

Royal School for the Blind

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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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

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 currently provides residential accommodation in three 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

The overall quality rating is good.

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

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 individualised care and support in a safe and

stimulating environment. This encourages young people's learning and personal development and results in significant progress especially as young people prepare for the transition to adulthood.

Staff are caring, very skilled and competent. They have created a warm friendly atmosphere with young people commenting that they 'love staying at the school', they feel 'they get on with everyone' and are 'well looked after'. Young people feel valued and know they will receive advice and support if they have any problems. Staff have an excellent understanding of young people's individual needs and the support they need. This is aided by very good information sharing both within the school and through constructive relationships with parent and carers who comment 'the communication is excellent' and 'staff are fully committed to the children'.

The school benefits from strong leadership. Staff are overall well trained, well supported and clearly committed to child-centred care. There are frequent opportunities to engage in community based activities that young people especially enjoy. This promotes inclusion and allows young people to participate in activities similar to those of other young people their age.

However, improvements still need to be made in the auditing of medication. This is restated from the previous inspection. Additionally, some records regarding health plans for young people are not up to date; the safeguarding policy requires to cover all the requirements in Appendix 1 of the Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards (NMS); the complaints policy needs to include details of how to contact Ofsted in the event of a complaint; when undertaking fire drills consideration must be given to undertaking one at night; and training is required for all staff that will address the issues detailed in Appendix 2 of the standards, specifically responding to complaints, equality and diversity and communication.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection three recommendations were made; two of which have been fully addressed. Notable, the verification of recruitment details for contracted staff has improved and risk assessments now include an assessment of the likelihood and severity of identified risk to young people. Addressing these helps to further safeguard young people. However, one recommendation is restated regarding medication as discussed in the summary section.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people's physical and emotional health needs are particularly well met. The school has excellent links with specialist health and advisory services. This helps ensure 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.

During their stay young people's health is closely monitored by staff who ensure they get medical treatment when they are unwell. This means young people receive a high standard of individualised care and support. Young people's needs are recorded in individual health plans that inform staff about the arrangements for meeting young people's health needs. Overall the plans provide very good detail, although in some instances the information is not always up to date.

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 being encouraged to follow a healthier lifestyle through for example regular physical activity, such as football and cycling at local clubs in the community.

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.

On each unit young people's medication is securely stored in a suitable cupboard. The school systems for the administration of medication provides clear guidance to staff so young people only have medication specifically prescribed for them and take it in line with the prescription instructions. However, some minor discrepancies were identified with regard to reconciling the recording of the administration that means the system is not sufficiently robust.

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 good.

Young people feel safe staying at the school and are protected from harm. The approach of staff to ensuring young people's privacy and dignity are promoted is a key strength. Young people receive appropriate support with their personal care that sensitively encourages their independence and learning. They each have single bedrooms that offer sufficient space where they can spend time alone when they wish. Many are personalised to varying degrees dependant upon young people's own choices. Staff are mindful of the importance of respecting young people's confidential information ensuring it is held securely in the office.

Young people are able to make a complaints in a meaningful way. They state 'we speak to staff' if they are worried about anything. The complaints procedure is available in a range of formats making it accessible to young people with different communication needs. Staff are especially adept at identifying when young people are feeling unhappy or sad through non-verbal clues and changes in behaviour. This means overall young people's concerns are identified, 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. There is a high level of supervision and young people are given good 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.

Young people have individual behaviour plans that guide staff in how to manage and support young people effectively. There are clear and consistent boundaries with young people confirming they understand what standards of behaviour are expected and what is unacceptable. However, there is a strong emphasis on acknowledging positive behaviour and praising young people when they do well.

Young people live in secure and safe environment. There is a well organised approach to managing 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 around the residential provision including fire safety systems. This helps ensure the accommodation remains a safe place to live, although there has not been a fire drill at night.

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.

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 wider community. For example, young people train with a football club every week, attend the theatre and cinema have good links with a local youth club.

Staff throughout the school are exceptionally good at sharing information with each other about young people's needs and the support they require. This enables them to work out how best to support young people with specific issues. Staff spend a lot of time individually with young people which means staff have a good understanding of how issues of equality and diversity, such as cultural background, gender and disability relate to individual young people. 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.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school's records provide a very thorough 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 very well supported in enabling them to communicate their wishes and feelings effectively, and to influence decisions made with regard to their day to day living and their future.

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. Responses in parent questionnaires overall reflected that relationships were very positive with comments including 'the carers are excellent', 'I can talk personally to my child's carer if needed' and 'communication is excellent'.

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. This means young people start at the school in a planned and sensitive way. There is an equally emphasis on transitional planning as young people prepare to move on. Young people are provided with tremendous emotional and

practical support to ensure transitions go smoothly and successfully.

There is a strong focus on involving young people in decisions about both their own lives and the wider operation of the school. There is an effective and well established school council who commented that they have secured changes that young people had put forward, such as improved lighting and the introduction of a recycling scheme. Staff praise young people for their ideas and encourage both verbally and non verbally communication so young people can have confidence in knowing their opinion and views are listened to.

Young people enjoy very 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.

There is an excellent focus on developing the independence skills of young people in preparation for adult life. The school provides young people with a variety of experiences both within the school as well as the wider community to enable them to work constructively with others, learn how to manage their difficulties effectively and succeed in many different situations. This fosters a sense of inclusion and participation within the local community while teaching valuable life skills.

Staff are very skilled at encouraging young people to develop their skills and confidence through involvement in a range of activities that meet their individual needs, abilities and interests. Staff are creative and resourceful in building young people's confidence. For example, young people are supported to try new experiences and take controlled risks. They spoke positively about being encouraged to join in with 'footy and cycling' as well as using public transport and taking part in activities in the community such going to the theatre and cinema.

Young people enjoy homely and comfortable accommodation. Young people have their own rooms, which they are encouraged to decorate and personalise during their stays. Rooms are all decorated, maintained and furnished to a good standard and young people are encouraged to keep their rooms tidy and free from clutter.

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 good.

The school is professionally and efficiently run by effective senior managers, who promote a 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. Sound systems are in place, such as regular visits by the nominated school governor, to review the quality of care and to identify areas for improvement. This helps ensure that the school continues to promote young people's welfare.

Young people and their parents or carers know what support they can expect from the school. Young people have access to helpful information about the school that explains how they will be looked after and this is readily available in various formats. 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 competent and enthusiastic people, who have suitable skills and experience to meet their needs. Staff overall are positive about the level of support and guidance they receive. Professional staff supervision takes within the timescale recommended in the standards and team meetings take place weekly. These provide an opportunity to discuss and review individual young people, the running of the residential units, staff development and training, and to look at ways to improve the service they offer. Staff do have opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge through a planned programme of training. However, not all staff have received recent training in responding to complaints, equality and diversity and communication.

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 school's written records provide a very good picture of individual young people's needs, development and progress. Young people's records are generally 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?

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...

- maintain an effective audit trail of all medications administered (NMS 14.20)
- ensure all relevant documentation, specifically health plans for young people, are up to date (NMS 14.6)
- ensure that the safeguarding policy covers all the requirements in Appendix 1 of the Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards (breach of national minimum standard 5.4)
- up date the complaints policy so that it includes details of how to contact Ofsted in the event of a complaint (NMS 4.8)
- conduct fire drills in accordance with Fire regulations, specifically undertake one at night (breach of national minimum standard 26.6)
- provide training for all staff which address the issues detailed in Appendix 2 of the National Minimum Standards, notably, responding to and dealing with complaints, equality and diversity and communication. (NMS 29.4)