

Heathlands School

Heathlands School for Deaf Children, Heathlands Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5AY

Inspection dates

6 June to 8 June 2016

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding 1

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children 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

- Children and young people make significant progress during their time in the residential provision. Inclusion in the community with their hearing peers is an important part of their experiences.
- All staff are fully trained in child protection, and the students' safety is at the heart of the school. There are robust and highly effective safeguarding arrangements which are monitored by the school's governors.
- Children and young people live in a safe environment. A health and safety audit undertaken by the local authority reported it as an outstanding provision.
- Staff understand that transitions into school and the residential provision can be difficult for some children and their families. Parents commented that they were fully involved in transition planning.
- Staff have high aspirations for children and young people, and are proactive in looking at how they can continually support them to reach their full potential.
- Staff give meticulous consideration to the assessment of risk so that children and young people can engage in a wide variety of activities while being kept safe.
- Governors and leaders undertake regular monitoring checks, and spend time with the children and young people to gain their views wishes and feelings.

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?

- To ensure that children and young people have contact details of an independent person to use outside of school hours.

Information about this inspection

The school was notified of the inspection three hours before it commenced. Time was spent in the boarding provision during the inspection. Meals were attended, as well as activities. Observations were made of the interactions between staff and students. Meetings took place with children and young people, the headteacher, head of pastoral care and residential staff. Discussions were held with parents and the chair of governors. Discussions also took place with the local authority's designated officer. Children's and young people's views were sought through copious time in face-to-face contact and through observation of interactions. The online questionnaire, Parent View, was also used to assess the provision. An interpreter was used to facilitate communication with staff, children and young people.

Inspection team

Trish Palmer

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Heathlands School and its residential provision, Heath House, is in St Albans, Hertfordshire. It is a local authority run day and residential school for pupils, aged three to 16 years, who are deaf. Residential provision and education are on the same site. There are 103 pupils on roll with 12 receiving residential services. Residential students reside at the school during the 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 January 2016.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Children and young people make excellent progress through living in a group environment. They spoke about making friendships and how, in the past, it had been difficult in a mainstream school. There is much evidence that children and young people have positive experiences and the opportunity to attend clubs in the community, which enhances life experiences and inclusion. The children and young people are clearly central to the residential provision, and are encouraged to make it their own by choosing the furniture and decor.

Children and young people have built positive, secure relationships with staff. A young person was extremely excited to see a member of staff who had been away for several weeks. This shows that there are warm, positive, trusting relationships between staff, children and young people.

Children and young people have very positive experiences while boarding. They progress well, thanks to an enthusiastic team of staff who are passionate about children and young people having positive experiences and progressing while in the school and residential environment.

All staff use sign language and two members of residential staff are deaf. This both provides positive role modelling for young people and gives parents confidence that there are staff who have experienced life in a hearing environment. Some children and young people were unable to use sign language or were not confident in using it before coming to the school. A parent commented, 'she has only been at the school since last September and was in a mainstream before. Although she had some sign language, she needed more. The school has really developed her sign language and she is so much more confident now.'

Staff create opportunities for children and young people to learn about the world around them and current issues. To promote this, children and young people watch children's news programmes such as Newsround. Staff interpret and then actively promote a discussion.

Staff understand that children and families can find transitions difficult. Children, young people and their families receive a thorough induction in order to prepare them. Parents spoke positively of the flexibility of the residential staff to tailor an induction plan to meet their child's individual needs. One parent said, 'he was very young, so he spent time getting used to the school and visiting the residential home. He then boarded for a couple of days before he went full time.' Another said, 'I was more apprehensive than she was. She did one night and then built it up, and she loves it.'

The quality of the residential provision is excellent. The children and young people are supported and encouraged to personalise their own space in their bedroom, and were proud to show this off. Children and young people are also encouraged to personalise

other areas of the provision, and are involved in choosing furniture and other equipment. There is a warm, nurturing feeling to the residential provision, with photos of young people and staff along with artwork. There is an excellent resource of books and games covering a wide age range.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The children and young people benefit from living in a nurturing, supportive environment. Staff are knowledgeable about the individual needs of the children and young people, and are dedicated and committed to supporting them to meet their full potential.

Children and young people share a positive mutual respect for staff and each other, and this is an important part of the residential setting. A young person explained that staff and other young people have to flash the bedroom lights from the corridor to alert them if they wish to come in, and have to wait to be invited.

Children and young people said that staff listen to them, and could name a member of staff whom they would speak to if they were worried or upset. One young person commented, 'I can speak to staff if I want to talk or if I have problems with my homework.' Another commented, 'staff here are nice and kind.' An independent visitor meets with the children and young people fortnightly, and staff inform them when she is due.

The governors, as part of their monitoring visit, ensure that they spend time with the young people. This provides children and young people with a variety of adults whom they can speak to if they are worried or upset, yet do not wish to speak to staff. Although there is information explaining who the independent visitor is and her role, there are no contact details for other independent adults, should children or young people wish to speak to someone outside of the school day.

Children and young people attend weekly house meetings where menus, activities and other issues are discussed. Through these meetings, young people are able to choose furniture for the lounges and the decor of the home. Staff produce a purposeful letter termly to inform the children and young people of what they said, what staff did and upcoming plans for the provision. This makes house meetings meaningful and young people can see that they are listened to, and that staff act on ideas or requests. They are encouraged to personalise their part of the shared bedrooms. Staff ensure that children and young people know that, even if they are not staying in the residential provision that night, this is their space and that no other children will use their bed.

Staff involve children and young people in menu planning and the ordering of food. They are encouraged to eat a well-balanced, healthy diet. There is always a good variety of food and fresh fruit available. Children and young people are involved in the preparation and cooking of meals. This helps them to learn new skills and promotes their independence. Meal times are seen as a sociable occasion. Children and young people talk about their day, and plans for the evening are discussed. Breakfast is also seen as an important part of the educational day, and children and young people are encouraged to eat a healthy breakfast before walking across to the school.

Children and young people are learning the value of money and are supported in going to the local shops with staff to purchase items. Young people spoken to say that they have to ask for a magazine, hand over the money and check their change. They also go out for meals and order their food. This helps to build their confidence and supports them in learning how to communicate in a hearing environment. A parent commented, 'staff have helped her to develop her independence and take responsibility. I have noticed a difference. She does more for herself, now'.

Children and young people have access to a wide variety of age-appropriate games and books. Staff spend quality time with them. A young person was seen playing a new game that he had learnt from a member of staff and was able to explain the rules. Staff encourage the children and young people to participate and share in games. This supports social interaction and communication. There are also large, well-equipped grounds which young people can use in the summer, alongside an all-weather football pitch. A parent commented, 'he's been able to build and maintain meaningful relationships. The school has taught him to make friends and maintain these, which is important.'

Staff know the importance of inclusion, and are proactive in supporting children and young people to attend clubs in the community. Children and young people go swimming once a week at the local leisure centre. Some young people attend local Cubs or Girl Guides packs. Staff attend and interpret for the young people, to support inclusion. Due to the young people not being able to attend an overnight camp to gain their badge, some of the leaders came and helped them to set up a tent in the school grounds. They could participate in the activities, and a member of staff stayed with them overnight. This enabled them to get their camping badge, and shows how staff and community-based clubs can work together so that young people can have the same opportunities as other children. A parent commented, 'She now attends Girl Guides with another girl from school. It is important, as she can establish friendships.'

Children and young people understand the rules and boundaries that are in place in school, and there are also reminders around the school and residential provision. There is a rewards system in place. Children and young people were able to explain their individual targets and how these can be achieved. Once they have completed a target, they can have a prize from the cupboard. Staff understand the importance of rewarding the younger children instantly. For older young people, a different system is in place where they can earn extra activities or money towards an item of their choice.

The residential staff work closely with the school in setting targets. This ensures that there is not a wide range of different targets set. Children and young people are involved in setting some. These are reviewed termly, and children and young people comment on their achievements. The school has been using a schools information monitoring system to monitor a wide range of behaviours. Since the last inspection, the residential provision has begun to use this. This has made a significant difference to the recording, monitoring and effective working at the school.

Care plans are individualised, and are comprehensive and live documents. These are frequently reviewed and updated to ensure that they reflect the current needs of children and young people, and are implemented by a knowledgeable consistent staff

team.

Ongoing training is an important part of the school's quest for excellence. Staff spoken to say that they are supported in undertaking training which will enhance the experience and needs of the children and young people. The school works with other agencies when behaviours have been identified. Appropriate intervention and support are discussed, and incorporated into their care plans.

Staff ensure that specialist training is up to date, to be able to meet children's and young people's specific medical needs. A parent commented, 'I have no concerns that staff do not understand her condition, and am confident they could deal with anything which may arise.' Another commented, 'living so far away, we have to trust the staff if he is unwell. Staff know him well and always keep me updated.'

Due to some children and young people living at a distance from home, contact is important. Children and young people can 'Facetime' (video facility) their parents, either in private or in the communal areas, whenever they wish. For some young people, contact can have a detrimental effect on their behaviours. Staff and a parent identified that frequent contact was difficult for a young person to manage, and his behaviour deteriorated afterwards. Staff worked with his parents and, by giving him a few days to settle in, when he next speaks to his mum he is able to manage his behaviours, and there have been no incidents since the last inspection.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Children and young people say that they feel safe and happy. There is a range of adults whom they can speak to if they have any worries or concerns.

Staff are not risk averse, and understand that children and young people need to learn to manage risks according to their age, understanding and ability. Risk assessments are robust, with every conceivable risk considered and controlled measures put in place. Consequently, children and young people can participate in a wide variety of activities. The headteacher and head of pastoral care carefully consider the children and young people staying in the residential provision, along with sleeping accommodation, so that they feel safe, comfortable and well cared for.

Staff understand and respond to any concerns that a young person is at risk of harm and are clear about who to report these to. The headteacher and head of pastoral care have undertaken the appropriate safeguarding training. All concerns are logged, a running sheet evidencing actions is used and outcomes are recorded. The governors also monitor this. Staff work closely with other professionals when concerns become known. This includes the designated officer responsible for safeguarding.

There is a dedicated governor responsible for safeguarding who has the knowledge and experience to review policies, procedures and practices. As part of the governors' monitoring, they regularly ask young people if they are happy and safe.

Behaviour is exemplary. Staff have training in physical intervention. There have been no incidents since the last inspection. There has been one negative consequence since the

last inspection. The young person involved has signed to say that he was in agreement with the sanction. Systems are monitored to look at the effectiveness, and any patterns or trends. Positive behaviours are encouraged by all staff, and children and young people respond well to positive praise.

Children and young people understand that bullying is unacceptable. There have been no records of bullying since the last inspection. A parent commented, 'staff are vigilant about bullying. Sometimes they just get fed up with each other, as all children do. Staff always ring me if he has upset or been upset by another child. He needs to learn how to build and manage friendships.' Children and young people spoken to say that they would inform staff if someone were being unkind to them.

Staff record any concerns or behaviours on the school information monitoring system, so that both school and residential staff can identify patterns and work together. Children and young people in both the school and the residential provision are courteous and respectful to each other, as well as to adults. Good manners are an important part of school life.

Staff keep children and young people as safe as possible in the cyber-world. Staff speak to them about how they can keep safe while using mobile phones and to tell them if they receive something from someone whom they do not know, or if they are worried. Staff monitor the use of electronic devices and keep themselves updated on new social media sites. Adults, children or young people cannot take devices with cameras into the sleeping accommodation. This further protects and safeguards them, and makes them feel safe. Information regarding Internet safety has been sent to parents, and information is also available in the school foyer.

The senior management team and residential staff have undertaken Prevent training, and training to counter radicalisation and child sexual exploitation. Staff are alert to the risks and know the routes to voice any concerns or obtain advice, such as through local authority experts.

Children and young people live in a safe environment. All necessary health and safety checks are in place. Key staff address maintenance issues promptly. A robust health and safety audit was conducted in March by the local authority, and a grading of outstanding was obtained. Staff involved with recruitment follow safer recruitment practice. They employ only adults deemed to be suitable to work with children. Checks for staff living on site have been obtained.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

Senior managers in both school and the residential provision are dedicated and fully committed to providing effective and efficient leadership. The culture of the school and the residential provision is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all children and young people. Leaders and managers ensure that children and young people make good academic and progress, are safe and achieve their goals.

An experienced and active governing body underpins all the work. Governors are regular visitors to the school and residential provision. They mingle with the children and young people and staff, and provide regular scrutiny and monitoring.

Staff regularly seek feedback from children and young people and ensure that they respond to requests, meaning that they feel that their ideas and opinions are important. Staff are proactive in bringing families together and come up with innovative ideas to bring both hearing and deaf parents together, which has meant that friendships and support within the parent group have been made.

The care that children and young people receive is exceptional. Staff from school and the residential provision work closely together, and this enhances the progression and experiences of the young people. They address difficult and challenging issues, and develop a consistent and shared approach.

Staff communicate exceptionally well with parents. They develop trusting relationships. Parents feel free to discuss anything in their child's life that may affect their care or education. A parent commented, 'I trust the staff implicitly. They deal with everything and I can call anytime I want.'

Leaders, managers and staff receive regular and effective supervision that is recorded. There is effective support and challenge to ensure that the professional development of staff and leaders provides the right environment for good practice to thrive.

Children and young people are cared for by an experienced and dedicated team that works together to enhance the life experiences of children and young people. There are good levels of staffing. Managers will take immediate action if staffing levels drop. Teaching assistants who work directly with the children or young people in school will cover shifts; senior managers will also cover if there is a shortfall. This means that there is continuity for the children and young people.

There have been no complaints since the last inspection, yet there is good evidence that complaints would be dealt with without delay and a record of any action taken.

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	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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	103
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	Three to 16
Headteacher	Deborah Jones-Stevens
Date of previous boarding inspection	11 January 2016
Telephone number	01727 754060
Email address	head@heathlands.herts.sch.uk

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