

# Heathlands School

Heathlands School for Deaf Children, Heathlands Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5AY  
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special 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 3 to 16 years, who are deaf. The residential and education provision are on the same site. The school provides education for up to 105 students. Currently, 11 children and young people are 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 in single or shared study bedrooms for up to 20 residential pupils. The residential provision was last inspected in June 2016.

**Inspection dates:** 19 to 21 June 2017

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
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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 children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 6 June 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- The senior managers continue to drive the provision forward by sharing and implementing research-based practice to enhance the experiences and progress of children.
- The children and young people make excellent progress because the residential provision is stimulating. It has a highly positive effect on their educational and social development.
- The children and young people clearly enjoy their residential time. Parents are unanimously positive about the progress that their children make.
- The children and young people have developed positive relationships with an accomplished and dynamic staff team. The staff interact well with the children, in a calm and relaxed manner.
- The staff team is highly professional and is dedicated to ensuring that the residential experience is supportive and beneficial.
- The majority of the staff in the residential provision are deaf. This means that they have a good understanding of the children's and young people's communication needs. The staff act as highly positive role models.
- The children and young people are treated with dignity and respect. They are taught effectively to respect each other's differences.
- The children and young people are encouraged to support each other to develop their independence and communication skills.
- Children and young people are given the opportunity to attend community-based activities, with their hearing peers, in a safe and nurturing environment.
- Staff are not risk averse. They enable the children and young people to have new, exciting and positive experiences.
- The reporting and management of safeguarding concerns are strong and demonstrate excellent practice.
- Children and young people complete their homework with the support of the staff. This is part of the children's daily routine and it supports their education and progress in school.
- Staff understand that transitions, both in and out of the residential provision, can be difficult for the children and young people and their parents. The staff work closely with the children and young people and their families to ensure that transitions are smooth.
- A dynamic and forward-thinking management team ensures that the staff are fully trained and supported.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that all of the policies have a review date.
- Evaluate the use of sanctions to ensure that they are effective.
- Document the outcomes of consultations with the children.

## Inspection judgements

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

The children and young people make excellent progress because the residential provision is stimulating. They have the opportunity to build and maintain positive friendships with other deaf children. A parent said, 'It was so difficult for her before, being in a mainstream school. She was unable to make meaningful relationships with her peers. Since moving to the school, she is so much happier. She has been able to make friends at school and in residential. This has really helped her with her confidence.'

The senior managers continue to drive the provision forward by sharing and implementing research-based practice to enhance the experiences and progress of children. The headteacher ensures that she is abreast of developments in research in the field of residential care for children. She provides whole school training for the education and residential staff together, which helps to develop consistent practice across the disciplines and means that practice is continually evolving. The children benefit because the staff are unified in their approach and work holistically with the children to meet all of their developmental needs.

The children's individual progress is exceptional. One of the children could not use sign language when he first came to the school. The school and residential staff worked closely together to help the child to learn to sign and to communicate his needs. He was observed during the inspection signing to the staff, who commented that he has become a lot more confident. A child with complex health needs has been able to attend clubs in the community with the help of staff. This was something that previously she was unable to do. This means that the child has been able to have the same opportunities as her peers and has the confidence to join in with activities with her hearing peers.

The children and young people have built secure positive relationships with a highly dedicated and motivated staff team that clearly wants the children to make progress while having the best experiences possible. This culture was evident consistently throughout the inspection. During the inspection, a child commented, 'It's fun here, and you can have a laugh with the staff.'

All of the staff use the school's information monitoring system to record the children's and young people's progress. This means that all of the staff can identify trends and patterns, and work together to support the children and young people.

The staff in the residential provision have begun to use colourful individual log books, which depict the children's and young people's progress from their starting points. These logs include records and photographs of the children's and young people's achievements. The staff make comments on how the children and young people have reached their targets, and what they need to do next. The older children and young people complete a 'what have I done to be proud of' sticker, which also goes into their log book. These records are purposeful and meaningful, and they create

reminders of the children's and young people's time in the residential provision. A parent said, 'He [child] has progressed so much. The staff are always supporting him and encouraging him. He is so excited to tell me when he has learned to do something new.'

The staff support the children and young people to complete their homework after school. This is part of the well-embedded daily routine. The staff noticed a common theme of the children and young people struggling to manage money and tell the time. A member of staff devised work sheets to complete with the children and young people to aid their learning. The residential staff are proactive in recognising when children and young people need extra help. The staff act swiftly to provide highly individualised help that is tailored to each child's needs. One child struggles with his signing and spelling. He was reluctant to do extra signing and spelling with staff, so they introduced an incentive of Lego cards. The child now undertakes tasks with staff before and after school to help him to improve. He was proud to show off his collection of Lego cards. The staff are creative in their approaches to helping the children to make progress through extra-curricular activities that appeal to their individual interests.

The children and young people have developed positive meaningful relationships with each other. They were observed, during the inspection, helping each other with independence tasks and supporting a child who was finding it difficult to communicate. The children and young people are tolerant of, and have empathy with, each other.

The children and young people have flourished because of their time in the residential provision. They have developed their independence skills in line with their age, understanding, and ability, and following the staff's consultation with parents. The staff give children and young people the space and time to develop their skills at their own pace. A parent said, 'He has learned so many new skills that have made him so much more independent, and he can use these skills when he's at home.' A child had learned to ride a bike at school the previous week and enthusiastically demonstrated his cycling skills during the inspection.

The staff understand that transitions into and out of the residential provision can be difficult for children and young people and their families. A parent said, 'Both myself and my son were fully involved with the transition. We came to visit and we spent time with the staff and other children. Due to the distance, he [child] had to move in straight away rather than gradually, but he could contact us when he wanted to in the evenings. At first, the phone calls were two or three times a day. Now, I have to phone him as he's always out doing something. He has settled really well, and that's due to the staff.'

A child explained, during the inspection, that she was sad because her friend in the residential provision is leaving next week. The staff explained to the inspector that they and the children and young people had all been out for a meal the week before, and next week they are having a special tea. The staff also recognise that children and young people can find it difficult when a member of staff leaves, so they do something special together with the children and young people. The staff recognise

and understand the importance and power of the children's and young people's attachments with each other and with the staff. The staff ensure that positive endings enable children and young people to understand and manage transitions.

The school governors complete regular monitoring visits, and children and young people are consulted as part of this process. The children and young people are consulted in a number of ways. These include one-to-one conversations with staff and house meetings, during which children and young people are consulted about their activities, menus, and purchases for the house. However, there is a lack of evidence of the outcome of the consultations.

The children and young people engage in a wide variety of activities, both at school and in the community, which gives them the opportunity to mix with and develop friendships with their hearing peers. Children and young people attend Cubs/Scouts/Brownies with a member of staff who interprets for them. During the inspection, two of the children attended an activity at Scouts club. The interaction between the children and their hearing peers was excellent, and the Scout leaders were able to support the children during the activity. The residential staff understand how important it is for the children and young people to access these community-based clubs and experience this inclusive approach.

The staff take the children and young people to use local amenities in the community, such as at the local tennis club. The children and young people attended and had a lesson from a deaf tennis coach who had previously attended the school. The staff understand that using the local amenities shows the children and young people that they can have the same opportunities as their peers. These experiences help to develop the children's and young people's confidence and help them to understand how to behave in the community.

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

Proactive and creative safeguarding practice means that all of the children have a strong sense of safety. The staff and senior managers continue to make safeguarding a priority. The headteacher has recently introduced a new recording system to log safeguarding concerns and provide clear chronologies to reflect the action that has been taken. A social worker said, 'The school and residential staff are excellent at recording and passing on any concerns. They work closely with myself and other agencies.' A child protection school liaison officer said, 'I was impressed with how a complex safeguarding case was managed and the speed with which the headteacher acted to escalate this to all of the relevant agencies. This demonstrates the high level of best practice arrangements in the school.' Another professional emailed the headteacher to say, 'Thank you for the update. This is a great piece of work. I will be emailing [colleague] to make him aware of your terrific practice.' The headteacher challenges other professionals when safeguarding matters are not dealt with in a timely manner or in a way that is in the best interest of the child.

The children and young people say that they feel safe in the residential provision.

There is a wide range of adults with whom the children and young people can speak if they are worried or upset. A child commented, 'If I am scared at night, I can talk to the waking night [staff], and if I really wanted to speak to the staff she would get them for me.' Another child said, 'You can talk to any of the staff if you are upset or missing home and they help you.' The children and young people understand that the staff will support them if they are worried at any time during the day or night.

The staff understand the importance of children and young people having new and meaningful experiences while learning to manage risk. The staff are not risk averse; they use clear and comprehensive risk assessments to help them to keep children and young people safe. The children and young people have the opportunity to have new experiences and learn new skills in a safe environment. For example, the staff teach the children and young people road safety. This helps the children and young people to enjoy a potentially hazardous activity safely because they are aware of their surroundings when they are out in the community.

Children and young people know how to complain and are asked regularly whether they have any complaints. They have not made any complaints since the last inspection. During this inspection, the children and young people spoke confidently about how the staff would listen to and help them if needed. One parent has made a complaint since the last inspection. The managers have responded to and resolved this complaint effectively.

All of the staff and governors have undertaken safeguarding training. The headteacher completes a safeguarding audit to identify any gaps in knowledge, or extra training that may be required. The staff have a good understanding of the safeguarding procedures and they know how to act as whistle-blowers.

Behaviour is exemplary. Children and young people are polite, courteous and respectful of staff, each other and visitors. They make visitors feel welcome and are proud to show off the residential provision. The staff have an excellent understanding of the children's and young people's strengths and areas for development, as well as triggers for unwanted behaviours. Effective behaviour management plans help the staff to recognise potential issues so that they can de-escalate unwanted behaviour quickly. Staff help the children and young people to recognise when they may need some time out or one-to-one time with staff. The staff's knowledge of the children and young people, and their highly skilled approach to behaviour management, mean that staff have not needed to use physical restraint since the last inspection.

All of the staff use the school's information monitoring system to record positive and negative behaviours, which enables them to identify patterns and trends and adapt support plans accordingly. The residential staff have begun to record sanctions imposed for negative behaviour. However, these sanctions and records are not evaluated to ensure that the sanction is effective.

No children or young people have gone missing from the school. The staff know what to do if an incident occurs. There have been no incidents of bullying since the last inspection. Children and young people are taught to recognise and understand

the effect that their behaviour can have on each other. The staff address individual incidents to help children and young people to resolve incidents and make reparation, such as writing a letter of apology.

The staff keep children and young people as safe as possible in the cyber world. The children and young people are taught internet safety at school and this teaching is extended into the residential provision. On one occasion, some of the children saw something on social media that concerned them. Two of the children reported this to the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, and another told a parent. This shows that children understand who to report concerns to if they see anything that worries or upsets them.

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

Senior managers in both the school and the residential setting are passionate, dedicated and fully committed to providing effective and efficient leadership to ensure that the children and young people make excellent progress, have fun and are kept safe. Staff have high expectations and aspirations for the children. They ensure that the children and young people have fun through play as well as having the same experiences and life chances as their peers, such as undertaking their cycling proficiency test, learning new skills such as tennis, football and cooking and preparing simple meals.

The governors complete regular visits to the residential provision to assess the quality of care. These visits include consultation with the children and young people. An in-depth report is produced after each visit, outlining the strengths of the residential provision, areas for improvement and actions. A range of governors undertake these visits so that the children and young people get to know them. This increases the children's confidence in approaching adults outside of the immediate staff team if they have a concern.

The teaching and residential staff contribute to children's and young people's annual reviews. The children and young people are supported to contribute to and comment about their reviews. This helps them to understand that their views are integral to their education and care planning. Consequently, they understand the progress that they have made and the areas that they need to develop.

Staff communicate exceptionally well with parents and have daily contact with them. A parent said, 'Communication is excellent. I can contact the staff at any time to discuss any concerns, and staff will contact me not only if there has been an incident, but with positives as well.' Another parent said, 'I can call staff whenever I need to. This is important to me, as my child lives a distance from home.'

The staff organise family days twice a year, one at Christmas and a family BBQ in the summer. This gives families the opportunity to meet with staff, governors and each other. A parent said that she has been able to make friends with other families from the deaf community and has been able to arrange for her child to maintain contact with her friends in the holidays. Another parent said of her child, 'She has made a close friend and is able to see her in the holidays, and has even stayed overnight



with her. It's important to her that she has the opportunity to say in contact with her friends during the holidays.'

The care that children and young people receive is exceptional. The staff in the school and residential provision work closely together to meet children's and young people's individual needs. The headteacher is proactive in meeting with the children at breakfast times and during the evening, and the children and young people are always excited to tell her about their evening or day at school. This provides excellent role modelling to staff and lets the children and young people know that they are valued. Leaders and managers lead by example, innovate and generate creative ideas to sustain the highest quality of care for children. They will join in activities with the children and young people and learn new skills and have new experiences alongside the children, which supports and encourages the children to participate.

The residential provision is an integral part of the school. Parents are extremely complimentary about the value of the residential provision and its contribution to children's and young people's personal, social and academic development.

There is a high level of staffing. Managers take immediate action if staffing levels fall. Some of the staff from the school who do not work directly with children during the day will cover any gaps in the rota. The managers and staff understand the importance of providing children and young people with a constant and familiar staff team. The children and young people feel safe because they are able to trust the adults who work with them.

All of the residential staff have undertaken safeguarding training and their mandatory training is up to date. Two of the staff are undertaking their induction. They said that they found this helpful in supporting them to work with the children and young people. Regular probation reviews are undertaken to support new staff. All of the staff receive regular supervision, which provides them with the support that they need and ensures that managers retain good oversight of performance and practice.

The school and residential provision are run by an effective, forward-thinking management team that has a clear vision of how it wants to continually develop to ensure that children and young people fulfil their potential.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. 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 children and young people who 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:** SC056396

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**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspector**

Trish Palmer, social care inspector (lead)



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