

Mary Hare School

Arlington Manor, Snelsmore Common, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 3BQ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Mary Hare School is a non-maintained special school near Newbury in Berkshire. The school provides education and accommodation for students aged five to 19 who have severe and profound hearing loss. The primary school is on a separate site and offers day and weekly boarding placements. The secondary school admits students from all over the United Kingdom and has a small number of students from overseas. Nearly all students board. The primary school has a boarding facility with bedrooms to suit the age profile of the school. The secondary school has six boarding houses. Year 7 has two dedicated boarding houses; Years 8 to 10 live in two larger boarding houses; Year 11 pupils live in a purpose-built boarding house; and the sixth form has four separate accommodation blocks of individual and shared study bedrooms.

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 December 2018

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 16 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- Residential students make good progress socially and emotionally. Many students said that it is the first time they have made friends and felt accepted.
- Students said that they feel safe and that they can go to staff if they have any worries or concerns. Students said that staff sort out any issues with friendships and that staff help them if they feel that they are being bullied.
- The health and well-being provision within the school is excellent. Students know they have support available and will self-refer to the well-being coordinator, who is a trusted presence within the school. The school nurses support students well and link in with staff and other health professionals to help ensure that every student can fully participate in all aspects of the residential experience.
- The school youth club is an innovative resource for students. It is a lively social hub where students can socialise, relax and even enter the world of employment.
- Governance and oversight of the residential provision are strong. External independent visitors are helping to drive improvements that enhance the residential experience for students.

The residential special school's areas for development:

- The residential accommodation is too variable in its quality. Leaders are prioritising redevelopment and maintenance, however some aspects of this need to be expedited, particularly the bathrooms in one house.
- Some important records are undated and do not identify the author. This leads to uncertainty about who has made decisions and when. It also hinders accountability and management oversight of practice.
- On occasion, there has been delay in sharing potential safeguarding concerns with external professionals. Safeguarding records do not always demonstrate the rationale and reasoning for this.
- Staff deployment in the residential provision needs to ensure that at key times, such as the end of the school day, staff are able to spend time with, and effectively plan each evening with all students.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- 5.3 Suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for children, which are reasonably accessible from the sleeping accommodation. Separate toilet facilities are provided for boys and girls unless each toilet facility is provided in a separate room intended for use by one pupil at a time, the door to which is capable of being secured from inside. Toilet and washing facilities provide appropriate privacy for children.
- 11.1 The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 22.1 Every child has an accurate, permanent record of their history and progress which can be read by the child at any time (except where the data controller is not obliged to supply the information to the child), and add personal statements or statements correcting errors.

Recommendations

- Review the residential provision's statement of purpose.
- Ensure that a full range of checks, in line with safer recruitment, is carried out when selecting the independent visitor.
- Review staff deployment within the residential houses.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Residential students make good progress both socially and emotionally. Students said that it is the first time that they have felt accepted somewhere and made friends. Students feel more confident and develop high aspirations for their futures. Feedback from parents is generally positive. Parents are pleased with the progress their children have made. There is a community feel across the school and a sense that students really care about each other. Some students commented that it feels like home.

Students said they feel listened to and have various routes to share their views. The school council has effected change in the activities and meals on offer and is always seeking new ways in which to engage more students. Students are confident in approaching staff to share their ideas through the school council as well as through regular house meetings.

There is a wide range of activities on offer for students. The onsite youth club is a fantastic resource and worthy of dissemination to other residential special schools. Students have access to an American diner, a chill-out room and games rooms where they can socialise with friends and benefit from positive social experiences. The youth club also provides employment opportunities for students, for example in the kitchen, serving tables, and providing security for the club.

Incidents of physical interventions are infrequent. Staff are increasingly recognising negative behaviour as a form of communication and are responding appropriately to this. Staff have supported students through some very challenging personal experiences and worked with them and their parents to help guide them and provide a consistent approach and response. In one house, however, inspectors noted that some students required a higher level of support. This had a negative impact on the amount of time and attention some other students received from staff.

Staff meet the physical and emotional well-being needs of students well. The school nurses provide staff with guidance on how best to support students with complex and lifelong health conditions. Staff are confident in processes for administering medication. The school's well-being service has excellent links with the deaf child and adolescent mental health services. Students are confident in accessing the well-being service and they use it frequently.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Students said that they feel safe and that they can go to staff if they are worried or upset. Students are confident that staff will 'sort out' any issues. On occasion, bullying has been a concern in the school, but students said that staff have managed

incidents well. A great deal of work has been done with students and staff in recognising bullying, including supporting students to consider their own actions and how they potentially affect others. Students often use signing to communicate with peers and have adapted their own school slang. Staff are not always up to date on the variations of this and so may miss opportunities to intervene. Governors and senior staff are aware of this issue and recognise the need for staff to develop a greater understanding of new signs.

Overall, residential staff are confident in their roles and responsibilities with regard to safeguarding and child protection. However, on one occasion there was a delay in a concern being reported to the school's designated safeguarding lead, and two occasions when there was a delay in reporting concerns to safeguarding teams within the local authority. As the designated safeguarding lead did not record the rationale for this at the time, it is impossible for inspectors to know whether the delay was proportionate and appropriate to meet the safety needs of the students.

The residential accommodation varies greatly in quality and condition. Some houses are newly refurbished and provide a warm and welcoming environment. However, others are in desperate need of refurbishment. One bathroom had tiles missing and was in a general state of disrepair. The senior leaders are aware of the concerns and a development plan is in place, however the redevelopment is taking too long.

The staff recruitment process has been overhauled, with greater detail of pre-employment checks being recorded. However, more thorough scrutiny of the references provided for the independent visitor would strengthen recruitment procedures further.

Leaders have responded promptly to several concerns raised in a recent fire audit. Residential students are involved in fire evacuations and have visual and audio alerts in their rooms. Greater detail is required in evacuation records, specifically the names of students who have been involved in each fire evacuation to evidence that all students have participated in one and know what to do in the event of a fire.

The health and well-being officer is an asset to the school. She is highly skilled in communicating with students both verbally and through signing. Students know who she is and will often request to meet with her. She has strong links with local health services including child and adolescent mental health services. Students who require extra support, such as those who self-harm, have support plans. Some support plans lack a level of detail and scrutiny.

Staff are aware of the potential vulnerabilities of students, including risks relating to exploitation in all forms. Students have recently benefited from a tailored dramatic performance regarding the risks of sexual and criminal exploitation and they have engaged well in follow-up sessions to further develop their skills in recognising risky or inappropriate situations.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders have high aspirations for all students in the school. When necessary, they challenge local authorities through tribunals and are strong advocates for students and their families. The residential provision is meeting its aims as set out in its statement of purpose. This document would benefit from a review to acknowledge changes and more recent improvements in the setting.

Staff are positive about their roles and said they feel well supported by senior staff and the leadership team. Staff feel that they have had the right training. Staff identify that this, and improvements in the supervision and appraisal process, help them to meet the needs of those they care for to a good standard. Supervision records demonstrate an awareness of staff development needs and when there is a need for performance management.

Monitoring systems have improved and are effective. An external independent visitor is rigorous in their oversight and reporting, providing a high level of challenge. The senior leaders recognise the weaknesses within the residential provision and are prioritising the areas of greatest need. The school nurse team has strengthened oversight of medication administration within the houses and staff said they feel confident in their role in relation to this. Governance has strengthened through the targeted recruitment of governors with key skills and expertise, including a former head of care of a residential special school.

Staffing levels are improving, and staff said there are enough of them to meet the needs of the students. However, the deployment of staff within the residential houses is not always effective. For example, during the inspection, one house presented as chaotic and disorganised when students returned at the end of the school day and needed individual attention. This has potentially contributed to an increase in incidents in this house.

Record-keeping needs to improve. Most records are not signed by the author or dated. As a result, there is a lack of clarity in respect of actions taken, by whom, and when. Staff recognise that some students' records are weak and do not always evidence the significant progress residential students make socially and emotionally. Work to address this shortfall is in progress with the introduction of revised welfare plans. For those students who have a revised welfare plan in place, their support needs across education and care are more detailed. Goals and targets, set in consultation with the students, are written clearly within the plan, making it much easier to monitor the outcomes and progress students are making.

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: SC011137

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