

# Royal School for the Blind

Royal School for the Blind Liverpool, Church Road North, Liverpool L15 6TQ  
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

The Royal School for the Blind is a non-maintained charitable school that provides education and accommodation for children who have a visual impairment and/or a wide range of complex needs. The school provides up to 66 places for children aged between two and 19 years. It offers residential provision for up to 10 children at any one time, in a detached house in the school grounds. At present, 10 children use the residential provision in a mix of Monday to Thursday placements and overnight stays. The school provides a multi-disciplinary approach. This includes the involvement of specialist staff such as teachers, nurses, physiotherapists, a music therapist, mobility officers and a speech and language assistant.

**Inspection dates:** 16 to 18 April 2018

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<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:** 3 July 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children continue to flourish because all staff work energetically and cohesively in their best interests.
- Leaders and governors use comprehensive development plans to continually develop the outstanding quality of care for very vulnerable children.
- Children love staying overnight. They show their delight in smiles, excited gestures and happy relationships with staff. They grow in confidence, experience and independence because of the excellent support staff give to them.
- Exceptional leaders pioneer a belief in each child's ability to make progress. Whatever their starting point, children are nurtured by all of the staff so that they can develop their skills and abilities. The staff constantly challenge false limitations regarding what children are able to do.
- Children excel in areas of communication and activity because staff have high expectations of them.
- Parents say that they have greater expectations for their children's futures because the school has helped to unlock their potential.
- Children are safe and happy. Staff use their considerable expertise to care for them with love and respect.
- Staff have an excellent and wide-ranging knowledge of how to protect vulnerable children from harm. This includes bespoke training and rigorous recruitment practice to ensure that children are safe from unsuitable adults and situations.
- Staff use a problem-solving approach to risk management, which means that children participate fully in activities and experiences that enrich their lives.
- Staff understand the importance of wraparound care. They work diligently with parents, placing authorities, and health and support professionals to ensure that children develop to their full potential and are protected from harm.
- Staff recognise the importance of the quality of children's lives outside of school. Leaders facilitate significant involvement in community-based projects such as a thriving nursery and a parent befriending scheme.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Under the leadership of the newly appointed nurse, continue to monitor systems that capture children's healthcare needs to further improve outcomes for their health and well-being.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Continue to monitor systems that capture children's healthcare needs to further improve outcomes for their health and well-being. (National Minimum Standards 13.9)

## Inspection judgements

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

Children continue to flourish because all staff work energetically and cohesively in their best interests. They receive coordinated care from a stable and exceedingly competent multi-disciplinary team. Staff understand and appreciate the importance of every tiny step of progress that children make. Children enjoy the generous praise and affection, and the 'you can do it' approach of the staff. Children exercise control over their decisions and choices because staff ensure that they actively listen to them and give them the right amount of help to achieve success. Parents and professionals say that children 'exceed their expectations'. Staff say that there is no limit to what children can achieve with the right support and encouragement. Children's rich communication, social, play and learning skills result from this highly effective approach.

Staff, including therapy staff, work exceptionally well together to ensure that children receive care that fully meets their needs. For example, the speech and language assistant spends time with children after school to help them to improve their communication skills; the mobility officer supports children's independence in the residential provision; apprentices provide additional eyes and ears during activities. Good multi-professional communication underpins the excellent care provided and promotes children's progress.

Staff continually develop their skills and expertise in caring for children through a 'total sensory and communication approach'. Training includes well-researched approaches to supporting children through mobility, physiotherapy and sensory programmes. Staff are eager to learn more so that they can help children to make more progress. This eagerness includes staff seeking out new activities to stretch and challenge children, such as increasing their independence in local shops and parks and using swimming and football sessions to explore new ways to play and communicate.

Children have a curiosity about the world around them. They wanted to learn inspector's names. They happily played on the swings, asking to be pushed. They talked about the smells and sounds of spring, the traffic and their favourite toys. Equally, they told inspectors when they had had enough of talking, by waving inspectors away, choosing staff to play with them, or simply ignoring inspectors. This confident approach to new situations and people is a strength that children learn on their overnight stays. Most of all, children say the best bits about staying over are the opportunities to spend time with their friends and to enjoy dinner'. Parents say their children often 'don't want to come home', and this is because they have fun during their overnight stays.

Staff support children's complex health needs with kindness and dignity. Recently, managers have transferred the nursing department from external to internal

appointments. The transfer of responsibility for this change happened over a planned and prolonged period, and has already had a positive impact on the children. The new, suitably registered and experienced nurse has begun to review all healthcare systems, has provided bespoke training for staff, and has increased the scope of oversight to include residential time. Parents are very positive about how the nurse is developing relationships with their children's medical professionals and supporting them with complex medical arrangements. This means that children are receiving consistent and regularly reviewed healthcare. Routine needs are met well and emergency needs are planned for effectively. The nurse is overseeing a review of medication administration, and developing a competency-based medication and intervention training programme for staff. This training will help staff to avoid potential errors in the management of children's healthcare.

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

Children, parents and professionals say that the school and the residence are safe and happy places to be. Children see staff as being able to help them and to sort out any difficulties that they may have. One child said that sometimes she did not like the noise level in residence. She said, 'Staff take me out to help.' Another child smiled when inspectors asked, 'Do staff help you?' When a residential staff member's name was mentioned, another child beamed and waved his hand, expressing his delight. The warm and affectionate quality of relationships is the foundation of the high-quality, safe care that children experience.

Children are empowered to speak their minds with whatever communication style they use. Staff continually expect them to share their opinions. Eye pointing, hand movements, sounds, gestures or words all carry equal importance. Staff know how to read children's signs and respond to them. This protects children because they understand their views are important; they can choose who delivers their care, plays with them, feeds them and puts them to bed. Any distress or discord is picked up immediately by staff, who explore the reasons for it and work hard to resolve it. This is outstanding practice in protecting disabled children from the risk of abuse.

Children's speech, interactions and body language show that they feel very settled and comfortable in the residential house and in school. Their families talk emotionally about how safe their children are. One parent said, 'This is the only place we will actually leave him', and, 'You have to have complete trust in people you are leaving them with, and I do here.' Staff know children's specific complex disabilities and their layered medical and developmental needs. They use the best strategies to manage these effectively. This approach focuses on children being as independent as possible and helps to develop their safety, confidence and self-esteem.

Managers have continued to use exceptional safe-recruitment practice by using stringent checking procedures and thorough assessment methods. This ensures that they only employ staff who have the right qualities and attributes to complement the

'children first' approach that is so embedded in care practice. The residential team has grown in number, but the quality and consistency of care has remained high. New staff receive prompt training in child protection, medical support and communication. The open culture of the school enables staff to question practice, learn from excellent role modelling and reflect on their own development needs. This culture helps to create a safe environment for children.

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

Leaders are passionate about ensuring that children's outcomes continually improve. They oversee development so that staff have the skills, knowledge and support necessary to provide excellent care for the children. All of the staff care about the whole child, including the children's lives outside of school and their families. This means that children benefit from strongly woven support networks designed to help them to progress.

Leaders, including governors, demonstrate a clear prioritisation of development. They use an 'if it matters to children, it matters to us' approach. Professionals and parents praise 'the time and trouble taken to individually assess each child's needs'. Excellent information gathering, evaluation and sharing systems are in place. These are used before admission to ensure that there is good matching, and during placement to ensure that there is continuous growth and development.

Managers plan future progress by working with placing authorities to improve the quality of co-production in children's local authority documents. They champion children's views and aspirations to ensure that they are appropriately captured and addressed within meetings and key documents. This dynamic child-centred focus is valued by families, professionals and disability support groups.

Relevant and bespoke staff training and development are continuous. Staff training and development are suited to the needs of the children, and are designed to help staff understand how to bring comfort to children, stretch their thinking and problem solving, and therefore increase their independence. Staff use excellent systems for measuring and capturing progress. Education a strong element, but it is well integrated with care and health. This means that the sky is the limit for children.

Open and honest reflective practice is consistently applied. The residential development plan accurately records the staff team's aspirations and areas for development and this leads to change when necessary, no matter how daunting. An example of this is the whole school leadership support for changing the nursing provider to an internally employed individual. A highly collaborative approach ensured that health services for children were protected during the changeover of staff. The impact of this change is being carefully monitored to ensure that children continue to receive high-quality healthcare.

There is very good scrutiny, support and challenge from governors. The residential

and safeguarding governor is keenly interested in practice and how it benefits children. They actively seek and listen to views expressed by parents, staff and external professionals. This has resulted in collaborative financial planning, to ensure that children in the local community also benefit from school resources, including staff time. This increases children's view of their place in the world because they meet a greater range of people than they might do otherwise. Dynamic new projects include developing community services and working with a local partner to improve planning towards adulthood. Internal projects, such as improved site security, a new dining area and accommodating younger children, are carefully scoped out to promote successful outcomes. This attention to detail is a strength of the school.

A very strong residential team is led by a highly competent head and a deputy head of care. They demonstrate exceptional skills in working with children. Staff learn from them as they model the specific approach of the school. Staff are enthused by this model. Turnover is low, practice is consistent and long-term relationships are built that provide children with the warmth and security they need to grow and develop.

## **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 differences 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 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:** SC040720

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Paul Boulton

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Denise Jolly, social care inspector (lead)  
Sarah Billett, social care inspector



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