

Heathlands School

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

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.

Residential students reside at the school during the week. Heath House is a two-storey building that offers accommodation for 25 male and female students, in single or shared study bedrooms. The boarding provision was last inspected in April 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	outstanding
Outcomes for residential pupils	good
Quality of residential provision and care	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of Heathlands School is outstanding. Staff are committed to help boarders develop confidence and improve their life chances. This is achieved through excellent communication between the academic and boarding staff. The good relationships boarders have with staff nurture and encourage them.
- The school provides an exceptional boarding experience. All areas are outstanding, apart from the outcomes for boarders. This is judged to be good due to some external limiting factors. However, there is clear evidence that the school is doing all it can to help boarders achieve positive outcomes.
- Boarders have high quality, detailed assessments that show their starting points, track their journey through the school and their boarding experience. These are extremely individualised, with boarders having a say in the targets set. Their improvements are regularly measured and praised. Additional support is quickly identified with access to internal and external professionals.
- The safeguarding of boarders is exceptional. There are clear policies, procedures and practices that provide maximum protection for boarders, covering child protection through to health and safety.
- The boarding accommodation is of a very high standard. This promotes privacy, safety and a comfortable environment for boarders when they are away from home.
- Boarders enjoy engaging in an extensive range of stimulating and interesting activities aimed at challenging them and enabling them to develop new interests

and skills. Equality and diversity issues are very well addressed.

- The residential provision is extremely well organised and managed, with boarders at the centre of practice. This means that the boarding experience allows boarders to develop at their own pace and ability, with care and support available whenever they need it.
- The school continuously seeks ways to improve outcomes for boarders through open dialogue and rigorous monitoring of the impact their practice has on boarders.
- All national minimum standards are fully met. There are no significant weaknesses that impact on the care and support of boarders. Improvement points have been made regarding storage and record keeping.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Boarders' overall progress and development is good. They stay in a unique inclusive environment, where total communication is practised to maximise their capacity to understand and be understood. Boarders are well supported to reach their personal and educational goals.

Boarders learn to be patient and tolerant. They develop good relationships with each other and there is a tangible sense of community within the boarding environment. This is consolidated through thoughtful activities such as street dance, theatre and boxing, chosen by the boarders. These activities build their confidence and develop additional skills. The activities take place in the community offering further opportunities to integrate into the wider society.

The vast majority of boarders report that they are safe and feel safe in Heath House. They have access to a variety of adults, including the head teacher, to discuss any concerns or problems they have. Anti-social behaviour is frowned upon. Boarders help to regulate each other's behaviour. The good racial, gender, age and cultural mix of pupils enable boarders to explore difference and learn from each other. They take an interest in and are respectful of each other's cultures. Boarders live harmoniously most of the time.

Boarders express their views within the house. They do not always get what they have requested and do not always understand the reasons why particular proposals have been refused. For example, boarders would have liked a more detailed explanation of why a paintballing activity was refused. Other views expressed have an impact on how the house is run, including decisions about décor and activities.

Boarders' health needs are well catered for, with first aid-trained staff available and, access to medical support in the community. Good ongoing contact between boarders' parents and carers means that medical issues are always addressed promptly. Boarders are able to make good use of the kitchen and can choose to

prepare their own breakfasts if they wish. The meals provided are well presented and tasty offering a balanced diet. This enables them to learn more about healthy eating and enhances their culinary skills.

Boarders develop a good sense of self and are exposed to a variety of experiences that will enhance their quality of life. Boarders learn not to be hindered by the hearing world, but to engage with it.

School leavers are well equipped for the next stage of their lives having learned additional skills while boarding. Moving on is celebrated by boarders and good relationships made at school are maintained outside.

Although outcomes for boarders are judged as good, this is not a reflection on the school. The school is unique and makes exceptional efforts to integrate boarders into the hearing world. This is met with some resistance and hesitation by some boarders who have a number of barriers to overcome to make full use of the support, guidance and facilities available.

Quality of residential provision and care

Boarders are thoughtfully inducted into the school and boarding provision to ensure it suits them. Established boarders help with settling in to ensure that new boarders experience a warm and friendly environment.

Excellent relationships between academic and boarding staff means that boarders are supported with their studies through homework clubs. Residential staff provide daily support at these sessions. Boarders sometimes help each other complete work. This exists because of the camaraderie in Heath House.

Staff support boarders to choose and research their activities. A varied range including high rope activity and skateboarding are available. Boarders learn the skill of research, planning and presentation by taking responsibility. They also learn the art of communication, negotiation and debate about popularity and suitability. A recent dining style competition was organised by a member of staff. This was well-liked by boarders who have a particular interest in cooking and those who like the challenge of improving their culinary skills. Dining out gives boarders the opportunity to eat foods from around the globe. These provide an opportunity for peers to explore dishes that resemble those from boarders' countries of origin.

Care plans are of superior quality. They are very individualised and give a tremendous insight into boarders' development over time. Independence checklist records offer practical information about the level of self-reliance boarders have on arrival and the progress they make. These well thought out plans bring together other disciplines such as specialist health services for the deaf and other relevant professionals. This holistic approach means that boarders' needs are fully addressed. The plans are robustly reviewed with boarders, who comment about their progress

and difficulties. Boarders are central to the review process.

All staff are trained in first aid. First rate records are kept of minor injuries and the treatment boarders receive. Consent forms for medical treatment are standard practice. The security and administration of medication is excellent.

Boarders live in spacious, comfortable, well-decorated surroundings. Heath House has the feeling of a place where young people live. A variety of indoor equipment ensures boarders are entertained. The corridors separated by gender allow boarders to maintain privacy. The grounds are secure and lend themselves well to outdoor activities. Notices in the communal areas give age appropriate advice and information to boarders such as sexual health, school council representatives and help lines.

Boarders can receive visitors during their stay and equally spend time out of the boarding accommodation with friends. This gives boarders the confidence to develop friendships outside the boarding community. The school welcomes relatives and carers to join the weekly group to learn British Sign Language to aid communication with their children and support their education and development. Families are invited to attend the Heath House annual barbeque to maintain positive relationships with the staff team.

Boarders respect each other and their space. They do this by undertaking light domestic tasks in the house such as tidying personal and communal areas after use and displaying good manners. The ethos of the boarding environment supports increased independence, social etiquette and enables boarders to measure their own progress and challenge themselves further.

Residential pupils' safety

The arrangements for ensuring that boarders are safe and protected from harm are outstanding. Robust systems at Heath House ensure that boarders' safety is central to the service they provide. Policies and procedures in practice provide enhanced protection. The vast majority of students feel safe.

There is a designated senior person supported by a deputy who is the head of care for boarding. The designated person has built up an excellent knowledge of safeguarding. The school liaison advisor stated, 'I have no concerns about the way in which safeguarding matters are managed in this school. Training is always timely with interpreters available to ensure all staff participate...the staff are professional and take the role of protecting boarders seriously.'

The school uses a 'record of concern' form, completed by any staff member to pass on information that may be relevant. Prompt attention is paid to any information. Attendance and contributions are made to core group and strategy meetings as appropriate.

The safety of pupils is further promoted through a detailed approach to the recruitment of staff and checking of other adults as appropriate. Key staff have completed safer recruitment training and interviews do not take place without at least one trained representative on the panel.

Boarding staff make good use of behaviour management training. The strategies they employ are subject to regular review. This ensures they are effective and being implemented in a consistent way. The school manages incidences of bullying extremely well. They know which boarders are vulnerable and remain vigilant. Boarders tell staff if they have been bullied. They know that staff will always take action. Cyber-bullying is understood and rules are in place to minimise potential incidences. One example is that all forms of camera are prohibited in bedroom corridors. This reduces the risk of images being shared on social networking sites. Boarders sign up to this and accept that their privacy and dignity is being protected.

Boarders are helped to mature by understanding their behaviour and any consequences. The effect is that sanctions are kept to a minimum because boarders generally behave well and like to live in a friendly environment. Some records of sanctions lack detail to help understand the behaviour that led to a sanction. Boarders sometimes make comments following a sanction and generally do not think that sanctions are unfair. There have not been any incidents of physical intervention since 2010.

There are arrangements for keeping boarders' personal belongings safe. However, boarders say that the lockable drawers are not big enough for their property.

Health and safety is of paramount importance. Equipment is regularly maintained. Staff report repairs and response times are speedy. Regular testing of gas, electrical and fire equipment takes place. There are highly sophisticated arrangements to evacuate boarders in the event of a fire. Boarders confirm that evacuations happen and they know where to assemble. Fire wardens within the boarding accommodation and around the school site are responsible for the safe evacuation of boarders and pupils. All hearing staff have this responsibility. The building also has a flashing light system to alert pupils in the event of a fire. A recent check by the fire authority concluded; 'There is an excellent standard of fire protection management throughout the school.'

Excellent security measures protect boarders around the school and when they leave the premises. These measures do not compromise their personal freedom.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

There is a clear statement of principle which outlines what the boarding provision aims to do. This is very effectively translated into practice. The small staff team are highly skilled and able to address the needs of the boarders without compromising

any aspects of their welfare safety and development. There is a culture of encouragement, community and aspiration within the boarding house. Boarders are expected to aim for success in all areas and take the positive experiences from their education and time in boarding into their adult lives.

Policies and procedures are updated as necessary to ensure they incorporate current legislation. Staff understand their responsibilities to implement them. Key policies are available on the school website for parents and carers to access.

Training, supervision, appraisal and team meetings contribute to the staff developing in depth knowledge and understanding of their role. They deploy flexible approaches to boarders according to their needs. The staff team regularly explore the tension between boarders' freedom and their responsibility to keep them safe and constantly evaluate if they have achieved the correct balance.

The management team is committed to driving improvement. Monitoring of the provision is completed regularly by an independent visitor. The reports are provided to the head teacher and the organisation. The independent visitor reports on all aspects listed in the national minimum standards, but they lack some detail. This does not have any impact on the care of boarders or the organisation, because additional robust mechanisms are in place to regularly monitor progress. The annual self-evaluation form enables the school to measure targets set for the previous year and plan continued development whilst sustaining a high level of service. The leadership in the school has demonstrated an excellent understanding and implementation of the revised national minimum standards. The service is continually evolving to meet boarders' needs.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- Improve the records of sanctions, giving clearer information about the reason why the sanction was imposed.
- Increase the size of the lockable cabinets, to ensure safe storage of boarders personal belongings.
- Review the way in which school council minutes are written to provide more clarity about how some decisions are reached.
- Provide more written detail in the school's records of monitoring.

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.



22/05/2012

Dear Boarders

Inspection of Heathlands School

Thank you so much for your time during the inspection; the time you spent talking to us and giving us a tour of your environment. It was very interesting, even though you had a very busy programme.

The staff team are very organised and believe that helping you to identify and achieve your goals is the best way to prepare you for independence. Staff do an excellent job in working with you and trying to balance your freedom and independence whilst keeping you all safe.

You have developed good friendships that make your stay at Heath house more enjoyable.

The school will look at increasing your personal lockable space, to make sure your personal belongings are safe. They will also provide more detail in your school council minutes, so that you are clearer about how decisions are made and whether they are in your favour or not.

Yours Sincerely

Tola Akinde-Hummel and Pippa Greed

Yours sincerely,

Tola Akinde-Hummel / Pippa Greed