

Mary Hare School for the Deaf

Mary Hare School, Arlington Manor, Snelsmore Common, NEWBURY, Berkshire, RG14 3BQ

Inspection dates	29/09/2015 to 01/10/2015	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Good	2
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The leadership team work well together. There is a strong commitment to continual improvement. Governors are active and effective in their respective roles, providing robust governance.
- The committed and well-trained staff team demonstrate a genuine desire to give children and young people a really positive and enjoyable experience and communicate this effectively to them. As a result children say, 'the best thing I think about boarding is the care staff,' and 'the night lady always makes me feel better if I'm unhappy about something.'
- Children and young people make good progress both academically and personally. They make good use of the wide ranging opportunities offered to develop their skills and interests. As a result they build their self-esteem and grow in confidence.
- Staff effectively promote the safety and well-being of children and young people. They have a good awareness of the range of safeguarding issues and work hard to ensure that the children and young people they care for develop an age-appropriate understanding of how to keep themselves safe.
- The newly built accommodation is of a good standard. Older accommodation is on a rolling programme of refurbishment. Health and safety measures are well understood and implemented.
- Residential staff work well as a team and with external agencies to support and promote the health and well-being of children and young people.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Where necessary, a child has a clear individual health and welfare plan or similar record, containing relevant health and welfare information provided by parents/carers and recording significant health and welfare needs and issues. This record should be agreed by parents/carers and include:

- records of developmental checks;
- health monitoring required by staff;
- intimate care or bodily functions requiring staff help; and
- the involvement of a child's parents/carers or significant others in health and welfare issues. (NMS 3.12)

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Review recording systems to ensure that new knowledge is consistently and reliably used to inform risk assessments and the care of young people.
- Make a formal record of the risk assessment process undertaken when making decisions about sleeping accommodation for children and young people.
- Improve both the reporting of maintenance issues by staff and the recording of health and safety actions in response to recommendations.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted carried out this inspection with two hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice over two evenings; formal group meetings with boarders; informal discussion during shared meals; meetings and discussions with the Principal, the Vice Principal (Care), residential staff and their managers, ancillary staff, the chair of governors and the governor with the safeguarding lead and the premises and facilities manager; contact with the local statutory safeguarding authority; a tour of the accommodation; and scrutiny of the wide ranging documentation about boarding. Responses on Parent View and pupil and staff responses to Ofsted's surveys undertaken during the inspection were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Maire Atherton	Lead social care inspector
Emeline Evans	Social care inspector
Chris Peel	Social care inspector
Amanda Maxwell	Social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Mary Hare School is a non-maintained, mixed, special school near Newbury in Berkshire for pupils aged 5 to 19 with severe and profound hearing loss. The mixed ability primary centre is on a separate site and offers both day and weekly boarding placements. The senior school is also mixed ability although pupils from the primary school do not automatically progress to the secondary school. The secondary school admits pupils from all over the United Kingdom and has a small number of pupils from overseas. It offers both day and termly boarding placements. Nearly all children and young people board. The primary school currently has one boarding facility with both themed and more conventional bedrooms to suit the age profile of the school. The secondary school has six boarding houses. Year 7 has two dedicated boarding houses, Years 8 to 10 live in two larger boarding houses, Year 11 live in a purpose-built boarding house and the sixth form has separate accommodation of individual and shared study bedrooms.

At the time of this inspection there were 232 children and young people in the residential provision.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Children and young people make progress in this residential provision, particularly socially and in building their self-esteem and confidence. Children and young people recognise this for themselves. Staff have a very good understanding of the feelings of isolation and vulnerability that children and young people may experience as a consequence of their hearing impairment. There is a strong sense of an inclusive community, a new feeling for many, which they are very pleased to feel part of. Children and young people say: 'Feels like a home, together like a family'; 'Everyone looks out for each other. We have fights but apologise and get help easily' and 'Care staff are like parents to us.'

There are very good relationships between staff and children and young people. There is considerable enjoyment in each other's company, evidenced in much fun and laughter. Staff demonstrate empathy and provide good role modelling for the children and young people in their care. Communication between staff and children and young people is effective and positive. As a result they say, 'I love how they support me in everything I do', 'They treat us the way we want to be treated' and 'Care staff listen to us, and if we have any worries they sort it out.'

Safety is well promoted and is underpinned by a range of sound policies and procedures that are effectively implemented in practice. Staff are alert to potential risks and children and young people are given information in a variety of ways to educate them on how to keep themselves safe. Staff also check that children understand and know how to apply the information they have been given. This has proved effective as children and young people have made good decisions based on their learning, which they have shared with staff.

The deployment, training, supervision and support of staff enables them to successfully meet the needs of the children and young people. This includes the arrangements for the promotion of health, academic achievement and personal development. Children and young people gain sound, age-appropriate life and independence skills. For example younger children enjoy cooking club and eating and sharing what they have made, older young people do their own laundry and may prepare their own meals. Staff successfully promote participation in activities, both in school and in the community, that develop self-esteem and resilience as well as reflecting the interests and abilities of the young people. One young person said, 'I love this house so much I stay at weekends. The care staff will do what they need to make you happy, like taking my laptop to be fixed in their own time.' Another said, 'Mary Hare is a brilliant school. I love it.'

There are formal and informal systems for children and young people to have a voice in the school. Representatives on the student council take their role seriously and ensure they get the views and opinions of their peers to take to the meeting. The accessibility of staff enables their voices to be heard informally on a daily basis with prompt responses from staff. Young people said, 'They listen to us, for example we now have a common room for year 10. I'm impressed by that.'

Staff know the children and young people well and have a good understanding of their individual needs and vulnerabilities. Children and young people confirm this: 'There's always someone to talk to'; 'staff take good care of us' and 'I think the care staff are better than best and they are all lovely and they care about us very well.' This is consistent across the primary and secondary school sites. There is an independent listener who visits the school every half-term so that children and young people may get to know the person whose contact details are well advertised. There is also easily accessible information on notice boards about external help lines that children and young people could use.

Children and young people have a positive experience of moving in and moving on. The induction of children and young people new to boarding is thorough and robust. New boarders have the opportunity to visit the school and value this experience. There is also a virtual tour of some of the accommodation on the school's website that enables young people to refresh their memories before starting school. The induction process is measured and gives children and young people the opportunity to build up and test the knowledge that they have gained. One young person said, 'I was scared on the first day, a bit nervous on the second and fine by the third.' Transitions between houses are also well managed as is preparation for leaving.

A significant strength of the school is the close working relationships between the staff teams. There is frequent and effective communication between the residential, medical, education and therapy staff. This holistic approach informs and underpins the care provided and enables staff to work consistently with children and young people. This information is not consistently well documented in the care planning records.

Children and young people respond positively to care that is given sensitively. Staff have a strong awareness of the vulnerabilities associated with hearing impairment and how that is affecting each child. Staff, children and young people understand difference and focus on inclusion. Equal opportunities are successfully promoted.

Since the last inspection the school has built a second year-seven house. Although a separate building the children are encouraged to see this as part of the overall year seven provision. This provides them with a good range of communal space that is very well used and appreciated, particularly the kitchen when cooking club is on. The houses for years eight to ten have also been given additional communal space which they are enjoying. There is a five year programme of the continuous improvement of facilities and standard of accommodation. The leadership team have recognised that some areas of the accommodation are tired, the sixth form houses for example, and this is being addressed as part of rolling programme. The majority of children and young people report that their possessions are safe. They all have lockable space in the houses, either in their rooms or in lockers. Children and young people are happy with their sleeping accommodation. Staff undertake active risk assessments about sleeping accommodation on the basis of observed behaviours and take action in response. However this is not formalised in a written risk assessment.

Children and young people are positive about the wide range of activities on offer, both off and on site. Examples include specialist football training at Reading FC, archery, brownies, trampolining, swimming and horse riding. The on-site Coles Diner is well used and the youth club run from there is very popular with children of all ages. They are enabled and encouraged to maintain existing interests and skills and develop new ones, in school and in the local community.

Staff promote children's and young people's health well. Menus show a balanced and varied diet. Individual dietary requirements on health or religious grounds are sensitively catered for.

Through surveys and in discussion some children and young people expressed satisfaction with the food provided and others said that they would like to see some improvement. The management team are aware of this and are actively working to address the concerns raised. Children and young people enjoy meal times as well-managed, social occasions. Older young people appreciate the flexibility of being able to eat in houses and others being able to order food in the diner occasionally. Healthcare arrangements are robust. Children and young people's routine and emerging health needs are well met by an experienced and well-trained team that includes two full-time registered nurses and a health and well-being officer. The team work very well together and play a significant part in meeting the individual needs of children and young people. Medication arrangements are robust, underpinned by thorough training for staff.

The quality of written plans is variable. Staff demonstrate a good working knowledge of how to meet the day-to-day needs of children and young people and a sound awareness of risk management that they implement in practice. In some cases this is underpinned by detailed plans, other plans lack detail and information is not consistently carried forward. There are inconsistencies across the sites. Children who have support needs in relation to welfare do not currently have a specific plan. Although the necessary professionals are working together to support children and young people there is a lack of documentation to demonstrate who this and there is no record of evaluation of the work. Staff are aware of the risks presented by some children and young people. However the sample of written risk assessments seen lack detail and clarity. For example they do not show all known risks, and any strategies employed or support offered to reduce that risk.

In the light of the last inspection the leadership team have worked hard to demonstrate how the views and feelings of children and young people are actively sought. Staff do this formally through house meetings, half-termly one to ones and the student council. The elected representatives for the student council understand their role in gaining the views of others. Young people also complete feedback forms after activities. Examples of action taken in response to young people's views include the creation of a common room for Year 10 in Mansell House, the provision of table football and requests for food to cook on Saturday evenings. Staff are sensitive to, and respond appropriately to, the communication needs of children and young people. While respecting the aural ethos of the school, residential staff employ differing communication methods to enable young people to express themselves most effectively and to their satisfaction.

Children and young people say that staff support them to communicate with their family. They achieve this by use of webcam and other similar methods. Staff also facilitate children and young people's private and supported use of house land lines and mobiles at their request. Staff communication with parents is determined by the needs and/or age of the young people. Parents report a good level of satisfaction with staff contact.

Staff are knowledgeable about the good policies and procedures that underpin their practice.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Children and young people are safe and report that they feel safe. There are sound complaints processes known to children and young people. They very rarely need to use them because staff recognise the signs that children are not happy and intervene early so a complaint is not necessary. For example, staff help them to sort out niggles in relationships before they become an issue. Children and young people are confident that any bullying is well-managed by staff and say that it happens rarely. All children and young people have a trusted adult to whom they could bring their concerns, with the health and well-being officer a popular choice.

The leadership team have been robust in their response to the last inspection and have made significant improvements to the safeguarding of children and young people. Effective leadership by the designated safeguarding lead has ensured that staff know, understand and effectively implement safeguarding procedures. Recording systems are of a good standard and provide a secure audit trail. There is a dedicated and knowledgeable safeguarding governor who is actively involved and robust in reporting on the half-termly visits. The care and education sub-committee monitors and signs off safeguarding records. Staff are strong advocates in the promotion of children and young people's safety and in equipping them to keep themselves safe. Residential and academic staff are effectively working together to develop and promote children's understanding of 'good touch, bad touch'. The sixth form have been involved in the development of a relationships policy for their age group and work is planned with other year groups. There are good examples of working with local authorities, external professionals and agencies to safeguard young people, such as the police coming in to talk about drugs and safe driving on separate occasions.

Children and young people enjoy age-appropriate freedom. Staff have well-established monitoring systems that highlight any unplanned absences. There are very few instances of young people going absent without permission. When this does happen staff actively engage in searching for and communicating with the young person so that they are found quickly.

Staff have a good understanding and knowledge of the vulnerabilities of and potential risks to the children and young people in their care. Where specific concerns are identified staff successfully engage with parents and external agencies. These include drug and alcohol education/advice service and mental health support. This is underpinned by training for staff in specific areas, such as child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. Staff articulate meaningfully how training has heightened their awareness and informed their safeguarding practice. Children and young people are well informed about how to keep themselves safe on social media and have put their learning into practice, alerting staff when they have concerns.

There is a very inclusive atmosphere in the school. Children and young people demonstrate a strong awareness of discrimination. They behave very thoughtfully towards each other, keen to support and help in overcoming difficulties, in communication for example.

Staff implement the comprehensive risk assessments in relation to the range of activities enjoyed by the children and young people. Their individual needs are considered in the light of the activity and the steps required to enable them to participate are identified and met.

Staff promote positive behaviour management to good effect, with an emphasis on restorative justice, a reward system and learning from reflection on behaviour. Children and young people behave well. Staff challenge minor misdemeanours appropriately. Children and young people understand the boundaries and feel the use of sanctions is fair and proportionate. There is very limited use of physical intervention.

The application of the staff recruitment policy and procedures is robust, ensuring suitable people are employed to work in the school.

The large school site and accommodation generally provides children and young people with a safe and secure environment, with generally strong health and safety practice. Routine checks and maintenance are undertaken as required. The school broadly complies with fire regulations, including fire drills and any oversights have been picked up in subsequent checks. However actions in response to health and safety recommendations, following a legionella assessment for example, are based on the personal knowledge and experience of the maintenance team rather than backed up by records. There is a minor weakness in the noting and reporting of concerns

by staff of particular issues, external lights not working for example.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

The management team show passion and commitment to providing an environment in which children and young people are supported and encouraged to succeed, personally and academically. Their academic progress is well evidenced and work is in progress to extend this to more systematically measure personal achievements. The experienced Vice Principal (Care) provides strategic oversight of the residential provision and supports the joint Heads of Care. The staff team effectively communicate the ethos of the school to support deaf children and young people in their emotional and social well-being in their interactions with children and young people, parents and professionals and external agencies involved with the school.

There are sufficient staff deployed to meet the needs of the children and young people. There is a strong group of established, suitably qualified and competent staff. Staff are flexible and responsive to changing needs in the management of this, and use campus and activity support staff well. Unobtrusive walkie-talkies enable staff to keep in touch over a large site. Children and young people and staff use mobile phones efficiently to maintain contact and keep up-to-date about any changes in plans. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced for their respective roles in the residential provision. Children and young people talk positively about the staff. One said 'I think the care staff are better than best and they are all lovely and they care about us very well.' Staff make themselves readily available to children and young people and are on hand to support the times when, 'I don't always enjoy boarding because I fight with my friends'.

The supervision and support of care staff is robust, and they describe it as useful. They work effectively as house teams and also across the residential provision. Staff handover between each shift and house leaders meet weekly ensuring consistency in approach. There is good team work and campus workers, education staff and trainers contribute to life in the residential provision. Staff are relishing the new training regime implemented since the last inspection and feel valued, especially in the provision of and commitment to the level 3 Diploma. Staff describe enthusiastically how training, both in core skills and specialisms, has made a difference to their practice. Staff with responsibility for training are in the process of reviewing the induction programme, looking to dovetail this with the Level 3 Diploma.

Sound monitoring systems by the care standards officer and the safeguarding governor and the use of information from complaints and feedback effectively promote learning. This has led to changes, for example in the PHSE programme, the implementation of a new system for reviewing incidents and monitoring of in-house sanctions records. Parental voice as expressed on Parent View is very positive about the school, showing an improvement on last year.

The leadership team are focused on further emphasising the residential provision within the school and moving forward, supported by an active and involved governing body. The chair of governors sees their role to provide challenge to the leadership team, 'to hold them to account and act as critical friends'. The leadership team regularly review and update policies and procedures, using current guidance. These are then ratified by governors through discussion at a governors meeting. The leadership team responded robustly and thoroughly to the last report, addressing the shortfalls well. The development plans show a strong desire to further improve.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	110180
Social care unique reference number	SC011137
DfE registration number	869/7005

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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	230
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	4 to19
Headteacher	Peter Gale
Date of previous boarding inspection	06/10/2014
Telephone number	01635 244200
Email address	p.gale@maryhare.org.uk

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