

Royal School for the Blind

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

Unique reference number for social care SC040720
Unique reference number for education 104735
Inspection dates 20/11/2012 to 22/11/2012
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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 20 children and young people during weekdays in term time. There are currently 31 children on roll; 18 are male and 13 are female. 12 pupils use the residential provision; six male and six female pupils.

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 two 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 January 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	outstanding
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 the residential provision is outstanding. A key strength is the whole school approach to ensuring that all residential pupils achieve the most from their time here. Staff refer to themselves as being like a jigsaw, where all the pieces need to fit to ensure that residential pupils receive the best possible care, support and education.
- The care provision is exceptional and enables residential pupils to develop to their full potential. The school is an example of the very best residential care for young people with visual impairments and who also have additional and complex learning and/or physical disabilities. Equality and diversity is an intrinsic part of the school and means the very diverse and complex needs of residential pupils are acknowledged, celebrated and provided for within an inclusive environment.
- Residential pupils are cared for by a highly committed, dedicated and consistent staff team who always put the children first. This includes kitchen staff who are committed to ensuring that young people receive the best possible care from them with regards to their health and nutrition.
- The leadership and management of the school is inspirational. The headteacher and head of care are acutely aware of each residential pupils complex needs and the support necessary to help them to make as much progress as possible in relation to their starting points. The management team as well as staff frequently go to considerable lengths to ensure that children continually receive exceptional care and support.
- The safety and well-being of residential pupils is of paramount importance. Staff are extremely vigilant and take swift effective action should they have any

concerns about the health, safety and well-being of any child.

- Residential pupils are cared for in a warm welcoming and stimulating environment. There are fabulous opportunities for young people to develop their social and independence skills, talents and interests.
- Staff are highly skilled at managing the complex behaviours displayed by young people. Staff are acutely aware of potential triggers for them and effectively minimise these so that young people get the most out of their time in residence.
- The residential provision has sustained and in many cases exceeded its strengths from past inspections. The improvements have significantly enhanced the outcomes for residential pupils. This includes enhancing the safety of young people by ensuring that they are not exposed to hot surfaces. All staff have attended child protection training. There are more robust system in place for sourcing information with regards to the health, education and care needs.
- The national minimum standards are met and in a number of areas exceeded. There is a minor weakness in the recording of medication brought into the unit and improving the use of technology within the units. However, these issues are already being addressed by the head of care.

Outcomes for residential pupils

The outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Residential pupils enjoy extremely positive relationships with staff. They thoroughly enjoy the time they spend with them and the units are filled with the sounds of children having fun. The environment is stimulating, vibrant and created with the residential pupils at its centre. Residential pupils engage in an extensive range of activities within school and in the community, such as football clubs and night clubs. They relish the opportunities to go to the nightclub where they are able to 'boogie' with the staff and meet their friends. Residential pupils are increasing in confidence; for example, choosing to sing on the karaoke. They enjoy spending time relaxing with staff on the units, watching films or listening to music. Residential pupils enjoy using a range of technologies within school, such as computers and tablets. However, currently they do not have the same opportunities within the residential areas.

Residential pupils have a sense of self-worth and faith in their own abilities, such as musical talents. They engage with visitors confidently and enjoy testing them on their English and drumming skills. Residential pupils are enabled to make informed choices in their everyday lives; for example, choosing their meals. They are encouraged to be as independent as possible in relation to their starting points. This includes undertaking small tasks, such as making their own drinks and developing an awareness of the own safety outdoors; for example, when walking to the local shops.

Residential pupils are actively involved in keeping themselves fit and healthy. They take part in a wide range of activities such as football, swimming and enjoy using the

extensive outdoor play equipment. Residential pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own self-care needs such as dressing, brushing their teeth and bathing.

Residential pupils have a strong sense of belonging. A residential pupil said, 'this is a fun house where you feel safe and forget about your worries.' Their wishes and feelings are of paramount importance to staff. They are consulted in various ways so that all their voices can be heard and acted upon. The school council is one such area and empowers children to put forward their ideas and to help bring about change within the school. Consequently, residential pupils feel valued, as staff listened to and act upon their requests.

It is clearly evident from listening to residential pupils, that they thoroughly enjoy their time in residence. They are able to engage in enjoyable, stimulating activities and this enables them to reach their full potential. Residential pupils' lives are enriched by the opportunities provided. This is because staff are excellent advocates for them, committed to removing social barriers to enable meaningful participation. This significantly enhances residential pupils' confidence, self-esteem and independence.

Parents are very complimentary about the school. This is demonstrated by the comments on the wall of fame; for example, how staff have helped the child become the person they are today and that this has given them the best start in life.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of care is outstanding and exceptional. Residential pupils benefit highly from the effective 24 hour curriculum. All staff are highly committed to providing exceptional childcare to all young people and often go to considerable lengths for them, such as coming in on their day off to attend meetings or to go on activities. This support effectively enables residential pupils to maximise the opportunities that arise from activities which are effectively tailored to their specific needs.

Care plans are meticulous and allow the uniqueness of each residential pupil to shine. Care plans effectively take into account the diverse and complex needs of each residential pupil. This is exceptionally well supported by the staff's commitment to working in partnership with parents, health care professionals, physiotherapist and school staff to create a care plan that is tailored to the residential pupils' needs. This means that a comprehensive picture is created which clearly identifies the residential pupils' care needs, which are met well in day-to-day practice.

Catering staff are highly committed to ensuring that residential pupils enjoy healthy and nutritious meals which meet their specific dietary requirements. They are constantly adapting and refining menus to meet their ever-changing needs. They make lunchtime fun by creating theme days around events, such as the golden jubilee and the Olympics. A particular favourite is Titanic day, when residential pupils

were escorted to their seats by catering staff dressed as the ship's captain.

Highly effective health care arrangements are in place. Health care plans are extremely detailed and are regularly reviewed to ensure that they remain current. The arrangements for administering medication are robust and ensure that residential pupils receive their medication at the right time. This is enhanced by the excellent support offered by school nursing staff. All staff are trained in the administration of medication, including rescue medication.

Staff are acutely aware of young people's health care needs and meet these exceptionally well; for example, by not taking children on activities when they are feeling unwell. All medication brought into the home is recorded. However, on a small number of occasions, the quantity of medicines is not always accurately recorded. This was quickly identified, but it may lead to confusion as to the amount of medication in stock.

Effective systems are in place for residential pupils to remain in contact with their families. Parents, carers and family members are able to contact the school each day to speak to their child and to the staff. Families enjoy positive relationships with staff and are confident to contact them throughout the day to discuss their child with them. They are carefully consulted and included in all aspects of their child care. Parents' views are highly respected and valued; as far as possible, they are acted upon.

Staff promote consistently high aspirations for the residential pupils. They are passionate about ensuring that each young person has the best opportunities and can achieve their full potential. For example, some residential pupils undertake and achieve good examination results in piano and trumpet. This results in young people wanting to achieve and consequently they make exceptional progress.

Residential pupils enjoy a warm, welcoming and homely environment in which they are flourishing. Each residential pupil has their own room, which they personalise to varying degrees. Each room is designed around the specific needs of each young person to ensure their comfort, safety and well-being. Careful consideration has been given to residential pupils' mobility and to their visual impairments. The recent introduction of push buttons on doors, which omit a specific fragrance, such as lavender, further enhances the sensory experience for young people. This is further developed by the use of objects of reference, as young people are able to move more freely around the unit. Consequently, they are able to retain the maximum level of independence.

Residential pupils' safety

The safety of residential pupils is outstanding. The welfare of residential pupils is actively promoted and safeguarded. They are appropriately supervised by vigilant staff and are free from bullying. The school takes appropriate and decisive action to

safeguard residential pupils and works effectively with the relevant external agencies. Staff fully understand 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 residential pupils at the school.

Staff provide an excellent level of supervision for residential pupils, based on their age, understanding and ability, to make sure they are safe in school and in the community. Every member of care staff is trained in child protection. There is a robust system in place for the safe recruitment of staff, which assesses their suitability to work with children.

Residential pupils are provided with excellent levels of supervision, based upon their age, understanding and ability to make sure that they are safe in school and in the community. All visitors to the school are suitably vetted and supervised during their visit, to ensure the safety and well-being of young people. Staff work extremely hard to ensure that risks to residential pupils are effectively managed. Residential pupils do not go missing. However, all staff are aware of the procedures to follow should this occur.

Positive behaviour is consistently and effectively promoted. Staff are highly skilled in de-escalation techniques, which are implemented extremely well in practice. This is supported by the staff's innate understanding of each young person's behaviour and their potential triggers, such as loud noises. Staff are vigilant and respond quickly and effectively to residential pupils' ever-changing needs. Staff deflate situations effectively, by using simple hand gestures or by simply talking quietly to residential pupils offering them reassurances. This avoids the behaviour escalating to a level where the residential pupils become distressed and place themselves or others at the risk of harm.

Residential pupils are protected by a comprehensive range of detailed health and safety procedures, risk assessments and checks. Staff conduct regular health and safety checks, including fire drills, to ensure that the premises are safe and secure. Residential pupils' safety is enhanced by the implementation of the fire evacuation chair and 'grab bag'. The 'grab bag' contains various items that residential pupils may need should they need to evacuate during the night, such as contact details, additional socks, coats and umbrellas. Staff are trained in the use of the evacuation chair, which means they are able to evacuate residential pupils to a place of safety in an emergency.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. The school is professionally and efficiently run by effective senior managers. They promote a clear vision and values that provide a safe and stable environment for the pupils residing at the school. The school is committed to sustained improvement in

the quality of care it provides. The head of care is very clear on the importance of team building and networking. Managers say, 'there is no 'I' in team; we are all in this together to improve the outcomes for our young people.'

The headteacher and staff often refer to the school as being 'a family'. The whole school approach to supporting residential pupils is exceptional. Staff are clear that the residential pupils are at the very heart of everything that they do. This is because the main aim of the school is to enable them to lead rich, fulfilling lives.

Management of this school is enthusiastic, ensuring that others are equally inspired to make a difference. This level of commitment means that little goes unnoticed. This typifies the school's positive approach towards ensuring that every child matters. The involvement and participation of residential pupils is totally inclusive of everyday practice and means that they can make informed choices and feel valued by those who care for them.

Strong and thorough systems are in place to review the quality of care, identify areas for improvement and take action to ensure that the school meets residential pupils' needs and promotes their welfare. This involves an independent visitor who visits the school regularly on behalf of the organisation to check records, assess the physical condition of the buildings and talk to residential pupils about their experiences.

There is always a high number of staff on duty to meet the needs of the residential pupils. As a result, residential pupils feel valued, supported, respected and are able to engage in activities of their choice.

Staff receive high levels of training and support. This means that they are highly effective in their roles and are able consistently to meet the ever changing needs of the residential pupils. Staff are extremely complimentary about the head of care and the changes that they have implemented over the last year. This has significantly enhanced the communication systems between all school departments, which in turn, has improved upon the outcomes for residential pupils.

Staff are experts in the diverse needs of residential pupils. This is made possible by the strong support provided from the headteacher and head of care. This includes regular supervision and encouragement to gain additional qualifications and new skills. Staff deployment is child focused and provides residential pupils with excellent continuity of care with people they trust and respect. Staff say that all want is the very best for the young people. The school values the rights of individuals to respect and dignity and has created an environment where people's differences are accepted.

All recommendations from the previous inspection have been met. All staff including catering staff have undertaken child protection training. Staff ensure that all information pertaining to residential pupils' health education and care needs is obtained. This enables staff to create comprehensive care plans which are tailored to

residential pupils' specific needs. The school has improved upon the safety of residential pupils, as they are now protected from hot surfaces such as radiators.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure that there are accurate records of all medication brought into the residential units.
- enhance the opportunities for residential pupils to use technology within the residential units.

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.



20/11/2012

Hello everyone,

Inspection of Royal School for the Blind

I want to say a very big thank you to all of you for making me feel so welcome. It was an absolute pleasure to spend time talking to you and seeing you all enjoying yourselves. Your laughter is infectious!

Thank you so much for allowing me to come to football with you. It was great to see you having so much fun and I think your football skills are fabulous. Also, thank you for making me think about my English skills and the use of words and abbreviations!

It was wonderful to hear how well you are all doing and that staff encourage you to try new things such as playing musical instruments. It was great to see you having fun with the staff. The staff are highly committed to making sure you have everything that you need. It is obvious that they care deeply about all of you.

I think the school is first class and provides excellent care and support to all of you. This enables you to achieve your individual goals. There are a few things that the school needs to consider, such as how medication is recorded and improving the opportunities for you to use technology in residential time. The head of care is already in the process of addressing these things for you.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Scully