

# Royal School for the Blind

Royal School for the Blind Liverpool, Church Road North, Liverpool L15 6TQ

<b>Inspection dates</b>	4/10/2016 to 6/10/2016	
<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
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 school provides outstanding levels of care and support for children and young people. Staff across the school work closely and collaboratively and are aware of the individual needs of pupils. Relationships between staff and children are strong and warm.
- The children and young people make sustained progress, both academically and personally, during their time at the school. They make effective 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.
- Safeguarding policies and practice operate effectively to keep children and young people safe. The school has a robust training programme and works closely with other authorities to ensure that children and young people are safe.
- Senior staff ensure that there is a clear vision to improve children's lives that all staff understand and energetically work to fulfil.

### 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?

- Further improve the detail of children's records of achievement, so that any analysis

of the impact of activities and strategies clearly identifies the next steps necessary to support children's continuous development.

- Ensure that whole-school risk assessments are updated in a timely way, to capture and assess the effectiveness of all identified actions arising from the development of the residential provision.

## Information about this inspection

The school was contacted on the morning of day one by the lead inspector to announce the inspection. The inspection took place over three days, with final feedback provided on day three. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice and activities over two evenings; formal and informal interaction with residential pupils; meetings and discussions with the headteacher, head of care (also the designated safeguarding lead), assistant head of care, residential worker, school nurse, physiotherapy team, school business manager, chair of governors and governor responsible for residential oversight and parents. Telephone and email contact was made with placing authorities. Before the inspection, feedback was obtained from the local safeguarding authority.

## Inspection team

Denise Jolly

Lead social care inspector

# **Full Report**

## **Information about this school**

The Royal School for the Blind is a non-maintained charitable school that provides education and accommodation for children and young people who have 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 two to 19 years, with residential provision for up to 20 children and young people during weekdays in term time. There are currently 33 children on roll. Ten pupils use the residential provision: six male and four female pupils. A number of young people attend the afterschool club. 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 a detached property 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 October 2015.

## Inspection judgements

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

**Good**

The children and young people make sustained academic and personal progress at the school. Children express great pleasure in their time in residence. When the inspector asked the children's council, 'Are you happy when you stay at school?' one child paused, thought about it, smiled broadly and then said, 'Yeeeeehs!' and clapped her hands in delight. Another young person smiled, turned his head and looked at staff with an expression of pleasure. The inspector observed staff consistently helping young people to manage their feelings and behaviour, and to increase their social skills, confidence and independence.

Parents value the trusted and secure relationships that they see their children have with the staff team. They are positive regarding the changes that they see in their children, and one said, 'I couldn't think of a better place for my child to be.' Professionals are positive about the collaborative and inclusive approach to multi-professional working that has children's health and happiness at its heart. Placing authorities praise the school for good communication and a can-do attitude.

The children and young people enjoy residential life and the varied range of activities on offer. Staff and young people enjoy each other's company and have fun together. Records such as care plans are well maintained with clear targets set and monitored through regular review. Residential staff are committed and enthusiastic and are keen to develop new ideas, such as how best to monitor the progress and achievements of the young people.

The safety of children and young people is given high priority. Safeguarding procedures are effective, and staff understand the importance of identifying signs of change in children's well-being and sharing information with the appropriate agencies. As a result, children and young people feel safe and valued.

All staff work collaboratively across the school to provide good levels of consistency. Effective strategies are in place to meet children's immediate and developing needs. There are commissioning arrangements with health professionals who work in the school on a daily basis. This ensures that children's complex health needs are addressed very well, so that they can continue to participate in the living and learning experiences provided. In this way, nursing, physiotherapy and speech and language professionals work alongside school staff to provide the necessary expertise that underpins continuous improvement in children's communication and mobility. In turn, this enables children to exercise more control over their lives. Staff encourage children to speak for themselves and are adept at listening and responding to their expressed views and wishes. Children demonstrate how comfortable they are in the residence by their relaxed demeanour and smiles.

Senior leaders recognise the importance of the residential provision and are committed to improvement. Despite the positive outcomes and the outstanding levels of care and support given to the young people, there are a few areas for further improvement to ensure best practice in all areas.

Children and young people receive high levels of individual support from staff who have time to listen to them and play with them, and who know them well. Staff at the school work closely and collaboratively, and the effective handover processes ensure that relevant information is shared. Residential staff also work during the day in school, which ensures high levels of consistency and continuity.

Children, young people and parents give outstanding feedback about the quality of the care, support and guidance provided. One parent said, 'Due to school working in partnership with me, my child has made progress well beyond expectations.' Another said, 'I can't think of a better place for her to be. She is happier, more interactive and has started to tolerate new experiences. The staff go above and beyond.'

The residential care plans are detailed, comprehensive and of high quality. During the child's transition into residential placement, staff take great care to ensure that they have all the information they need and pace introductions to suit each child, so the child enters overnight stays with confidence and emotional security. They outline the complex support needs of the children and young people in an extremely clear and detailed way. This ensures that staff provide holistic, safe and consistent care that enables children to be happy and comfortable, and to make continual progress. Plans and targets are regularly evaluated and modified, to ensure that they accurately reflect progress and change. The small and very experienced staff team uses daily discussion and reflection with the multi-professional team at school, to ensure that it is fully appraised of any challenges or developments that may impact on children's well-being and safety. Celebrations of achievements take place with smiling acknowledgement and praise is given freely.

Arrangements for healthcare are outstanding. Children's and young people's health needs are very well supported by a range of professionals who work in the school, including physiotherapists, nurses and a speech and language assistant. Regular 'team around the child' meetings take place, to ensure that all staff understand the immediate concerns and developments that may impact on children's progress. Staff share successes in their approach to children. For example, physiotherapists have motivated a young person to use her walking aid by timing their session to coincide with her journey to lunch. This helped residential and teaching staff to identify further food-related moments when she could practise her walking, which would enable her to be independent in her mobility. Another child is in the early stages of learning to use a long stick for mobility. Residential staff have identified that he likes to push his pushchair around, to help him to navigate outdoors, and the mobility officer has agreed that this is good preparation for essential learning about how to use a long stick. There are effective procedures for safely managing medication, with well-established procedures for bringing medication in and out of school, which are carefully monitored.

Medication administration records are up to date and are useful reference tools for both staff and young people. This has improved since the last inspection, as the system is now more streamlined. Healthcare plans are of high quality and include emergency epilepsy care plans, when necessary, and records of contact with parents and medical professionals. One parent said, 'Because school work with community nurses, and are

eager to understand her needs, my child's healthcare is excellent. I do not worry about her when she stays overnight.' Staff are appropriately trained and regularly refreshed in using procedures and equipment to support children's medical needs. This includes use of hoists and wheelchairs, physiotherapy equipment and medical procedures, such as hormone injections that a parent might administer. Children thus receive competent and nurturing care that reflects their unique needs and vulnerabilities, and keeps them safe and healthy.

In June 2016, children moved into a detached house on the site. It provides spacious, high-quality accommodation, with immediate access to a safe garden area that children enjoy using. It is comfortable and well maintained so that the children and young people feel relaxed and safe. It is homely and non-institutional in appearance, but contains all the equipment, such as hoist systems and adapted bathrooms, to ensure that children's personal care is carried out with dignity and in privacy. Children enjoy single bedrooms, which are personalised in accordance with the children's own preferences and make use of family contributions. Due to mobility and other safety concerns, some children use bespoke 'safe space' beds. The use of these is carefully monitored and reviewed, so that children can enjoy freedom of movement when this is appropriate. One young person has progressed to using a bed that is now only equipped with bedsidings because his level of risk of harm overnight has diminished. Another young person no longer requires padded areas around his bed, because he has significantly reduced frequency and intensity of self-harming behaviour episodes. These examples demonstrate the commitment of staff to helping children to enjoy increasing confidence and independence in their surroundings.

The children and young people enjoy the food provided. Lunch is eaten in the school dining room, and breakfast and the evening meal are eaten in the residential houses. The food provided is of good quality and is adapted to the dietary needs of individuals. In order for children to make progress, each child has a unique meal plan that clearly sets out the way in which dining should be set up, the texture of the food, and the amount of support and encouragement required to enable them to become as independent as possible. This means that some children learn to feed themselves, while others enjoy being helped in a sociable and dignified way. Staff are appropriately trained in providing liquid feeds for those who have gastrostomy needs, and any dietary concerns are discussed with appropriate professionals at the earliest opportunity. The meals are sociable occasions when staff and young people sit together enjoying each other's company.

There is an excellent range and choice of activities provided for the children and young people, which they enjoy enormously. There is a variety of creative, active, social, physical and cultural activities on and off the school site, such as music, soft play, and sensory play, swimming, walking in the local park or playing with toys. One-off trips to places such as the circus or to community events are a common occurrence. There is weekly specialised football, for children who have disability, at a local sports centre. This is an excellent opportunity for children who have visual impairment, and for those who use wheelchairs, to experience the fun and excitement of playing in a team and scoring goals, and to engage in exercise.

All activities are appropriately risk assessed according to the individual young people

taking part. For example, additional staff go to football to ensure that each child has sufficient support to take part, or to enable any to opt out if it all becomes too much. This enables everyone to have an enjoyable time, because staff encourage them to participate without increasing their anxiety. Following a recommendation at the last inspection, staff take lots of photographs of the children having fun and create diaries of their experiences that are sent home to their families. This provides a clear record of children's experiences and achievements, such as helping to make pancakes or rolling down a grassy slope with expressions of sheer delight. The activities help the young people to acquire new skills and to build social skills and confidence. Greater detail in activity records would help staff to highlight and evaluate the impact of activities on individual children, and provide more detailed accounts of their progress. This is a point for improvement.

### **How well children and young people are protected**

**Good**

Safeguarding procedures at the school are effective in ensuring that children and young people are kept safe from harm. Staff working at the school use their understanding of pupils' specific needs and vulnerabilities well, to ensure that their practice effectively promotes children's and young people's safety.

All staff receive comprehensive information and training in how to keep children and young people safe. This is completed as part of whole-school training, to ensure that everybody knows and understands key messages emerging from best practice and changes in legislation and guidance. In the last year, training has included areas such as e-safety, child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and radicalisation. The head of care worked in partnership with a national training provider to ensure that the sessions reflected the unique needs of children who have disability, visual impairment or complex health needs. The trainer applauded the energy and commitment that staff demonstrated in their willingness to explore difficult scenarios in relation to the needs of children at the school. Governors and senior leaders have undertaken safer recruitment training. Children and young people say that they feel safe at the school. One parent said, 'Children are safe in every aspect, including their development and emotional capacity.' Professionals are unanimous in their view that staff are energetic in their approach to the safety and welfare of children. A social worker said, 'Staff are vigilant to any warning signs of a deterioration in health, which is vital in ensuring she is treated quickly to prevent serious harm.'

Although the residential team is long established, staff recruitment processes are robust and ensure that only suitable people are employed to work at the school. Children are involved in selecting staff as applicants spend time in the residence, to be introduced to them prior to interview, so that their ability to build relationships with children is assessed. The head of care is revising induction programmes because they are now seeking to appoint additional staff. This will ensure that new staff continue to provide children with competent and consistent care.

The whole-school approach to supporting young people to develop strategies for managing their emotions and relationships is universally positive. Staff are skilful in distraction and other low-level responses to unwanted behaviour. Children and young people behave well, and positive behaviour is recognised and rewarded. Staff seek to understand the triggers for children's and young people's behaviour. Sanctions are not



used because staff prefer to help children to identify positive activity and increase their communication ability, so that they feel secure and comfortable during their time at school.

The school site and accommodation provide children and young people with a safe and secure environment. Health and safety are taken seriously, and there are routine checks regarding fire, electrical and gas safety, which are well recorded. Fire drills take place in residential time, and environmental risk assessments are undertaken. The school is working with a safety consultant to ensure that its risk assessment is appropriately reviewed. The residential accommodation was moved in June this year to a detached house on site, to improve fire safety and to facilitate speedier evacuation. Appropriate checks were made regarding the fire safety and emergency evacuation equipment, individual evacuation plans were updated for each child, and staff procedures for managing an evacuation were published. Although all matters were addressed individually, there is no formal record of a timely risk assessment tested out in a drill, to help staff to identify and resolve any potential problems that could arise. This has since been completed, and the house is now part of the updated whole-school risk assessment. The delay has not impacted on the safety of children, but is a point for improvement.

### **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

**Good**

Senior leaders at the school value the contribution that the residential team makes and are supportive of continued development and improvement across the whole school. The headteacher has been in post for 18 months, and feedback from staff, parents, professionals and governors, regarding the smooth transition and the changes made, is positive. Parents particularly value the open style of communication, and the parent governor is enthusiastic about how her role will be used to improve the school's liaison with families, to better support children and young people.

The residential provision is led and managed by an experienced and well-trained staff team. The culture of the residential provision is characterised by high expectations and aspirations for all children and young people. Innovative practice includes the use of integrated multiple communication and sensory systems that maximise opportunities for children to express themselves and achieve independent movement. The aims of the provision are clear and child centred and concentrate on providing additional experiences and improving social intelligence, so that children can participate in life to their full capacity. Parents and professionals are keen to praise the impact that this approach has on children's quality of life outside of school. Care plans have been reorganised into more succinct documents that enable the reader to identify important information and any actions that they must take to encourage children's growth and development. Greater detail in records of achievement would help staff to demonstrate how they adapt plans to ensure that children are supported to take the next small step in their progress.

Team meetings take place weekly and provide an opportunity for the staff team members to come together to discuss practice. The head of care uses this opportunity to relay any important information that she has gathered during the daily senior leadership team meetings. This enhances the collaborative approach to supporting children that is a key feature of the school. The residential staff are committed and enthusiastic in their work and are keen to improve outcomes for the children and young people in their care.

They offer stability and consistency, and contribute to school development, for example by helping to write 'about me' profiles of children that will be used in all settings.

There are sufficient numbers of staff on duty during the evenings and overnight. Staff numbers are currently low, so the school is actively recruiting to appoint two new residential staff members. Any additional staffing needs are covered by education staff who work into the evening to support activities and care. This further improves consistency and cooperative practice between school and the residence, so that children experience common expectations and support that help them to improve.

Residential staff feel well supported in their work, and formal staff supervision takes place termly. Staff value this opportunity to reflect on and develop their own practice. Safeguarding is an important element of each session. Staff are encouraged to consider and share any concerns about the safety and welfare of children, so that early signs can be acted upon to ensure children's well-being. Training equips staff with the specific skills and knowledge that they need to effectively work with the children and young people at the school.

Governors are active in their monitoring of the residential provision. The reports are suitably detailed in content, and include points for improvement, both in the environment and in care practice. The development plan is suitably ambitious, and there is regular monitoring of records. Policies and procedures are regularly reviewed, to ensure that guidance to staff reflects current legislation and best practice. For example, the safeguarding policy has been updated to include the requirements of 'Keeping Children Safe in Education (2016)'. This helps to raise standards in the school. The delays in formal review of the risk assessment for the residence is an isolated oversight that has not adversely affected the children's safety.

## 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 exceed the standard of good and result 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 their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	104735
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC040720
<b>DfE registration number</b>	10017455

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Residential special school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	27
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	2 to 19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Paul Boulton
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	7/10/2015
<b>Telephone number</b>	01517 331012
<b>Email address</b>	susie.bradley@rsblind.co.uk

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