

Hamilton Lodge School

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

Hamilton Lodge School is a co-educational residential school which caters for young people between the ages of 5 and 18 who are hearing impaired and some have additional specific needs. The main form of communication used in the school is British Sign Language (BSL). Young people board on a weekly basis and are expected to return home for weekends. The school is situated in a residential area. The boarding units are adjacent to the main school site.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

At this short notice announced inspection all key standards were inspected. The inspection also looked at the progress the setting has made with the one recommendation made at the last inspection. This related to the recording of sanctions.

A British Sign Language interpreter was available during the inspection which enabled the inspectors to communicate with the young people and staff.

This is an outstanding service in all respects. The school provides high quality care which meets the individual needs of all the young people who board. Young people's welfare is enhanced by the excellent relationships that exist between staff and young people, and between young people and their peers. Safeguarding young people is a priority for all staff who are experienced and knowledgeable in child protection areas.

The community ethos in the school enables young people to have a sense of belonging and ensures that they do not feel isolated. Activities provided ensure that the young people are able to be part of the community and to develop their skills and life experience in a positive and constructive manner. Young people have a clear voice in the running of the school.

Health matters are addressed to a high standard with parental consents supporting very good practice, apart from one area that is not explicit in relation to the administration of first aid. Health and safety is robustly addressed with excellent records kept. The school needs to ensure that radiators and water temperatures are not a risk to vulnerable young people.

The school gives young people an opportunity to experience education and school life as a positive part of their lives. Many positive comments were made by the young people, such as 'I love my life here at the school'. Similar positive feedback was also gained from parents.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the setting was asked to ensure the effectiveness and consequences of any sanction are recorded consistently. Records viewed showed an improved consistency in this area.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive excellent health care at the school. Feedback from the young people and a sample of parents was very positive about the health care provision. Each young person has a health plan in place which details information about medical history and current health needs. Medication procedures are robust with trained staff administering medicines. The school nurse is integrated fully into the school offering an oversight and expertise in the areas of medication, first aid and treatment. Monitoring of the administration and storage of medication is thorough and consistent. All of the young people have written consent for a range of medical treatment although this does not specify the administration of first aid. Medical appointments are available at a local General Practitioner surgery. Specialist health advice and guidance is readily available from health professionals such as an audiologist, occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, visual impairment service and educational psychologist. Each young person has a comprehensive package of care in place which addresses their health needs in a detailed and thorough manner. Staff are fully informed of individual health care needs enabling them to meet all needs to a high standard.

The food offered to the young people is varied and healthy. Feedback from the young people was extremely favourable about the food on offer. The catering staff are well aware of any specific dietary needs whether these are based on religious, cultural or medical grounds. The nurse and the catering manager meet to ensure that specific dietary needs are identified. The young people are offered a choice of menus and some have the opportunity to prepare meals in their living areas, as part of the development of their life skills. One young person said 'Staff help us, and encourage us to learn things. I did not like to cook, but staff have helped me to learn to cook, and now I like it more'. The menus give young people the opportunity to enjoy foods from a variety of different cultural backgrounds. Young people can voice their opinions about the food and their preferences in formal settings, such as the school council, and informally with tutors and care staff. The catering manager also meets with the Business Manager twice every half term to discuss the quality of food and preferences. The catering team are very well managed and organised and ensure that a high quality of food is provided to all the young people. The catering department has recently been awarded a five star rating for food safety from the local council; this being the highest award given. The catering staff have British Sign Language skills (BSL) that enables them to communicate with the young people. Plans to redecorate the dining room are in place.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The privacy of young people is respected by staff and any confidential matters are discussed in private. High standards of staff practice were observed throughout the inspection relating to respect and dignity. Young people are respectful of each other. Staff always ensure that the young people are aware that they wish to enter a room, for example by switching a light on and off, bearing in mind that the young people are deaf and will not hear someone knocking on their door. All toilets and showers offer privacy. Confidential information relating to all young people is kept in appropriately secure facilities.

Young people know how to and are confident in making a complaint on a formal and informal basis. Formal complaints are addressed promptly and records made of how they were resolved. Young people have numerous individuals to whom they can make representation such as care staff, teaching staff, independent visitor, governors and senior members of staff. The independent listener also has BSL skills so is able to communicate well with the young people. It is clear that the young people's views are valued and encouraged whether related to complaints or comments on how the school is being run. Staff are very well informed of whistle blowing procedures.

Safeguarding young people is a priority at this setting and covers every aspect of the pupils' lives. All child protection concerns are addressed rigorously and promptly. The designated senior member of staff who takes the lead on child protection and safeguarding, practices in a manner that puts the young people's safety first at all times. Excellent referral practices are in place with continued communication and liaising with all other professionals relating to safeguarding. The school's guidance works alongside the local area child protection and safeguarding procedures. The school has very good working relationships with the local authority designated officers for child protection. Staff are very well informed of the internal procedures to take if an allegation is made or if they have concerns. All members of staff are offered regular training to ensure that they are aware of their obligations. All records kept are thorough, detailed and very well organised.

Young people report that incidents of bullying are addressed and resolved swiftly by staff. Restorative justice methods used are effective when dealing with any bullying incident. Clear messages are given to the young people that bullying is not accepted. Emphasis is placed on close supervision and support of those who are assessed as particularly needing it. The staff team know the young people very well and are aware of dynamics and tensions when they arise. Caring for each other is a belief strongly embedded in the ethos of the school. Young people will inform members of staff if they have concerns about another young person or if they witness behaviour which could constitute bullying. The school acknowledges the ever increasing difficulty in dealing with cyber bullying and continually endeavours to put new strategies in place to lessen the risks.

Staff closely monitor the movement of young people throughout the day. The school has an appropriate policy with procedures should any young people go missing. All young people are reminded of the importance of informing staff of their movements and the potential dangers associated with the nearby road. The staff are very sensitive to the differing needs of young people and which ones are particularly vulnerable if they are unsupervised in the community. A carefully prepared independent travel scheme enables young people to develop their travel skills in the community. No young people have gone missing since the last inspection.

The promotion of positive behaviour and the development of young people's social skills are planned for in a detailed and thorough manner. Throughout the inspection young people showed excellent standards of positive behaviours. Clear individual support plans are developed using multi-disciplinary input from relevant members of staff such as care, teaching and medical. Each young person's individual needs are known and met in a highly professional manner. Weekly multi-disciplinary meetings are held to review support plans for any young person who may need extra support at any given time.

Positive behaviour and achievements are celebrated and rewarded by the whole school community. For example, by receiving a certificate in a school assembly, having a letter sent home and being mentioned in the school's weekly newsletter. One young person stated 'When I do something very good, the staff take my photo and I get my picture put in the newsletter. I like this, as it makes me feel good about myself'. If sanctions are imposed, a record is made of this and monitored by senior members of staff to ensure that the sanctions are relevant and fair. Young people feel that sanctions are fair and appropriate. Staff are very well informed of permissible and non permissible sanctions they can impose. Recordings of the effectiveness of sanctions are consistent.

Physical intervention is very rarely used. Only one has been used since the last inspection. Recording is excellent with senior management monitoring all related records. Staff are trained in the school's chosen method of intervention and receive regular refresher training.

Health and safety measures are of a high standard. Young people, staff and visitors are safeguarded through detailed robust health and safety procedures. Fire safety procedures are stringent. This includes a range of fire drills and routine servicing of fire appliances and equipment. Young people know the emergency evacuation procedures for the school, including those for use at night, in case of fire. Young people confirm that they have regularly practised such evacuation through fire drills. Quick and effective maintenance monitoring by the health and safety officer ensures that work is prioritised appropriately and ensures high fire safety in the boarding houses and school premises. Specialist equipment is in place to ensure young people know when the fire alarm is activated. General health and safety risk assessments are kept up to date for ensuring the safety of staff and pupils at all times. Risk assessments are completed with regards to activities as well as individual behaviours or vulnerabilities shown by some pupils. Health and safety records are maintained to a high standard. This includes evidence of tests and checks for key procedures such

as water safety, electrical appliances and records required under the control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH). Some radiators and water temperatures exceeded the recommended 43 degrees centigrade. The organisation of safety records and the monitoring of these appliances ensure that the safety of pupils and staff is promoted to an excellent standard.

The recruitment of staff is robust and ensures that all necessary checks are carried out before they commence work. Members of staff who work on site under contract for a different organisation, such as catering staff, have their records checked by the school. A code of practice is in place for contractors, interpreters and volunteers to sign up to. The thorough recruitment process ensures the safety of young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people benefit from committed and trained staff who provide excellent support and guidance to enable young people to engage fully in their education. The special educational needs coordinator takes a very proactive role in ensuring all educational needs are met with any additional resources identified in place. The school's holistic approach ensures that all members of staff liaise closely with each other to ensure support is thoroughly and robustly prepared. This approach ensures that young people receive outstanding levels of individual support. Comprehensive, detailed and thorough care plans are regularly reviewed to ensure that support is sensitively and consistently delivered. The young people are supported by the staff in the boarding areas to prepare for the school day.

The school provides young people with a range of opportunities to engage and participate in activities. Activities are seen as an important aspect of the school day with a good balance being found between learning, enjoyment and exercise. Young people can choose a number of after school activities including football, arts and craft, swimming and interactive computer games. Feedback from young people was, in the main positive about the activities on offer. The school is an active member of the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme with young people achieving silver awards. A strong emphasis is placed on encouraging young people to be part of the local community and to integrate with their peers with many trips taking place in the surrounding area. The organisation around this is excellent with careful planning resulting in excellent outcomes.

Young people receive outstanding levels of individual support, guidance and care. Relationships between staff and young people are professional and respectful. Young people like the staff and spoke positively about them. Staff show a strong commitment to caring for the young people and clearly understand the needs of young people and as a result are able to respond swiftly to individual needs. One young person said 'If I am unhappy, I will talk to the staff and they help me'. As well as their hearing impairment, many young people have additional needs which are addressed as part of a holistic approach.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are many avenues for young people to express their views, opinions and wishes about the school and their lives. Staff consult with young people regularly about all aspects of their lives within boarding. A school council exists which ensures the views of all young people are very well represented. Weekly council meetings are held with whole school issues discussed such as food, school uniform and future social events. It is clear the culture of the school promotes the empowerment of young people. Young people are confident in expressing their opinions about how they are being cared for and that they feel their point of view is listened to and respected.

The needs of young people are fully assessed and considered prior to admission. The views of young people are listened to while parents are actively engaged in the admission and care planning process. Feedback from parents praised the planning and assessment process carried out by the school. Individual Education Plans take into account the social, emotional and behavioural needs of each young person together with the need to develop their communication skills. Care plans clearly describe how such needs should be met, while providing staff with clear guidance as to how this is to be achieved.

Young people are able to maintain good contact with family, carers and friends. Those who board stay during the week, with regular contact maintained between the school, parents and carers when necessary. Most young people have their own mobile phones, while contact can be further maintained via internet access and minicom systems. Key workers have weekly contact with parents and carers with communication seen as fundamental to boarding welfare. No pupil raised concerns regarding contact. Parents feel comfortable in talking to staff and spoke very positively about the communication they receive.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people live in accommodation that is maintained to a high standard. Spacious rooms and a homely environment enable young people to enjoy their time spent in the boarding houses. Young people are happy in the houses and enjoy the free time they have in them. One young person said 'There's nothing I would change about the boarding house, I am happy there'. An ongoing programme of redecoration and refurbishment is in place providing colourful and modern facilities. Staff ensure the young people have a say in the décor. Changes made in the houses over the last year have been positive with individual health and/or mobility needs being met. Rooms allocated meet the individual needs young people may have, such as close proximity to toilets or being accommodated on the ground floor. There are restrictions in relation to mobility needs due to the location of the school being in a very hilly area; all current mobility needs are met. The accommodation has been

assessed by mobility officers, occupational therapists and visual impairment officers. The school responds to the wishes of the young people in relation to accommodation; currently it is converting one large room into a dance studio as a result of young people's interest in street dancing.

The members of staff responsible for the maintenance of the school premises work extremely hard to ensure that the quality of the premises is maintained to a high level. Monitoring systems operated by senior members of staff ensure that the quality and cleanliness of the accommodation is regularly reviewed and assessed.

The accommodation provides sufficient bathrooms and toilets facilities, some have adapted equipment. Staff have appropriate accommodation when sleeping in with separate washing facilities.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The individual needs of each young person are known, valued and promoted. Staff ensure through practice and guidance that the rights of the young people are met and they do not face racism or discriminatory abuse. The pupils have their cultural needs met by individualised care planning and review processes which highlight and guide staff to meet the wishes of the young people. The school is currently completing the Rights Respecting School's Award which recognises achievement in putting the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child at the heart of a school's planning, policies, practices and ethos.

The school has a variety of information for parents, young people and staff to access that describes the principles, practices and the ethos of the school. There is a website that includes a young person's guide written by the young people about life at the school. A booklet is available for parents with information about how the school approaches communication. It clearly recognises that not all young people have the same method of communicating so the school takes a child centred approach and respects different forms of communication methods used.

The small team of senior management at the school is strong and highly effective. The school continues to function to an excellent standard and is committed to developing practices further. The senior management are supported by a strong staff team who are of a mixed gender and age. Feedback from both young people and parents is extremely complimentary about the staff and their commitment. One young person said 'I really love it here and enjoy time with care staff'. A parent stated that staff are 'brilliant'. The school's staffing arrangements ensure the welfare of pupils is protected and promoted to an excellent standard. Staffing levels provide appropriate supervision both on and off site and to support young people in relation to their assessed individual needs. Young people benefit from the established and stable staff team who provide consistency in care.

Training for the staff team is regular. New staff receive induction training plus mandatory training and then can gain further qualifications related to their roles. A very high percentage of staff have achieved the National Vocational Qualification level 3 in caring for children and young people or equivalent. Staff receive ongoing support from senior members of staff on a formal and informal basis. Members of staff report that senior members of staff are approachable and operate an 'open door' policy and that the established team works very well together. The care team meets on a daily basis so that key information is shared. A weekly meeting with the whole staff team including teachers also takes place.

Senior members of staff regularly monitor and endorse key records such as risk assessments, records of sanctions and restraints, minutes of meetings and any significant incidents and accidents. The senior management team is very experienced and includes key members of staff from different areas such as education, care and finance. They meet regularly to ensure that the school is operating in a cohesive manner. The small size of the school means that key members of staff are able to quickly respond to any issues, such as individual young people struggling within the school.

The school has an active board of governors who meet regularly and also visit the school on a very regular basis. Visits undertaken by the chair of governors are the subject of detailed reports which include recommendations and suggestions for improvement.

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 those young people risk assessed to be vulnerable do not have access to radiators and water temps that exceed 43 degree centigrade (NMS 26.8)
- ensure parental medical consents include the administration of first aid. (NMS 14.10)