

Royal School for the Blind

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

The Royal School for the Blind is a non-maintained charitable school that provides education and accommodation for children and young people with visual impairment and a wide range of complex special needs, including learning and physical disabilities. The school provides up to 66 places for children and young people aged from 2 to 19 years, with residential provision for up to 36 children and young people during weekdays in term time. There are currently 14 children and young people staying overnight at the school.

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. 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 residential provision was last inspected in February 2011

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of Royal School for the Blind is good. The school prides itself on supporting pupils who have visual impairment and also many have additional and complex learning and/or physical difficulties, including multi-sensory impairment.
- Residential pupils' experience genuine care from a stable and secure care staff team who are highly committed and always put children first.
- Equality and diversity is threaded through all aspects of practice, including ensuring residential pupils have a strong voice in their school community.
- Residential pupils are cared for by experienced care staff who work closely and consistently with teachers, nurses and therapists, to ensure the continuity of education and care is always the very best.
- The headteacher and head of care are dedicated, enthusiastic and committed to ensuring residential pupils experience first class care.
- The safety and well-being of residential pupils is of a high priority. This includes ensuring residential pupils experience a safe, positive and encouraging atmosphere. Active steps are taken to protect residential pupils from abuse and harm. Most importantly, residential pupils report feeling totally safe at school.
- The residential provision is a vibrant place, in which every residential pupil is afforded wonderful opportunities to develop personal and social skills, talents and abilities.
- Behaviour is well managed; this includes having high levels of surveillance in place that ensures residential pupils are not exposed to any form of potential

bullying.

- Parents highly value the school's residential provision and know their child is happy, well cared for and is making remarkable progress as a result of the wonderful facilities and caring people. Parents describe the school as the being 'the very best', and also describe communication as 'exceptional'.
- The school has a whole-child approach which enriches meaningful participation in which residential pupils are able to sustain a strong voice in their school's community.
- The residential provision has sustained its strengths from previous inspections and has also made improvements. This includes implementing more rigorous healthcare arrangements for the care of medicines and providing staff with training in equality and diversity.
- The national minimum standards are mainly met. Where weaknesses do exist, action to improve is already emerging. These shortfalls relate to a small percentage of radiators not having safety covers in place to help minimum the risk of children becoming in direct contact with a hot surface. A small number of support staff do not have the required knowledge of the school's child protection procedure. Lastly, a small number of care plans are missing some required details and reports to ensure they are a comprehensive document.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. The residential provision is a vibrant place, where laughter and fun are a central theme. Enriched, varied and imaginative activities mean every residential pupil gets fantastic opportunities in which to develop their personal and social skills. This extends to being able to participate in community-based integrated projects and to forge networks with the wider community. Relationships between staff and residential pupils are exceptional and formed on mutual respect. Residential pupils have a sense of self-worth and a positive self-direction that equips them to make informed choices in their everyday lives. The schools' facilities provide a safe, pleasant and stimulating environment for residential pupils in which accessibility is a central feature. Residential pupils are actively involved in keeping themselves fit and healthy. This is made possible by the stimulating physical activities available on a nightly basis, such as a bike and football club and swimming. Also, they appreciate the importance of healthy eating. Everyone involved in the care of residential pupils is aware of individual specific health and care needs. This includes being trained in different aspects of health care.

There is no doubt from listening to the views and opinions of residential pupils that they thoroughly enjoy their residential stays, which they find to be lots of fun and appropriately stimulating, enabling them to reach their full potential. These opportunities enable them to broaden their learning, develop their independence, forge new friendships and enhance their citizenship. One comment made by a

residential pupil captures the quality of their experience, 'I would score this school a full ten out of ten.' This level of total satisfaction is a credit to the school and demonstrates it is treating residential pupils with the upmost respect, including removing social barriers, enabling meaningful participation and most importantly maximising independence to an enriched level. Irrespective of residential pupils' culture, age or differences, everyone feels valued and shows kindness and respectfulness towards each other. This mutual respect creates a sense of being part of a family. This view is equally validated by parents who also describe the residential experience as a, 'child's second home.'

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is good. The relationship between staff and residential pupils is very positive. Residential pupils have a strong identity and loyalty to their school community and view their residential experiences as being the very best. The atmosphere is vibrant and very child-centred. The rapport between residential pupils and staff is simply wonderful. Residential pupils have access to extensive facilities including: a swimming pool; a soft play area; an outdoor adventure playground; a highly equipped sensory room and an outdoor mobility circuit.

Ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity is fully recognised, valued and promoted throughout the whole school community. Residential pupils have fantastic opportunities to develop their community engagement. This means they are increasingly well prepared for their future lives in society. Imaginative and creative steps ensure residential pupils do not experience any barriers in being able to participate in school decisions. This includes being able to be members of the school's council, where their ideas and opinions matter. Equally, the use of imagination has meant barriers have been removed and ensure residential pupils are able to practice their rights, including knowing about the Children's Rights Director and having access to his contact details. Residential pupils are assisted to feel confident, safe and secure and when asked if they feel safe, all are confident in replying 'yes'.

Care plans inform staff about residential pupils needs and in most cases these are thorough and detailed documents. This extends to child's development, care needs and health. Reviews are undertaken at appropriate intervals and care is taken to ensure that the residential pupils' future needs are reviewed properly in line with statutory requirements. Nevertheless, a small number of care plans do not take full account of all elements of a child's health, education or transitional period. This slightly hinders care staff being able to fully refer to and implement a care package that encompasses all aspects of welfare, learning, well-being and health recommendations. Furthermore, it hinders care staff being able to fully promote the required levels of independence which helps prepare post-16 residential pupils for adulthood.

Residential pupils have varied nutritious meals that are plentiful and of high quality. Meals are served with the diverse needs of pupils fully recognised including the impact on health. Highly effective health care arrangements are in place. This includes improvements so that arrangements for dealing with medication are both safe and effective. The use of creative communication means residential pupils are able to express their feelings, and importantly, practice their rights. This extends to raising concerns or complaints. Parents are equally aware of their rights to raise concerns although have not found a need to make a single complaint. They feel well informed and see the communication exchange as a particular strength of the school.

The accommodation and facilities overall provide a safe, pleasant and stimulating environment that is well suited to the needs of residential pupils. The fixtures, fittings and furniture match the diverse needs of residential pupils. This includes careful consideration of children's levels of mobility and most importantly to their visual impairments. For example, a lot of thought has been given to lighting and decor to enhance the environment for visually impaired pupils. The enhanced sensory environment means residential pupils retain maximum levels of independence.

Residential pupils' safety

The school makes good provision to safeguard residential pupils' welfare. Every residential pupil is safe, protected and well cared for by carers they trust and know. All care staff fully understand their roles and responsibilities for health and safety. This includes being familiar with procedures relating to fire, water, electrical safety and also the required action if a residential pupil was to go missing. However, there are a small number of radiators which can be accessed by residential pupils that are not fully protected.

Areas of personal care are dealt with the utmost respect, privacy and sensitivity. Consulting residential pupils on care practice is common place and means their views and opinions are highly valued. Care staff are well alert to residential pupils emotional, physical and social needs and deploy their knowledge and training highly effectively, to ensure welfare is not compromised.

The school has a clear procedure and guidance that help to ensure all staff and visitors are familiar with the requirements for safeguarding children. However, these procedures have not been formally explained to a small number of support staff. More positively, the names and duties of those staff with special responsibility for child protection are very well known throughout the residential care staff team. Also, every member of the care staff is trained in child protection, first aid and the care of medicines. There is a well-established system in place for the safe recruitment of staff and volunteers, which assesses their suitability to work with children. For example, all staff and volunteers who are in contact with children, or are in a position of trust, are required to have criminal record bureau check.

A hierarchy of behavioural techniques is well established. These techniques take into account the residential pupils' age, understanding and the seriousness of the situation at any given point. The support deployed enables residential pupils to self manage their emotions. Where care staff need to give additional support, this will only ever involve their re-direction or de-escalation. This early intervention means behaviour rarely escalates to a level where residential pupils become distressed or place themselves or others at risk of harm. Because of this highly effective approach, the use of restraint or other methods of discipline are not used.

There is a strong commitment by leadership to tackle all types of bullying through initiatives and strategies that improve behaviour and increase awareness. This well implemented approach means no residential pupil is experiencing any form of bullying or discrimination from fellow pupils or staff. There are detailed risk assessments used that help to identify any potential dangers to residential pupils. These extend to activities both within the school and within the wider community. These assessments are used by care staff to help ensure everyone is kept safe.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. Residential pupils' experience genuine care from a stable and secure care staff team who are highly committed to their work. The school truly promotes residential pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development within an environment of mutual respect and sensitivity. The rapport between the residential pupils and staff is unquestionably positive; including being full of respect and sincerity.

The school prides itself on reducing barriers so that every residential pupil can experience enriched learning and residential care that is highly child-focused. There is a strong commitment to inclusion, participation and promoting independence. The residential pupils are strong ambassadors of the school's enriched values, and they show mutual respect and fairness to each other.

The care staff deploy their responsibilities of care in a manner that treats residential pupils with upmost dignity, respect and sensitivity. The process for dealing with complaints is fair and transparent. The exemplary partnership between parents and carers is reflected in achievements residential pupils are making. Parents value highly the school's residential provision and know their child is happy, well-cared for and is making remarkable progress as a result of the wonderful facilities and caring people. Parents describe the school as the being 'the very best', and also describe communication as 'exceptional'.

Motivation starts at the very top and quickly spreads so that others are equally inspired to make a difference. This level of commitment means nothing goes unnoticed. This typifies the school's positive approach towards ensuring every child matters. The involvement and participation of residential pupils is totally inclusive of everyday practice and means they can make informed choices and feel valued by

those that care and teach them.

The governing body plays an active role in monitoring the quality of residential care. This includes being a critical friend towards the residential provision. There are designated governors who visit regularly and spend time with residential pupils and staff. After each visit, a report is produced and shared with fellow governors. The school has its own self-evaluation which sets priorities that put pupils' learning, achievement, attainment and care at the centre of future development.

All care staff receive ongoing training to ensure they hold all acquired skills and knowledge necessary to meet residential pupils diverse needs. Regular supervision and team meetings take place and provide care staff with opportunities to discuss their practice and review their performance. This level of dedication demonstrates residential pupils' well-being remains the school's top priority.

The deployment of staff is child focused and gives residential pupils excellent continuity of care from people they truly trust and respect. All required policies and procedures are in place and known by those required to implement them. Records that are required to be maintained are completed and stored securely.

All recommendations from the previous inspection have been met. For example, more highly effective medication procedures are in place and are ensuring children receive their medication in accordance with their prescribing doctor's instructions. Staff training has been further enhanced and policies and care planning improved.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- Make sure all staff have child protection training.
- Ensure reasonable efforts to obtain all necessary information about a child's health, education and care needs are made.
- Improve the health and safety within the school by ensuring residential pupils are protected from hot surfaces such as radiators.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



25/01/2012

Inspection of Royal School for the Blind

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As you know, Ofsted recently inspected your residential provision at your school. The inspector visited all the residential units and spoke to as many of you as possible.

It was clear you were experiencing genuine care from a stable and secure care staff team who are highly committed to their work. It was also noted that the school took your safety, welfare and well-being very seriously. It was also wonderful to hear that you felt very safe. It was also fantastic to hear you laughing and having fun with your carers.

It was a pleasure to watch you all enjoying yourselves in your different activities. What was especially nice to see was how kind and supportive you were to each other.

Nearly everything about your school is first class. There are however a couple of areas that need slight improvement, including care planning, training and protecting you from hot surfaces. Given these findings, Ofsted has judged your residential provision at your school to be good with a number of outstanding features. This success is in many ways down to your own contribution and your support of each other.

Yours sincerely,

Michelle Moss