

Heathlands School

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

Inspection dates

11/01/2016 to 13/01/2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people and young people

Outstanding 1

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people and young people are protected

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Staff present a positive role model for children and young people who are deaf. They encourage broad aspirations and limitless confidence which directly improves outcomes for children and young people.
- Children and young people make exceptional progress across all areas of development from the point of joining the residential provision. This progress is central to the aims of the provision.
- On-going creative practice enhances children and young people's individual and collective life experiences. The introduction of new opportunities increases participation in community activities and interaction with hearing peers. This broadens social skills and development.
- Robust planning and information sharing minimises the destabilising impact of transitions into this provision. Staff quickly attune to children and young people's presenting behaviours. Consistent approaches to care form the foundations of trusting relationships.
- Open communication between staff, professionals and family members ensures there is cohesive approach to children and young people's care and education.
- The governing body and leaders in the school undertake regular monitoring which informs the on-going drive for improvement. Children and young people's views are integral to decision making and they know that staff listen to them.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to support residential staff to develop greater confidence in their record keeping skills.
- Further consider the safe use of internet ready mobile phones by children and young people to consolidate the existing staff approach to this.

Information about this inspection

At the time of the inspection, there were 11 residential pupils. One hour and thirty minutes' notice was given prior to the start of the inspection. The inspection methodology included a review of parent view and surveys completed by children and young people, their parents or carers; observation of residential care routines and practice; scrutiny of policies and records; liaison with parents by telephone and e mail; meetings with staff and residential pupils. Discussions took place with a range of staff responsible for leading, managing, and delivering residential care; these included residential staff, support staff, the Head of Pastoral Care the Head teacher and the school governor with responsibility for safeguarding. Discussions also took place with external professionals involved with the residential provision; this included the local authority designated officer, a social worker and local authority team manager. An interpreter was used to facilitate communication with staff, children and young people.

Inspection team

Angie Bishop

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 local authority run day and residential school for children and young people aged 3 to 16 years, who are deaf. Residential provision and education are on the same site. There are 105 pupils on role with 11 currently receiving residential services. Children and young people reside at the school during the school week. Heath House is a two-storey building that offers accommodation on the first floor for up to 20 male and female residential pupils, in single or shared study bedrooms. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2014.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

The residential provision represents a home away from home for all children and young people. It is warm, very welcoming and the presence of children and young people is evident in all areas. Staff encourage children and young people to personalise all areas of the home and there are a number of photographs displayed around the accommodation. For example, a member of staff engages children and young people in following a British astronaut in space. As a result, interest in space travel has increased and children and young people have recently decorated a shared bedroom and hallway with pictures and information about space travel. One young person proudly shares his replica model of a spacecraft with visitors.

Children, young people and their families are integral to the pre admission and continual planning process. Families receive a comprehensive welcome guide and children and young people have an informative pictorial guide to residential life. During pre-admission visits, children, young people and their families spend time in the residential setting, they also meet staff and existing residential pupils. This experience is invaluable for all involved and significantly reduces anxiety. One parent said: 'We visited with my son, we went away and he stayed for a night, we then went back the next day and there was a barbecue for us and all of the other parents and children, we know he is looked after.'

All staff use sign language and two members of residential staff are deaf adults. This brings an additional and unique understanding of living with deafness to the care they deliver. This understanding contributes to the strong trusting relationships which quickly develop between residential staff, children and young people. Peer relationships are positive and staff actively promote these by engaging children and young people in group activities which focus on united confidence building. Staff endeavour to promote the continuation of peer relationships by linking parents with each other in a, 'buddy' system. This increases the opportunity for children, young people and their families to socialise during school holiday time and has dual benefits as a developing support network for parents and carers.

Prior to joining this school, children and young people have often become isolated in mainstream school because of their deafness or hearing impairment. This has a detrimental impact on all round development and self-esteem. All children and young people make exceptional progress in their personal, social and academic development from their respective points on joining this school. Many children and young people do not know how to communicate using signs when starting here, within weeks they begin to confidently communicate with staff and peers. A parent said: 'His signing is improving and he is around other signers. His communication has come on brilliantly. His independence skills have improved, he particularly likes to help in the kitchen and is learning to plan meals, shop and cook.'

Staff are exceptionally positive role models and actively encourage the expansion of children and young people's collective and individual life experiences. Age appropriate aspirations for children and young people are very high and staff channel and promote ceiling free aims for the future. All staff adopt and promote a can do attitude and share

a united enthusiasm for success. One young person said: 'I would like to be the first deaf astronaut, or maybe I will design the next space station or rocket.'

Children and young people travel significant distances from their home areas to join this school and residential provision. The head teacher and head of pastoral care carefully balance this alongside children and young people's needs and the potential benefit to them of joining the school and residential provision.

Children and young people make an active contribution to their residential experience. They inform decision making about changes and meet regularly to share their views and feelings. Staff also use surveys to seek views to improve areas of their service in line with children and young people's suggestions. The heads and staff respond to children and young people and are creative at meeting their identified wishes.

Where children and young people have additional health needs, staff respond to these appropriately and in line with guidance from experienced medical professionals. In emergencies, procedures are clear and all staff understand how to implement them.

Staff effectively safeguard children and young people. They support them to learn about their personal safety and respond appropriately and in a timely manner if they have concerns about safety or wellbeing. Where there are child protection concerns the head of pastoral care and the head teacher contribute fully to the statutory monitoring and review process. Often, this provides a valuable insight into the child or young person's functioning away from the family home. A social worker said: 'They help me understand the child away from her home setting.'

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Each child and young person can choose décor for their bedroom and staff encourage personalisation of the living accommodation. Despite being in situ in the school building, the residential accommodation does not have an institutionalised appearance. It is well decorated and comfortably furnished.

Children and young people have access to multiple activities in the accommodation including books, board and electronic games and art and craft equipment. In the evenings children, young people and staff can use the school hall to take part in physical group activities. In spring and summertime, children and young people enjoy outdoor activities in the school grounds and community. Staff continually research community activities and experiences for the children and young people. With appropriate permission from parents and carers the opportunity to mix with hearing peers is maximised. One young person signed: 'I have been going to a beavers group, I go along with friends from here but tomorrow night I am going on my own and I will be with hearing people. I am not worried, I am happy to be going.'

Staff encourage children and young people to join in meal planning, preparation and cooking in the house kitchen, observations of this indicate that it is an enjoyable part of daily routines. Staff buy good quality, healthy food, drink and snacks from a local supermarket. Children and young people help staff put the food away in the kitchen cupboards. This provides an opportunity for children and young people to see new foods

and think about alternate meals they may like to try. Menus are varied and do not follow a cyclical rota thus avoiding repetition and boredom with food. Staff ensure there is always alternate food available should children or young people wish to eat something different from the menu choice. A variety of fruit is always available for snacks. Children, young people and staff eat their evening meals at the table in the kitchen. Discussions take place about the school day and plans for the evening activities, one parent describes this as, 'a really homely experience.' Staff utilise meals as a valuable means to promote children and young people's skills for independence. Planning and preparation for packed lunches is a key activity which children and young people actively take part in. During this one regular process, children and young people learn about the planning, shopping, finance, preparation, storage and serving. Staff also discuss the environmental impact of waste recycling.

Children and young people receive predictable care that is characterised by consistent boundaries and routines. In line with care plans, a small dedicated staff team deliver care with passion and enthusiasm. Care is unanimously child focussed and staff strive to provide the best possible care for all children and young people. Staff quickly attune to children and young people and are knowledgeable of each child and young person's needs. In house care plans focus on jointly agreed targets and clearly acknowledge children and young people's views about their achievements. Homework is part of the daily routine in between school finishing and the evening meal time. Where there is no homework, staff engage children and young people in purposeful learning activities. For example, exploring current affairs. Senior staff maintain a regular oversight of care to ensure it is meeting children and young people's needs. When they identify areas for improvement, they promptly implement change to benefit children and young people.

Staff receive on-going training in identifying and promoting physical and emotional health and wellbeing. Where children and young people present with changes in behaviour, staff consult and engage with external professionals to identify appropriate interventions and approaches. They are knowledgeable of individual medical conditions and receive specialist training to ensure they are able to meet children and young people's ongoing health needs. A parent said: 'I was very apprehensive boarding my child because of her medical and independence issues. Her independence skills are improving and I am confident in the staff's ability to administer her medication and they are trained in administering her emergency treatment.'

During residential stays, staff creatively promote contact between children, young people and their families. Use of computer equipment enables children, young people and their families to sign. This improves on previous methods of communication which were dependent on typed calls. One child signed: 'I miss my family, they are a really long way away, the good thing is I can actually see them and they can see me. They know I am okay and I know they are okay, that makes being here much better.' Parents and family members are also welcome to visit their dependants in the residential provision during the school week.

An independent person visits the school once a month and is available to children and young people if they wish to speak to her at other times. Staff clearly display her contact details and information about the support she can offer. This provides the opportunity for the sharing of any issues, worries or concerns with someone children and young people do not view as a member of staff.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

There are clear protocols and processes in place to protect children and young people from harm. All staff underpin their robust safeguarding practice with a strong theoretical basis. There have been no incidents of missing from the residential provision. However, staff know how they would respond if a child or young person were to be missing. Policies and protocols are comprehensive and residential staff understand how to implement them. Staff promptly refer child protection concerns to the appropriate authorities and staff engage children in individual support. Staff use tools and resources in a needs led approach focussed on enabling children and young people to keep themselves safe. The provision now has a dedicated governor responsible for safeguarding, she brings relevant external experience to the role providing a knowledgeable oversight of policies, procedures and practices.

Staff devise and implement risk assessments to cover children and young people's individual risk presenting behaviours, internal and external activity risk and environmental risks in the residential provision. Staff produce and share pictorial risk assessments and procedures with children and young people, they also display these around the residential provision. Staff effectively balance care and safety in a non-oppressive way and are keen to normalise safety precautions without inadvertently disclosing children and young people's individual risk needs to their peers. Children, young people and staff set up creative fire evacuations. Children and young people have made a fake fire model, staff place this in locations to block different exits and assess responses. Following the evacuations staff, children and young people reflect on any issues staff identify during the evacuation.

Clear records document incidents and accidents including a comprehensive overview by a senior member of staff and children and young people's responses. Recent identification that staff could not keep a child and young person safe and maintain the safety of other children and young people led to a suspension of one child's residential stays. Senior staff successfully reintegrated the young person back into residential stays following a period working with professionals and family members to formulate a comprehensive reintroduction plan. A social worker said: 'They have safeguarded her and were quick to analyse the risk and identify where they were not able to keep her safe and not able to effectively meet her needs. They have worked with us and her and have now reintegrated her which is a really good thing.'

Staff, children and young people understand the approach to bullying and unacceptable behaviour. Children engage in a reward led system which clearly explains consequences to actions. When children and young people display uncharacteristic behaviour that affects their peers, staff respond quickly and encourage reflection and understanding of behavioural impact. Staff always seek to understand the triggers or behaviour and update assessments to reflect their observations. They share this with school staff and this contributes to the seamless approach to care between the school and residential provision.

Some children and young people bring mobile telephone devices into the residential provision. Staff are aware of the potential risks of mobile internet access and are

appropriately vigilant during the periods where children and young people can use these. Staff, parents, children and young people would benefit from further guidance on the use of internet ready devices in the residential provision.

Robust safer recruitment processes are in place and all staff who have a role in recruitment implement these routinely.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

Senior staff in the school and the governing body understand the aims, purpose and ethos of the residential provision. The governors undertake frequent visits to the provision and spend time with children, young people and staff. Since the last inspection, governors all undertake routine monitoring visits, this provides them all with a valuable overview of the residential care in practice. These visits take place in pairs, this presents a learning opportunity for governors who share and reflect on their individual observations and analyses. The head of pastoral care, the head teacher and the governors complete regular reviews and ongoing monitoring of children and young people's experiences. They utilise the outcomes to inform improvement planning for the residential provision. Ongoing communication between the staff, professionals, parents and carers also informs change planning and provides a cohesive approach to care. As a result, there is early identification of issues and collective responses. A parent said: 'Staff definitely listen to me, they value my feedback and maintain regular contact with me. They understand and respect and act on my views. They share everything with me and I can contact them anytime.'

Alongside the wider evaluation of the provision, senior staff maintain a frequent oversight of children and young people's records. This recently led to the commencement of a program to transform record keeping to maximise its benefit to children and young people now and in the future. Senior staff seek children and young people's views. Where children and young people do not wish to discuss concerns with staff, they know how to access the independent visitor.

A clear and concise complaints policy is available to parents, there have been no complaints since the last inspection.

All staff receive regular good quality supervision. Records provide a clear representation of residential staff experiences and investment in their individual development. Staff induction is thorough and managers offer appropriate support and direction to guide staff to achieve competence in their roles. Staff describe supportive and available management who appropriately focus on the difference residential staff can make to children and young people's lives. Records of supervisions and training indicate a child focussed and needs led approach to the management of staff. Prompt introduction of new training courses where staff identify the need, ensures staff are equipped to respond effectively at all times to children and young people's changing needs.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people 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 and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people 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 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 and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people 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	117685
Social care unique reference number	SC056396
DfE registration number	919/7032

This inspection was carried out under the Children and young people 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	11
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to16
Headteacher	Deborah Jones-Stevens
Date of previous residential inspection	14/11/2014
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