

Heathlands School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Christy Wannop
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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

Heathlands primary school and residential provision, Heath House, is in St Albans, Hertfordshire. It is a day and residential school for pupils aged 2 to 16 years who are deaf. The secondary provision is based within two other schools: 'Heathlands at Townsend Comprehensive' and 'Heathlands at St Luke's', a community special school. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs with a requirement for sign language to access the curriculum. Residential students stay for four nights and all return home to parents or carers at the weekends. The school draws its pupils from all over the South East of England and the Midlands and sometimes further afield. It has extensive resources including a nursery and specialist rooms for audiology, speech and language therapy and sign language training. The school hopes to convert to Academy status by September 2011.

Heath House is a two-storey building that offers room for 30 students in single or shared study bedrooms spread over four wings. Bedroom groupings are arranged by age and gender. The facility has good communal areas, extensive grounds and there is access to the main school library after school hours. There were 23 residential students during the inspection, the oldest 19 and the youngest 7 years old.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced, short notice inspection of the key national minimum standards for residential special schools. This school provides highly specialised, well planned education and care and takes full account of each child and young person as an individual. This promotes excellent outcomes. The school respects the views and experiences of the children and this is central to the development of the residential service. Systems for health, safe care, education and leisure are highly developed and encourage children to develop into well rounded, positive young adults. This enables the children to make valued contributions within the school and the wider community. There is excellent support for children in all areas; enabling inclusion and self respect. Rigorous monitoring and a focus on continual improvement keep children's interests and well-being at the heart of the school.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no shortfalls at the school's last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Children understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and staff act as positive role models in promoting healthy choices. Children stay in a bright, airy and spacious environment with excellent grounds and have plenty of opportunities for fresh air and play. They receive prompt health and first aid care from well trained staff, who take a holistic approach to children's care. Staff work effectively in partnership with parents and carers. This ensures that they really understand individual health requirements and can deliver the care children need. There are well-established inter agency partnerships too, so children are able to access services and support for their physical, emotional and psychological health. There are sound systems in place for the safe administration and storage of medication. The school provides a very healthy, well balanced diet and young people are involved in menu planning. They can make snacks and drinks so they learn skills for self care and independence. Meal times are a relaxed and sociable time for young people and staff.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school has a pro active and creative approach to safeguarding practice that gives children a strong sense of safety and well-being. They are protected from abuse by the school's careful recruitment procedures, because all adults are rigorously vetted to ensure suitability to work with children. Staff are well trained in child protection, recognise children's diverse vulnerabilities and take active steps to protect them. Children say there is bullying in residence, but that staff are aware and deal with it quickly and this reduces the negative impact. The school has rigorous procedures to keep children safe within the grounds and strengthened procedures to safeguard children if they go missing. Children benefit from staying in a school that provides physical safety and security. Staff implement health and safety legislation and guidance to reduce unnecessary risks from fire and other hazards. Children know that their privacy is respected and that information about them is confidentially handled. Children are confident that they can trust the adults who care for them. There is a wealth of good quality, easy to understand information and advice about how to complain so that young people know how to raise issues. The school values children's rights and enables them to have responsibility and there are plenty of formal and informal routes for discussion. The school's approach to working with the young people emphasises their positive achievements and behaviours. Physical intervention is used, if at all, only in the most exceptional of circumstances, and the school is revising and improving policies and practice to reflect this approach. The school is committed to encouraging positive behaviour and trains staff to make constructive responses to children; consequently children behave well, because they are active, busy and have good relationships with the adults who care for them.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The Ofsted education inspection in 2009 found this to be an outstanding school that provides an exceptional level of care, guidance and support for pupils. The residential provision actively supports children's educational progress. Children are ready to learn and care staff really know about children's educational needs, and care about their achievements. For example, children and young people value the excellent after school homework club that runs in the secondary school. This provides an excellent opportunity for children in residence to have a quiet focus for revision, catch up and additional study towards GCSE's. Children describe these benefits, saying, 'they help us to improve'. Younger children also work with staff support in the boarding house study area. Good communication between care, educational staff and home, helps children to experience a consistently high standard of care.

Children receive individual support when they need it, because they get personalised support in line with their needs and wishes. Children and young people said that they have staff that they trust and who know them. Some children have complex additional needs and staff work in partnership with health, mental health, education and social care services to deliver the help, guidance and support required. Children have excellent opportunities for participation at school, in their community and wider society. There are plenty of structured and informal play and leisure activities each evening after school work is done. Staff are active and energetic in supporting the children in a wealth of sporting and creative leisure pursuits. Children enjoy these and learn skills to promote independence, confidence and leadership; qualities that link with educational aims.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Staff are proactive in supporting children to make progress in every aspect of their lives. The school uses skilful total communication to promote inclusion and independence. This is central to the ethos of the school as a means of enabling children to develop a positive self view and participate fully in the community. Celebrations of different cultural festivals take place in the school and diversity is respected. The individual needs of the children are met exceptionally well, especially with regard to their diverse cultural and communication needs. Children learn and practice democratic skills and staff encourage their voice through regular school and residential house meetings. Children have excellent opportunities to make decisions about their life and influence the way the school is run. Children have plenty of ideas for improvements, such as flexible activities and use of camera phones, and the school is aware of these. The school produces fully accessible and interesting information about residential life, and children are encouraged to visit before boarding.

The school plans children's entry and departure sensitively, so they quickly feel

comfortable and confident staying away from home. Those children leaving also have very good information and advice for their future. Staff place the well-being of children at the centre of their care practice and assessment; care planning and review arrangements are well managed. They set and evaluate individual targets which link into children's education planning and reviews. Key working relationships are strong and regular meetings help them to contribute and know that they are developing as students. One child described how the care plans reflected their identities. All children go home every weekend and so have regular and frequent contact with their families. At school they have telephones, access to the internet and use mobile phones to communicate freely with family and friends. Children described how they had settled in and that the quality of the relationships they forged with care staff helped enormously with home sickness.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Children learn independence and the skills they will need for young adulthood. Staff work in partnership to support any young care leavers with a smooth transition to future living arrangements. The school is very well equipped to meet the needs of young people. This includes the provision of specialist equipment to enable children to fully participate in communal living and to ensure their safety. The accommodation is welcoming, bright and spacious. Further developments are planned. Children's areas are well furnished and equipped with lots of games, equipment and space to play, study and relax. Young people are involved in choosing the colours and fittings for their bedrooms and living areas. Boarders have access to all the school's facilities. The school demonstrates respect for children by investing in and providing such an outstanding environment.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Leadership and management at this school are highly effective. The headteacher confidently communicates high expectations to staff about the quality of children's care. In response the staff team work well to ensure that the young people are well cared for, well educated and enabled to reach their potential. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Policy, procedure and good practice helps children to know that the school values their individual needs and will meet these in everyday life in the school.

Parents and young people are provided with a wealth of information, in a wide range of user friendly formats, including a website. This ensures they have a full picture about the way that the school operates and the services provided, including boarding. Staff levels are good and ensure that the needs of the young people are met. The headteacher and her staff team are excellent role models for the children in their care. The relationships between children and staff are warm, friendly and professional. Staff training takes good account of current issues and children's needs.

All staff are trained in British Sign language (BSL) and so are able to communicate well with the young people. Well established systems of staff selection, induction, training and performance review ensures that staff have the skills, qualities and competency to deliver care according to the school's ethos. The school has highly effective internal monitoring processes, driven by an extensive school development plan that includes boarding provision. Governors also carry out comprehensive audits during regular visits to the residential provision. The outcomes of these visits contribute to the quality assurance processes and this provides further opportunities to reflect the experience of the children and young people. These arrangements ensure continual review and improvement to prioritise children's welfare.