

Heathlands School

Heathlands School for Deaf Children, Heathlands Drive, ST. ALBANS, Hertfordshire, AL3 5AY

Inspection dates	17/03/2014 to 19/03/2014	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Outcomes for residential pupils	Good	2
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding	1
Residential pupils' safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- There is a continual focus on improving the service with residential provision seen as an integral part of the school.
- The views of residential pupils are sought and their views influence the care provided. This ensures they feel valued.
- A particular strength of the service is the extremely personalised care provided and the focus on developing communication skills. This highly individualised support helps pupils and their family members to communicate using British Sign Language and helps residential pupils integrate successfully into school and community life.
- Staff at all levels have the skills and ability to safeguard residential pupils and promote their welfare.
- Feedback from external professionals is unreservedly positive about the residential provision and the significant difference it has made to pupils lives.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

Information about this inspection

Three hours' notice was given prior to the start of the inspection. The inspection methodology included: observation of boarding routines and practice; scrutiny of school policies and records; discussions with parents and residential pupils as well as meetings with staff and residential pupils.

Discussions took place with a range of staff responsible for leading, managing and organising residential care these included, residential staff, support staff and the head of school. A tour of the premises with residential pupils included both residential areas and an administration area used by residential staff. The tour also covered education rooms used to support homework studies. discussions took place with residential pupils individually and as a group. These meeting were assisted by a BSL interpreter.

Inspection team

Gwen Buckley

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Heathlands School and the 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. Residential provision and education are on the same site.

Residential students reside at the school during the week. Heath House is a two-storey building that offers accommodation on the first floor for 20 male and female residential pupils, in single or shared study bedrooms. The residential provision was last inspected in May 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the behaviour management guidance to clarify what a 'major' sanction is within the residential provision.
- Further develop the fire safety guidance for staff. This is to ensure they are aware of what actions to take should a residential pupil refuse to leave the building.
- Further improve the frequency of external monitoring visits.
- Clarify that the induction process used for residential staff is to Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) standards.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Good

Outcomes for residential pupils are good. External professional's confirm the children quickly settle in the residential accommodation and make good to excellent progress. There is a highly individualised focus on care ensuring residential pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their life, whether it is within Heath House which is the residential provision or moving on from the school.

Since the last inspection the previous head of care has left and a significant change made to the residential accommodation. Part of the residential accommodation is now used as part of the education facility and residential numbers have reduced. External professionals consider house staff manage this transition very well while helping pupils cope with the changes and the loss of a well liked member of staff. The management team is very aware of the impact of these changes and are taking action to minimise this and provide continual support to residential pupils.

Comments made by visiting professionals and parents are very positive regarding the progress residential pupils make. They consider the residential pupil's quickly settle at Heath House; make significant attachments to staff and develop positive friendships at school and in the local community.

Residential pupils make good progress; they learn skills such as respect, sharing, patience and develop their abilities to communicate using British Sign Language. Visiting professionals consider a particular strength of the residential provision is the support staff provide in developing the pupil's ability to sign and therefore communicate effectively. This means residential pupils develop improved social skills and are more able to communicate their feelings, which helps them in many ways: preparing for adulthood and learning how to manage their own behaviours when needed.

Residential pupils benefit from the support provided that enables them to attend community activities. They are encouraged to take part in a range of activities, some of which are new to them such as badminton and cheer leading. Although residential pupils have a wide variety of activities available to them each week, both in the school grounds and the local community, some choose not to take part. The Head Teacher is aware of the views of residential pupils and has taken action to develop access to different activities. A newly appointed learning mentor now takes a lead in providing evening activities and developing new links with external resources. Residential pupils like the introduction of the learning mentor which has given a clear focus on developing new activities in the evening.

Residential pupils are effectively supported to undertake homework. They are supported each evening by residential and dedicated qualified teaching staff.

Residential pupils raise money for various charities throughout the year, which raises their self-esteem and helps them understand issues in the wider world. Overall, residential pupils respect and support each other. As a result, close friendships develop and difference is celebrated. Parents/carers report that as a result of being a residential pupil their children learn new skills, very quickly, which helps them grow in confidence.

Residential pupils understand that staff want to hear what they say. They have school council representatives and can talk to their link worker at any time. An independent listener visits very regularly and is available for all the residential pupils to talk with. A formal survey process has been rolled out which enhances the opportunities for residential pupils to influence their care. The Principle and other senior staff consider issues raised through these different processes and

have good systems in place to feedback to all the pupils the decisions made. As a result, of these consultation processes the girls have been able to refurbish their lounge area with new soft furnishings and younger residential pupils are being consulted over the décor in the proposed themed bedrooms. This ensures the residential pupils feel valued and respected. Residential pupils stated, 'I look forward to my nights here with my friends,' 'I like most of the staff' and 'I know they are taking action to improve the quality of the food, we are encouraged to cook a meal each week which most of us enjoy doing, but the improvements are taking far too long.'

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of care provided to residential pupils is outstanding. External visitors and parents are extremely complimentary about the progress residential pupils make and the quality of care provided by dedicated committed staff. The say this is evidence by the excellent progress residential pupils make.

A holistic approach to care and the strong multi-disciplinary approach ensures excellent joint working. This involves parents and a range of external staff to ensure the needs of the residential pupils are recognised and addressed. An example of this is the way information sharing between speech and language staff and visiting listener ensures action is taken to support all the residential pupils, and where appropriate their family members are directly involved. This support is extremely personalised and valued by their family. Family members report that the staff work exceptionally well helping them to understand their children which has meant that home life is much better and the residential pupils thrive as a result of their residential experience.

The clear directed support at homework time keeps the residential pupils focused on the task. Residential pupils were seen to enjoy leisure time with staff and share jokes between themselves and staff. Achievements are continually celebrated where praise is regularly given. Staff have a clear focus on developing social skills and there is a clear ethos which expects good behaviour. Staff consistently praised good behaviour, rewarding individuals as required.

The senior management team strive for continued improvement, as a result, they are introducing a new care planning system. This involves regular monitoring of care, which ensures residential pupils care needs are recognised and made known to all relevant staff. Action is then taken swiftly to meet any identified needs.

Medication administered in the residential accommodation is rare. However, staff have a clear understanding of safe storage, administration and recording processes.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

The arrangements for residential pupils safety are outstanding. The culture embedded in the residential provision ensures that the residential pupils benefit from a robust and rigorous approach which treats their emotional and physical safety as paramount. Behaviour is very well managed, attention to how residential pupils communicate and developing their ability to do so, is a key factor in helping them. This ensures they are able to express their feelings and they are supported to understand what these mean and how to develop strategies to manage them. Residential pupils quickly learn to trust, accept and understand the advice and support provided by care staff and other professional staff at the school.

Behaviour support plans are in place which are agreed by residential pupils, their parent or carer and staff. As a result, challenging behaviour is well managed without the need to use restraint. Parents and carers say knowing how behaviour is managed at school helps them to manage what at times could be very challenging behaviour at home and provides consistency of care. This

means the time spend with their child is more enjoyable.

Residential pupils are helped to understand the consequences of unwanted behaviour using a four point behaviour management system, working on work (WOW). The WOW system is new and helps residential pupils to see what the consequences are likely to be if they continue with unwanted behaviour. One major sanction recorded since the last inspection involved residential pupils. There is a clear definition for staff on what is considered a major sanction within the school, but not within Heath House.

No residential pupils have gone missing. Should this occur, staff are aware of process to follow. An excellent awareness of the vulnerabilities of the residential pupils and the use of risk assessments keep residential pupils safe. There is a sound awareness of safeguarding process throughout the staff group. All staff and visiting professionals have a strong sense of their individual responsibility to keep residential pupils safe. The management of allegations made by pupils is effective. Effective management and adherence to robust policies ensure all are protected and supported. A particular strength of provision is the focus on helping residential pupils to understand the potential risks when using the internet and other forms of communication.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Good

Leadership and management of the school is good. A very experienced Head Teacher offers excellent oversight and monitoring of the school. Following the departure of the head of care, the Head Teacher is reviewing the staffing structure to ensure best outcomes for residential pupils. Changes to the residential accommodation has meant that the number of pupils that can be accommodated at any one time has been reduced.

The residential service is integral to the school and clearly helps residential pupils to achieve in many aspects of their life. A particular strength of the service is that the management team recognise their strengths and areas for further development and have clear plans to address these. The plans focus on improving outcomes for residential pupils and acknowledge the significant changes in the school and the residential accommodation already made and those still to be achieved.

All areas to develop from the last inspection were met and the school continues to develop practice. There is a clear focus on fire safety and helping residential pupils to understand the need for drills and to take part in these. However, the guidance for staff does not include what actions they are to take if a residential pupils refuses to leave the building.

There is a dedicated enthusiastic team who have a clear focus in the individuality of the child. The management and detailed planning of boarding time, ensures the smooth running of the residential provision. There is sufficient staff on site to ensure that residential pupils have the supervision and support they need. Residential pupils benefit from living in accommodation with clear routines. Diverse needs are catered for sensitively and this results in fair and equal treatment for all. Residential pupils develop an understanding and empathy for others.

Residential staff are very well trained to meet the needs of individual children. They are part of an effective multi-disciplinary team, which enables them to meet the specific needs of residential pupils and ensures the voice of the child is heard. Parents/carers feel staff are very approachable and they have confidence in the staff's ability to care for their children. They state that the support for them and their child is 'second to none.'

The availability of the independent listener for residential pupils is a strength and pupils feel comfortable in her presence and are able to talk to her. The Head Teacher reports on the running

of the school and residential accommodation on a termly basis. This allows the governors to assess how well the school is running and how planned developments are progressing. The quality of monitoring visits undertaken by governors has recently improved. Two governors undertook the last visit and the report shows a significant improvement on the scrutiny of practice and consultation with residential pupils. The Head Teacher and the governor for safeguarding have been involved in reviewing and scrutinising practice at the school over the last year. However, the frequency of monitoring visits is not as frequent as expected.

Staff are well trained and there is a comprehensive 'in-house' induction process for new staff. Newly appointed staff consider the induction process and support of colleagues is very good and enables them to understand their roles and responsibilities. However, the Head Teacher is unable to verify that the induction process used meets expectations as set out in the Children's Workforce Development Council standards.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	117685
Social care unique reference number	SC056396
DfE registration number	919/7032

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.

Type of school	Maintained School
Number of boarders on roll	11
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	2 to 16
Headteacher	Mrs Deborah Jones-Stevens
Date of previous boarding inspection	22/05/2012
Telephone number	01727 754060
Email address	head@heathlands.herts.sch.uk

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