

# Hamilton Lodge School

Hamilton Lodge School, 7-9 Walpole Road, Brighton, BN2 0LS

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Hamilton Lodge School is a non-maintained co-educational residential school which caters for young people between five and 18 years of age who are hearing impaired, with some young people having additional complex needs. The main form of communication used is British Sign Language (BSL). English and Sign Supported English are also used. The school is situated in a residential area of Brighton. Young people board Monday to Friday in five boarding houses which are adjacent to the main school site. At the time of this visit 48 young people were resident.

**Inspection dates:** 6 to 8 June 2017

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 7 June 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Young people make exceptional progress. Their communication, emotional well-being and confidence improves immensely, often following a dreadful experience in mainstream education. Young people are ready to learn. School attendance is excellent.
- Staff promote independence. Young people develop skills that will enhance their adult life, such as using public transport independently and learning how to drive. Young people go on to further education or employment.
- Young people are confident in the staff around them. They enjoy secure and trusting relationships.
- Young people have a clear voice. Staff listen to their hopes and dreams as well as their concerns. Young people are confident that staff take their views seriously.
- Staff work, and young people live, in a community where equality and diversity is a natural part of the culture. Young people are able to express their identity with complete acceptance by all those around them.
- The senior leadership team comprises experts in their field. They work with others, such as universities, to research and develop understanding to support the deaf community.
- A highly skilled and stable staff team supports the young people. Staff place young people at the centre of practice. They are available to the young people for conversation and dialogue at any time.
- The senior management team has been very successful in using one of the boarding houses to accommodate deaf young people with additional needs, such as autism or learning difficulties.
- Specialist training is provided as necessary. This has equipped staff to meet the complex needs of young people.

The residential special school's areas for development:

- Some records are ambiguous and others lack a written record of the decision-making process taken to conclude that a young person is not at risk.

## **What does the residential special school need to do to improve?**

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that all written records are consistent and all safeguarding documents demonstrate the decision-making process and outcome.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

This is a warm, friendly school where young people are cared for exceptionally well. They enjoy each other's company, show exemplary behaviour and have trusting relationships with staff. They engage in a wide range of activities within the school and local community, such as swimming and cricket. A parent said, 'Our son is very keen to leave home and go to school on Monday morning and really enjoys his time there.' A young person told inspectors, 'The school is my passion.'

Young people's communication skills significantly improve because of staying in the school. Some young people, who have never had experience of BSL, are now able to engage in conversation. One young person was able to hear his annual review through an interpreter for the first time. For others, they learn new signs and are able to join them together to have a conversation. A parent said, 'His sign language has improved immensely, he is much better behaved and he has learned to get on well with other pupils and staff.' Staff are able to use videos in BSL to educate young people, for example in healthy relationships.

Since the last inspection, the way staff have adapted to meet the needs of deaf young people with additional complex needs has been of particular note. Staff are diligent in following the carefully constructed care plans. Some young people no longer use challenging behaviours to communicate. For others, their concentration has improved and they are able to engage in their education. Young people are able to learn personal skills, such as washing or pouring a drink. Deaf young people with autism are able to ask 'next' or 'what', and their anxiety is minimised.

Staff use an annex, attached to one of the boarding houses, effectively to develop and promote young people's independence. Older students are able to learn life skills, such as cooking and laundry. They practise other skills, such as budgeting, to prepare them for their future responsibilities. Young people gain job offers, and learn how to drive and communicate with the public. A young person said, 'This school changes our lives.' Another said, 'This school has been good for me.' This is a school where young people are exceptionally well prepared to enter the adult world.

Young people overcome challenges associated with their hearing difficulty. Being deaf is no longer a barrier to them. They become proud of being part of the deaf community as well as being able to enjoy, sometimes for the first time, wider society. For example, a young person wanted to show part of his first independent bus journey, live, to a member of staff using digital technology. Young people celebrate each other's wins, such as obtaining a driving licence. Staff ensure that young people are aware of current events, such as an election. They provide a forum where young people can learn different views and take part in a mock vote. This helps young people get ready for the adult world and understand how to be contributing members of society.

Young people have extremely positive and trusting relationships with the staff. They are confident that staff listen to their concerns and they do not need to resort to the formal complaints procedure. A parent said, 'My experience of the care side has been excellent. Particularly impressive is the rapport and trust between care staff and students.' Staff explain when they cannot accommodate young people's wishes, such as a later curfew or keeping the same interpreter. Staff are skilled at balancing young people's development and their welfare, as they focus on preparing young people for independence. Young people respond with a mature attitude when staff give such explanations. They understand that staff have their best interests at heart.

Equality is embedded in the culture of this school. Staff and young people accept others for who they are. Staff support young people to find their identity, for example by supporting attendance at a local lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender group. Young people, who have never been considered for a school play in mainstream school, are able to play key roles and perform such events using BSL. Their self-esteem and confidence improves immensely. Young people approaching school leaving age are well prepared for the real world. They obtain university placements or job offers. One young person said, 'I am confident to achieve what I want to do.'

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

Staff are extremely vigilant in safeguarding deaf young people. They listen carefully to young people using BSL. They act on any concerns and fully safeguard the young people in their care. They work with the safeguarding professionals within the school, as well as any external professionals, if necessary, to address concerns. Senior staff challenge other professionals' practice if they consider that such professionals have not considered every avenue to ensure the ongoing safety of each young person. Senior staff consult the necessary people, such as the designated officer for safeguarding or the local Prevent officer.

Young people identify many adults they can talk to about any concerns. As well as their key worker, young people have ready access to an independent listener. She visits the boarding houses on a regular basis and the young people know her well. A governor, with primary responsibility for care, and an independent visitor also come regularly into the boarding houses. Young people, who historically have had communication difficulties, are heard clearly.

Care staff work with other key professionals to write individual risk assessments which cover the range of complex needs young people have. Young people are able to engage in activities they enjoy, such as swimming, while being kept as safe as possible. A parent said, 'His residential care is fantastic with many evening activities and outings.'

Staff use a proactive approach to help young people manage their anxiety; for

example, young people are involved in writing their own stress management plans. Staff develop other tools, such as a stress book, for young people who are deaf and on the autistic spectrum, so young people can indicate their level of distress. For other young people, they are able to use alternative strategies to self-injurious behaviour. Young people make excellent progress in managing their stress and anxiety without the need to resort to self-harm or challenging behaviour.

The school nurse works effectively with care staff and other agencies, such as deaf child and adolescent mental health services. She develops strategies to help young people manage medication safely. She addresses specific health needs, such as writing epilepsy protocols. In one case, the records held on file in the boarding house were ambiguous. This was corrected during the inspection.

All staff demonstrate a good understanding of e-safety. They are not risk averse. Young people show a thorough knowledge of how to keep themselves and others safe. They tell staff of any worries they have about other young people's use of electronic devices. Deaf young people engage with the digital world as well as utilising all the benefits of communication applications. They are able to use alternatives to BSL to communicate with staff, each other and their families. Staff use 'expressions of concern' forms to record any potential safeguarding incidents, such as 'sexting'. In the main, these are comprehensive documents that clearly show the decision-making process and outcomes. However, this level of recording is not consistent in every case.

Staff understand the additional challenges a deaf young person may face. They provide good emotional support. Young people who are having a troubled time find solace during their stay at the school. They particularly enjoy a good relationship with their key worker, who is readily available for a supportive chat. Staff help young people explore their life history. They create an environment where young people feel safe and can process their painful emotions. A social worker said, '(Name of young person) has a real sense of safety at the school. She is no longer self-harming.'

Young people behave very well. Staff are on hand to defuse any potential incidents without resorting to restrictive physical intervention. Young people learn how to resolve conflict in a mature way. Staff arrange for additional support if necessary, such as an anger management programme. On occasion, staff use sanctions, or the principal uses a short-term exclusion, as behaviour management tools. These are proportionate and appropriate in the circumstances.

Young people live in a safe environment. A newly appointed business manager has all the necessary health and safety certification in place. He uses safer recruitment practice so only adults deemed suitable to work with young people are employed. He has responded to the previous recommendation for personal emergency evacuation plans.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

An experienced and competent management team leads the school. Senior managers have identified the need to adapt in response to the changing cohort of referrals. They have changed the use of one house with tremendous success. Deaf young people with additional complex needs receive exceptional care. The head of care has employed individual needs assistants to supplement the regular care staff; they are deployed to support a specific young person. He arranges for other services to be involved as necessary, such as deaf child and adolescent mental health services.

Senior managers carefully assess young people's needs and personalities. This results in good placement matching. Young people are able to share rooms with their friends who have similar interests. In a minority of cases, young people elect to have a single room. They speak positively of these arrangements.

Senior managers are successful at employing hearing staff who have an excellent grasp of BSL, as well as deaf staff who have communicated this way for many years. Senior managers are ambitious for the hearing staff to develop their skills further, such as progressing to a higher level of BSL and becoming more fluent. They provide training and support for this. They promote the needs of the deaf community further by providing BSL training for parents and the wider community. The local authority has recently adopted the BSL charter, and the school has been invited to host the ceremony. A young person from the school has been invited to be the signatory on behalf of the deaf community.

Senior managers obtain the necessary information from previous placements to inform the care planning. They ensure that young people come for induction visits, including overnight stays. They make staff available to support the young person, to build a relationship and observe behaviour to inform the school's care plan. They ensure that provision maps and young people's 'passports' contain the agreed targets. These include education and care goals with measurable outcomes. Young people, who have struggled with education due to their previous communication difficulties, make significant progress in their education as a result of the care and support given.

Care staff work exceptionally well with other professionals including the occupational therapist, teachers, speech and language therapist and physiotherapist. They share information so each young person has the best possible care, and there is consistency across the disciplines. A member of care staff said, 'We recognise each other's skill sets.' Staff have young people's day-to-day welfare at the forefront of their practice. The approach also contributes to broader assessments, such as whether a cochlear implant is an appropriate operation to have.

Senior managers have established a progressive, learning culture that seeks continuous improvement based on the latest research in supporting deaf young people. They have developed links with other education establishments, such as universities, to participate in research. They have excellent relationships with other local specialist schools, where a reciprocal arrangement ensures that each school

learns from the others' areas of expertise.

Senior managers have excellent systems in place for monitoring and evaluating practice. They welcome the oversight and comment from other professionals. Of particular note is the monitoring by governors. A governor with specific responsibility for care obtains the views of others, such as the designated officer for safeguarding and the independent visitor, before forming a view of the school. This is a school where senior leaders know their strengths and understand their weaknesses, and develop clear plans to address the weaknesses. For example, senior managers are reviewing the electronic storage and archiving of documents to make the essential documents more readily accessible to staff. They have reviewed arrangements with the care staff team to meet the changing needs of the cohort admitted.

The head of care provides the necessary training for staff, including working with deaf young people with additional complex needs. Staff speak highly of the training; they feel valued and are equipped to meet the individual needs of each young person. Staff confirm that they are well supported by the supervision process. Staff are proud of the progress that young people make, such as in BSL, independence, social interaction and education. Staff speak of the 'knock-on' effect in the home environment when communication improves and frustration diminishes.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of young people. They watched how professional staff work with young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to young people and their families. Two interpreters, independent of the school assisted inspectors. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.



## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC050400

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:**

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspector(s)**

Keith Riley, social care inspector (lead)  
Suzy Lemmy, social care inspector



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