate site and offers both day and weekly boarding placements. The secondary school caters for children with the ability to follow a full national curriculum and who might expect to continue with their education at 16+. Pupils from the primary school do not automatically progress to the secondary school. The secondary school admits pupils from all over the United Kingdom and has a small number of pupils from overseas. It offers both day and termly boarding placements. Nearly all pupils board.

The primary school currently has one boarding facility with both themed and more conventional bedrooms to suit the age profile of the school. The secondary school has four boarding houses. Year 7 has its own dedicated boarding house, Years 8 to 11 live in two larger boarding houses and the Sixth Form has separate accommodation of individual and shared study bedrooms.

Summary

The purpose of this visit was to conduct an announced inspection of all of the key national minimum standards for Residential Special Schools. Some additional standards were also inspected.

The overall standard of care for the children at the school is good. There is evidence that the school is committed to the inspection process and use this positively to reflect on the practice and the organisation of the care provision. Significant changes have been made to the management and organisation of the care team which have had a positive impact on the overall provision of care in the school. This includes the appointment of two qualified and experienced staff in a job sharing capacity as the head of care. A audit of policies and procedures has taken place and action has been taken. Some of the new practices and procedures that followed the audit have yet to become fully established. The school's commitment to improving the standards of care in the school is further demonstrated by the creation of a care standards officer whose remit is to ensure compliance with the national minimum standards. A programme for the refurbishment and upgrading of the boarding accommodation has been implemented.

The staff are committed to providing a safe environment for the children and young people and have good awareness of their roles and responsibility in safeguarding them. Children and young people state that they feel safe within the school. Relationships between them and the staff are sound. The vast majority of the children and young people identify staff members who they feel comfortable about approaching with concerns or issues and are confident that these will be listened. Staff adapt their practice to meet the needs of children and young people who are deaf.

The inspectors observed and became aware of a range of good practices within the school but these are not routinely recorded or appropriately documented

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school has been proactive and has fully addressed the majority of the recommendations. The school has commissioned an independent pharmacist to review and report on its medical procedures to ensure that they comply with current guidance. Action has been taken and a new medical policy has been drawn up. Training on the handling of medication has been introduced. A system for monitoring what the young people are eating has been implemented and effectively used to identify any concerns. Staffing levels have been reviewed and steps taken to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of staff to meet the daily needs of the children and young people. The arrangements for the care staff supervision have been reviewed. Care staff receive regular supervision from senior care staff. Arrangements are in place for the heads of care to receive regular supervision. The school has appointed two suitably qualified and experienced members of staff to job share the position of head of care.

Recommendations relating to the recording and reviewing the effectiveness of sanctions have been partially met and are readdressed within this report.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health care needs of pupils are well met. Staff are knowledgeable about the health care needs of the children and young people at the school. The care staff have strong links with nursing staff and meet regularly to discuss the individual health care needs of children and young people. The assistant head pastoral care, who is responsible for pupil support and the personal health and social education (PHSE) Curriculum, also attends the weekly meeting between care and nursing staff. The information discussed is not routinely included in the care plans, for example any risks associated with specific medical conditions such as epilepsy. There are also strong links with the local doctors surgery, with whom the majority of the senior school pupils are registered. The doctor provides a surgery at the school weekly, which pupils generally access through the nurse, though they may drop in for an appointment. The nurse provides an on call service from Sunday evening through to Friday afternoon, with surgery times at regular intervals during the school day.

Staff are trained in first aid, with a member of staff at the primary school specialising in paediatric first aid. There are records available of illnesses and accidents.

There are good systems in place to ensure that medication is stored, administered and recorded appropriately. The nurse has implemented the recommendations of a recent pharmacy report and has also updated the procedural guidance for staff. Young people report that they are happy with the health care support they receive.

Children and young people are knowledgeable about healthy eating and confirm that the school encourages them in this. One primary school parent comments: 'He told me lettuce made him big and strong and went on to eat quite a bit. Never thought I'd see the day!' Pupils are provided with a choice of healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs. The catering manager attends school council meetings so that he can include pupil choices on the menu, as far as possible, whilst maintaining a healthy balance. Religious, dietary and lifestyle choices are accommodated within the range of food provided. This includes robust arrangements for the provision of food for pupils who wish to observe Ramadan.

The kitchen provides 'supplies' to the houses of fruit, breads and spreads. Kitchen staff are trained in food handling and care staff are booked to receive this training. Young people also receive a briefing in food hygiene and have to pass a short test that allows them unsupervised access to the house kitchen at particular times.

Young people's food choices are monitored to ensure that they are eating a balanced healthy diet. Where food choices are consistently poor or pupils are missing meals regularly this is considered a cause for concern and leads to a proactive intervention with the individual concerned.

The dining rooms in both the primary school and Grammar school are suitably furnished and equipped, providing a pleasant environment for orderly, sociable mealtimes.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Care staff are provided with guidance that clearly sets out the school's expectations regarding the pupil's rights to privacy and how this is to be respected. This is borne out in practice and staff adapt their practice to meet the specific needs of the deaf community. For example, staff use a variety of ways to attract the attention of children and young people before entering their bedrooms.

The school has made physical adaptations to the environment that help to ensure the children and young people's privacy. Student rooms in the sixth form are fitted with special door bells that provide a visual signal which lets the occupants know when they have a visitor or caller. Each of the residential houses have a suitable adapted payphone that is available for use by the children and young people to make or receive incoming calls. The location of the payphones provides a satisfactory level of privacy. The majority of the children and young people in the senior school have mobile phones and they are provided with guidance on how and when these can be used. The pupils are made aware of the consequences of misusing their mobiles. The children and young people do not raise any specific concerns or issues regarding privacy or confidentiality.

There is expectation amongst staff and the children and young people that most concerns or issues can be dealt with informally. The children and young people are encouraged to share any issues that they have with an adult in the school. The majority of the children and young people identify adults and/or an older pupil who they feel comfortable talking to and who they are confident will listen to them. There are a number of forums that the children and young people can use to raise concerns though these are not normally used for personal issues. National helpline numbers are displayed in or around the payphones and included in the young people's handbooks, and provide an external independent contact for the children and young people if needed. The school provides parents and other significant people with details of how they can raise formal complaints. Records show that very few complaints have been received and when these are made they are responded to.

The school has robust procedures in place that ensure the children's and young people's welfare is promoted and that they are protected from abuse. Regular training and briefings are provided to all staff on child protection and on the procedures for dealing with disclosures. Staff demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities in responding to an allegation or suspicion of abuse. The school's response to any child protection concerns is led

by the designated person who has undertaken appropriate training. There are good links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The local Head of Child and Youth Services advises that the school has responded and acted appropriately to any enquires and that have been raised with the local authority. The school maintains records of contact and consultation with the local children's services. There is, however, some lack of clarity in the school about when a notification should be made to Ofsted regarding potential child protection matters.

Bullying is not perceived as an issue in the school by the majority of the children and young people and the staff. This is a view also shared by a number of stakeholders. One young person who advises that they had been bullied in a previous school describes now being 'being free from bullies and life is better'. One of the stakeholders comments positively on how 'bullying is not an issue and is dealt with effectively' and another that 'bullying is always nipped in the bud and dealt with sympathetically'. A significant majority of the children and young people state that when bullying has taken place that staff have taken steps to address and stop it. The school is proactive in raising the staff's and children and young people's awareness of bullying. Staff have access to a good policy and bullying is a subject covered during their induction. Bullying is covered through the school's personal, social and health educational programme and themed assemblies. A number of the students act as peer mentors and provide support to the younger and vulnerable children.

Staff are aware of the danger that a child or young person places him or herself in by leaving the premises and/or the supervision of staff without permission. Staff have access to guidance and are aware on how to respond to these incidents. Records show that incidents are rare and that on return the young people are spoken to by a member of staff to try and determine the reasons for them to leaving the safety of the school.

The ethos of the school is encouraging the young people to take personal responsibility for their behaviour.

Measures of control within the school are based on staff recognising and encouraging acceptable behaviour. The majority of the children and young people state that the rules in the school are fair. The children and young people are aware of the standards of behaviour that are expected from them and of the consequences when it is not acceptable. The boarding house operates a rewards system which reinforces positive and helpful behaviour.

The heads of care have taken steps to ensure that sanctions are consistently used throughout the schools. A tariff of a sanctions and guidance on when and how these are to be used has been circulated to all staff. A new format for recording sanctions has been implemented that covers all of the requirements of the national minimum standards. The children and young people are routinely asked to review their individual sanction records. A number take this opportunity to offer comment and views. The standard of recording is not consistent between the boarding houses. Sanction records do not routinely comment on their effectiveness. The sanctions record book is not secure.

Physical intervention is not a feature of the management of behaviour in the senior school and is rarely used in the junior school.

The school takes positive steps to keep the children and young people, staff and visitors safe from fire and other hazards. Systems are in place for the regular checking and servicing of fire

safety and detection equipment. A specialised fire alarm system alerts the young people when the alarms are activated. Detailed computerised records of fire safety activity are kept. A fire risk assessment is in place and the school has been proactive in addressing the majority of the significant findings this identified. The school provides regular briefing on fire awareness to all its care staff. All team leaders have the responsibility for fire procedures within their boarding house and have completed fire marshal training. A very small number of the children and young people attending the school have mobility difficulties or are visually impaired. Although action has been taken to ensure their safety during an evacuation of the building this is not recorded as a personal emergency evacuation plan. Advice has been sought and acted upon to reduce the environmental risks posed within the building for these young people.

Feedback on the recently upgraded security measures has been given to the school. The process for risk assessing all of the off site activities accessed by the young people is comprehensive, robust and contributes to overall safety of the young people. The assessments take into consideration the risk inherent to the activity and those posed by the children's and young people's deafness and any additional individual needs. Risk assessments for each of the boarding houses are in place.

The school has a robust system in place for the recruitment and vetting of staff. This contributes to the safeguarding of the children and helps to ensure that they are not being exposed to potential abusers. The recruitment process is thorough and all appropriate checks are undertaken.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

There are good levels of communication and support between residential and school staff. In the primary school, for example, there are handovers between care and school staff in the morning and afternoon to ensure that all staff are kept up to date with issues as they arise. Children and young people receive active practical and emotional support with their homework commensurate with their age and ability. The heads of care are clear that they wish to further develop the joint working arrangements between the education and care and focus on the whole. To illustrate this the school council is to be renamed the student council.

The strong relationships that exist between the staff and children and young people provide a good foundation for the individual support that is provided. Some children and young people with additional identified needs receive support from a variety of professionals in a co-ordinated way. However, this is not recorded in their care plans. There is a key worker system in place but young people can approach any one for help. There is no independent visitor in place for the senior school since the retirement in the summer of the previous visitor. The school is actively seeking a replacement. The primary school has a children's friend, who is employed in the senior school. Specialist support services for children with severe and profound hearing loss, such as speech therapy and an audiologist are available within the school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

The routine consultation with children and young people about their progress within boarding and on matters that affect their daily life is firmly established within the care practice at the school. Children and young people confirm that they are routinely consulted with and that their views and ideas are listened to. The school has established a number of forums that the children

and young people can use to express views and opinions. The children and young people specifically see the student council as a vehicle for change. They explain that this has influenced decisions on a range of issues including the installation of sky television, changes to the menus, the time of breakfast and to the school uniform. The student council has recently been approached by the board of governors regarding the plans for a new residential block. The children and young people make good use of the recently introduced suggestion boxes to make observation or raise ideas that apply specifically to their boarding houses. The children and young people are routinely invited to attend their annual reviews which provides them the opportunity to be involved in key decision making about their future.

All admissions to the boarding provision are planned. As part of the preadmission process the children, young people and their parents and or significant others are able to attend the school in a number of occasions. The children and young people are routinely given the opportunity to have a residential experience (Mill Hall) or a taster (senior school) which allows them to spend some time in the boarding houses before they move in full time. This provides them with opportunity to familiarise themselves with the setting, staff and the other children and young people. Staff recognise that for a number of parents the idea of their child being away from home is a difficult decision for them to make. During the initial visits the parents and child are given a comprehensive information booklet about the boarding provision. This has been designed to answer most of the issues and concerns that parents of prospective boarders may have.

Students moving from the senior boarding houses into the sixth form have the opportunity to visit the facility, and join in activities during their last term in the senior school.

Each of the children and young people have a care plan. These are drawn up in consultation between them and their key worker and are the subject of regular review. Care planning is an area that the heads of care have identified as being for further development. Current care plans primarily focus on the child or young person reflecting on their boarding experience. They do not identify, assess or address the needs of those children and young people with specific medical, emotional or behavioural difficulties or record the roles and responsibilities of the care staff and other professionals or agencies that are working with the young people. Individual behavioural assessment are not completed for those young people who display behaviours that places them at risk. Care plans in Mill Hall do not record the details of the personal care that the staff provide.

The school recognises the importance of the children and young people being able to keep in regular contact with parents, families and significant others. The children and young people have access to suitably adapted payphones located in each of the houses. The large majority of boarders have a mobile phones which they are able to use at agreed times of the day and evening. All of the children and young people are able to have regular access to the internet in order to access personal emails. The school provides practical support for parents wishing to visit the school and stay overnight.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

A large majority of the children and young people attending the schools are boarders. Age appropriate accommodation is provided on both school sites. The residential area in the junior school is located on the top floor of Mill Hall. Particular attention has been taken to provide a child centred accommodation. Bedrooms, communal areas and bathrooms are individually

decorated and follow themes based on fairy tales and characters from children stories. The bedroom furniture has been individually designed and built to reflect the themes. The accommodation is clean and well maintained and there is no sign of malicious damage. A number of the bedrooms have ensuite facilities. All bathroom and toilet facilities are clean, tidy and free from offensive smells and odours.

The boarding accommodation for the secondary aged children and young people is on the main school site and consists of four separate areas. Howard House (Year 7 mixed), Mansell (Years 8 to 11 male) and Wroughton Centre (sixth form) are purpose built. Accommodation for girls in Years 8 to 11 and is located in separate wings of the old manor house. The numbers of children and young people sharing bedrooms varies within the houses. The majority of the sixth form have single student style accommodation which provides a good living and study space with ensuite facilities. The school is committed to improving the overall standards of boarding accommodation. A three year programme of refurbishment is in place. Areas in Manor House and Mansell House have been the focus of this year's programme. The refurbished bedrooms provide comfortable spaces and are furnished and decorated to a good standard. Some communal corridors have been carpeted which provides a homely feel and reduces the travel noise in those areas.

Washing, showering and bathing facilities are a mixture of communal and ensuite facilities. All bathroom and toilet facilities are clean, tidy and free from offensive smells and odours. The principal bathroom areas in Manor have been upgraded and provide good facilities and levels of privacy for the young people. Some areas of the boarding accommodation and the recreational facilities within the house have been adapted to meet specific needs of the deaf community and of those children and young people who are visually impaired or have mobility issues.

The cellar in Mansell has been converted into a youth club that can be accessed by all of the children and young people on designated nights. The youth club is furnished in the style of an American diner and provides an exciting and practical space for the children and young people to socialise. A further room provides a 'chill out' space that is used for quieter activities and as a drop in centre.

The school has its own maintenance team who undertake most day to day maintenance and smaller projects and use outside contractors for larger complex projects. Maintenance issues are reported electronically by care staff. These are prioritised and responded to in a timely manner.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a number of documents that provide staff, children and young people, parents and placing authorities with information on its values, ethos and organisation. Additional information is available on the school's website. These collectively describe what the school sets out to do for the children and young people that it accommodates.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All of the children and young people are valued and respected as individuals. They are encouraged and helped to make personal choices and there is no assumption that any of them are incapable of doing this. There is equal access to all activities and resources regardless of gender or ability. The young people are supported with their religious commitments. The home is able to meet individual medical, dietary and

cultural needs as required. Documents demonstrate a commitment to equal opportunities, valuing diversity and avoidance of inappropriate discrimination in all forms.

The staffing arrangements are good and provide a level of consistency, continuity and predictability for the children and young people. Staffing levels are sufficient to meet the day to day needs of the children and young people. The school has taken positive steps which include the provision of additional staff and a review of some organisational barriers which ensure that the children and young people have regular access to offsite activities. Staff absenteeism is covered by the school and there is no use of agency staff. The children and young people routinely have contact with staff of both genders.

The children and young people are looked after by staff who have the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills required to care for them. The care staff have access to a comprehensive range of training that covers safeguarding and the welfare of the children and young people. Where required this training is routinely updated or refreshed. New staff follow an induction programme which includes reading key policies and guidance and work shadowing their more experienced colleagues. The introduction of weekly briefing/training sessions helps to ensure that there is a shared and current knowledge base of the school's procedures, policies and practice amongst all care staff. Members of staff comment positively on the training provided by the school. Requests for individual training and personal developmental opportunities are supported by the school.

Care staff supervision is established within the school. Care staff receive regular half termly supervision. Newly appointed staff receive their supervision more frequently. Care staff advise that they find supervision helpful and use their sessions to review practice and discuss individual developmental needs.

The school aspires to provide the best possible care and has made significant changes to the management and organisation of the care team. The appointment of two staff to the post of head of care ensures that the care staff are managed by, and have access to suitably qualified and experienced members of staff. The appointment of a care standards officer whose prime responsibility is to ensure compliance with the national minimum standards demonstrates the school's commitment to improving its standard of care. The care leadership team have implemented an audit and review of policies and practices. Action has been taken and new procedures and guidance have been introduced where a shortfall, review or need has been identified. Closer links have been established between the care teams in both schools, which helps to ensure that there is consistent good practice. Care staff talk positively about the new management arrangements and comment that they are pleased to be managed by senior care staff who have experience and a understanding of working with the deaf community.

The school demonstrates a commitment to striving to ensure that the children and young people are cared for by a competent staff team. School training records show that of the 21 full time care staff, 11 (55 per cent) have completed National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 3, and 10 are working towards this. The shortfall is not seen to have an impact on the care being provided to the children. The school is also supportive of team leaders having the opportunity to complete NVQ at Level 4 in care.

The care leadership team has implemented a system for the monitoring of internal records as required by the standards. Initially the system has been used to check that records are routinely

being kept. Actions are taken when any shortfalls or issues have been identified. The monitoring system has yet to become fully established and does not currently provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of some specific records and is not being used to identify possible trends or patterns.

The care leadership team has implemented a system of quality assurance regarding the experience of children and young people boarding at the school. All of the children and young people have met with the heads of care and have completed questionnaire. The information collected from this exercise is in the process of being collated and evaluated.

There is an established system for a member of the governing body to visit the school and to prepare a report on the conduct of the school. Recent reports show some inconsistencies in the areas covered and do not sufficiently address all of the points required by the standards.

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):

- ensure that all sanctions are recorded in a bound book (NMS.10)
- implement personal emergency evacuation plans for those children and young people and adults who require assistance during a evacuation of the building (NMS.26)
- ensure that care planning addresses individual needs and the management of children and young people at risk (NMS.2)
- continue with programme of redecoration and refurbishment to residential accommodation (NMS.23.)
- implement a system for the evaluation of all care records (NMS.32)
- ensure that governor's reports on the conduct on the school covers all of the areas required by the standards. (NMS. 3)