

Mary Hare School for the Deaf

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Maire Atherton / Christopher Garrett
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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

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 senior 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 overall quality rating is good.

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

This announced inspection focused on all the key national minimum standards for residential special schools.

The strong care management team in post is committed to providing a good and improving boarding experience for students. There is effective joint working between staff to safeguard and promote the health and welfare of children and young people. Training, supervision and support provide clear direction for staff who enjoy their work.

Student voices are valued and individual difference is celebrated. Children and young people are provided with a wide range of activities that provide opportunities to develop new interests. Care planning is increasingly robust with a strong focus on the meaningful involvement of young people in the process.

Many parents report high levels of satisfaction with comments such as 'our child is enjoying the time spent at Mary Hare, and is supported on the inevitable occasions that he feels daunted by the many challenges involved in boarding' and 'the children feel as though they are at home'.

This report contains four recommendations, two of which relate to records. One

concerns a shortfall in staff recruitment and the fourth is about the involvement of students in menu planning for supper.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were six recommendations made in the last report. Four related to record keeping and these have all been met. New sanctions books are in place, personal emergency evacuation plans have been implemented where required, there is a system for the evaluation of care records and the governors' reports cover the areas specified. There is a programme of redecoration and refurbishment and an ongoing commitment to maintain this. The creation, recording and implementation of care plans has significantly improved. The whole process has been revised to ensure that individual needs are identified and addressed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health care of students is effectively promoted by the strong links between the nursing staff and the care staff. This is achieved by regular formal meetings and day to day communication. This ensures that those staff who need to know have a good knowledge of the individual health care needs of students underpinned by relevant training, such as Epipen use and first aid. In addition these close links provide opportunities for specialist needs to be identified and appropriate external support accessed. The role of care staff to support this is detailed in the students' individual care plans. Eighty two per cent of students agree or strongly agree that they are well looked after when they are ill. The majority of parents are satisfied with the health care provision in school. One parent commented 'health needs are looked after very well, and medication is given on time, the care staff deal with my child's emotional needs very professionally and with great care'.

The new health centre has improved the medial facilities within the school. Each house has its own provision for the storage of medication and care staff administering medication do so in accordance with the approved procedures in place. A recent pharmacy report stated that there is 'safe conscientious handling of medicines in the school'. The audit trail has been updated improving security and accountability. Health staff monitor accidents and illnesses and are proactive in taking steps to reduce health risks to students, identifying and limiting the spread of an infection for example.

Children and young people are provided with a healthy, balanced and nutritious diet. Menus are adventurous and offer the opportunity for all boarders to experience food from different cultures. Individual specialist diets, for health, religious or cultural reasons, are catered for. The school is sympathetic to and supportive of the needs of boarders who have a strong preference for particular foods. The survey for this inspection and that undertaken by the school showed that students are generally satisfied with breakfast and lunch, with supper proving the least popular. The systems for the consultation with the boarders on the planning of menus and the

quality of food are not fully effective. There are strong monitoring systems in place that work to identify any emerging issues for students and support them in healthy eating. Mealtimes are sociable and orderly occasions. Both schools provide good dining facilities. Those in the school have been further improved by the provision of new chairs. These have made the room more attractive and comfortable by reducing the level of background noise.

The evening provides opportunities for students to prepare snacks, with one house looking forward to the implementation of the planned kitchen improvements, which includes an oven. Good standards of hygiene are maintained in the Primary and the Secondary school kitchens, gaining four and five stars respectively awarded by the local environmental health department.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Students are generally happy with the privacy afforded to them, with 81% agreeing that they have enough privacy. The systems adopted by staff for entering bedrooms take account of the sensory impairments of students and so protect their privacy. There are policies in place, shared with students, in respect of room searches and mobile phones which specify the circumstances in which the duty of staff to safeguard students is the overarching consideration. Staff encourage students to promote and protect their own privacy, by locking their phones and using the lockable space provided for them for example.

Staff receive regular training in child protection and know how to implement this in practice. The school has effective links with the local authority safeguarding team, working cooperatively and seeking guidance as and when required. A number of relevant senior staff have undertaken level two child protection training with the local authority and an in-house safeguarding committee has been set up, with the first meeting scheduled to consider the remit for the group. The local authority designated officer describes the school as 'a pleasure to work with'. The school is responsive to advice, looks for ways to improve and acts appropriately in promoting the protection of the students.

The relationships between care staff and young people are good, with 85% reporting that there are adults in the boarding house that they would talk to if worried or concerned. This reduces the use of the formal complaints system, which boarders know about, as they talk to staff informally as the day to day grumbles arise. The boarders are confident that staff listen to and act on issues or concerns they raise. The school deals with the very few complaints made by parents promptly, effectively and within appropriate timescales. There is a clear anti-bullying message to boarders, which includes cyber bullying, and boarders say that there is little bullying in the school. Any such instances are dealt with promptly and effectively. Staff and boarders know the action that will be taken if a boarder is absent without authority and there are risk assessments in place where this is an identified need. Staff respond appropriately to any unauthorised absence and encourage young people to

reflect on the potential risks and consequences of their absence.

The school has adopted a new method of behaviour management and trainers within the school are rolling out a programme of training for staff. The emphasis on encouraging positive behaviour by the use of reward schemes remains the high priority, with breakfast in bed a favourite reward for achieving targets. Eighty per cent of boarders believe the rules are fair and are consistently applied by staff across the boarding houses. Sanctions imposed by staff are age appropriate and the format for recording these measures is clear. The format is not fully used by staff as student views are not routinely recorded nor is the effectiveness of the actions routinely evaluated. Although staff are trained in physical restraint the use of this is very rare.

There are established procedures and practices in place which ensure that the boarders live in an environment that provides high standards of physical safety and security. Appropriate checks and servicing are routinely undertaken on the school's fire safety and detection equipment. The school acts promptly to shortfalls or significant findings identified in the individual boarding house fire risk assessments. Personal emergency evacuation plans identify environmental adaptations and the level of assistance required by a young person. The school is fully aware of the security issues inherent in the campuses and takes appropriate measures. Boarders state that they feel safe within their houses.

The process for risk assessing activities is very robust. Risk assessments are completed for all on and off site activities accessed by the young people. The assessments consider the risk associated with the activity and the specific individual needs of young people with hearing, visual and mobility impairments.

The school has established systems in place for the recruitment and vetting of staff and gap students. These fully meet the requirements of the national minimum standards. However, they do not comply with recent guidance on the portability of criminal record bureau checks for those staff moving jobs within the same organisation.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders benefit from the good working relationships between the teaching and care staff. A parent said 'Liaison between school staff and care staff has improved hugely in the years that my child has been resident'. This is achieved by regular formal meetings, joint training and effective communication. Care staff have been given training and written guidance on how to support the boarders in the development of speech, continuing the work in the school. Care staff support the boarders in prep time, listening to the primary boarders read for example. Boarders are encouraged to contribute to their annual education review.

There is a considerable range of activities, both on and offsite, arranged by an activities organiser supported by two full time workers. This along with the

acquisition of two smaller vehicles has significantly increased the opportunities for small group off-site activities. Students with particular talents are supported in developing these interests at school or in the local community. Care staff also organise things to do in house, cake decorating, crafts and a skipping competition for example. The majority of parents are highly complimentary about the activities on offer after school and at weekends. They say that boarders are offered 'A large number of various activities for all the different age groups', 'After school activities are varied, well planned, interesting and beneficial to a child's development: physical games, cooking, walks, art etc' and 'There are a lot of after school activities'. The Youth Club provides a venue for a variety of themed evenings and competitions. The coordinator works very hard to organise outings at weekends'. Boarders themselves are divided on the issue with just under half saying they would like more to do, while acknowledging that there are lots of things they could do but choose not to. Staff are very aware of the perceptions of young people in respect of activity levels and strive to be flexible to meet requests, including coming in to work on their time off.

Children and young people receive excellent support from staff highly attuned to their individual communication skills. Eighty nine per cent of boarders believe that staff care about how they are doing. There is an independent listener who visits each house regularly, providing opportunities for boarders to approach her face to face as well as by email or phone. Specialist support services for children with severe and profound hearing loss, such as speech therapy and an audiologist are available within the school. External support is appropriately sought and provided where there is an identified need. Parents said 'We think that the school provides excellent facilities for students who board with attention to individual needs and extra support as and when necessary. We specially commend the work of the care staff'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The school values and actively seeks the views and opinions of the students. There are established formal and informal systems in place to achieve this, for example the student council, house meetings and the use of suggestion boxes. One parent said 'They take the young people's suggestions and consider them well, they are used if they enhance life after school'. For example through Pupil Voice a skate park project is currently underway.

Relationships between children and young people and the staff are a real strength of the school, young people consistently describe staff as 'kind and helpful' and 'brilliant'. Parents report very positive relationships too, for example 'We feel that the boarding house staff have really got to know our child well in a short period of time' and 'The care staff at Howard House are excellent. They genuinely care for my child'.

There are clear processes in place for admission to boarding and this includes opportunities for overnight visits, supported by written information for children and their parents. They in turn are asked to supply information that will assist staff in ensuring a successful transition to boarding. Year 7 boarders and their parents speak

positively about their experience 'Our child started year 7 at Mary Hare in September 2010. He was integrated very quickly into the school community and enjoys his weekly residence there' and 'The school as a whole makes both the pupil and his/her family feel very welcome at the school and in the boarding house'.

Boarders are actively involved in planning their personal aims and objectives. This is achieved by formal scheduled one to one time with their key workers to discuss progress, identify issues and set new targets. This discussion is recorded and signed by the young person and the key worker.

Students are supported in maintaining contact with their families while at school. In addition to the suitably adapted payphones in each of the houses boarders have regular access to computers for email and there is also the opportunity to use Skype. The majority of boarders have personal mobile telephones, to be used in accordance with the policy that is in place. Parents report a high level of satisfaction with communication from the school staff with comments such as 'They provide various ways of keeping us in touch with our child while away from home using phone, email, mobile, etc. They are easily accessible in case of problems and ready to deal with any issue very quickly'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Accommodation for junior boarders is provided on the top floor of the junior school Manor house, which is a listed building. The décor and furnishings in bedrooms and communal areas is very child centred. A well equipped play room provides an excellent back drop for a wealth of child initiated imaginative play, a dental surgery at the time of this visit.

The accommodation on the main site consists of two individual houses and a sixth form complex in the school grounds, and one house within the old mansion house. There is an ongoing programme of refurbishment, with new carpets creating a more homely environment. Parents observe that 'There has been a huge improvement in the common rooms throughout the house which were dreary and depressing when our child started at the school. The bedrooms, shower rooms and stairways have also improved significantly'. Staff listen to the suggestions of young people and in one house are in the process of turning a games room into a cinema room.

There is a variety of single and shared bedrooms and boarders personalise their areas with posters, photographs and personal effects. The houses are individual in character yet operate to school policies and procedures providing consistency for students and staff who may work across different houses.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school is organised and managed so as to deliver and maintain a good level of care. The care management team in place at the time of the last inspection is now well established and provides a clear focus and sense of purpose for the whole residential team. The provision of office accommodation, the care suite, as well as providing a useful resource, is a symbol of the value and importance attached to ensuring that children and young people have a positive experience of boarding. The team provides good leadership and together have the expertise, skills and knowledge necessary to manage effectively. There is a strong commitment to continually raise standards in the delivery of care to the students. There are sufficient numbers of staff to meet the needs of the students and to support them in their activities and shortfalls in staffing are covered from within the school staff team to ensure consistency of care. The management team are pro-active in responding to the emerging needs of children, by reorganising and redeploying staff for example. Good arrangements are in place for senior cover on duty and access to senior management for advice and support when needed.

Staff receive good support through regular supervision and a comprehensive range of training, including access to recognised qualifications. They report very positively on the training provided, particularly the service specific training which they felt gave them a 'better understanding of how to care for a deaf child' and 'an idea of the difficulties facing a deaf child and for us to adapt our practice to meet these'. This ensures that children and young people are cared by staff who have the opportunity to develop and maintain the necessary knowledge and skills.

There is effective monitoring of the welfare of boarders, this includes internal monitoring by the care standards officer and by regular visits by members of the governing body who take time to talk to staff and students in the boarding houses.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Individual needs are identified and well met, for example giving practical support for religious commitments, and difference is celebrated. All students are given the same opportunities, with the provision of additional support where this is required. Senior staff have received training in this area and they plan to provide this for all staff.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- ensure that for each pupil there is on file written parental consent for the

administration of first aid (NMS 14. 10)

- ensure pupils are consulted over planning of menus and the quality of food provided (NMS 15.1)
- ensure that the school applies current guidance on the portability of criminal records bureau checks (NMS 27.1)
- ensure the sanctions record contains pupil views and that the effectiveness of sanctions is routinely evaluated (NMS 10.9)