

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 children between five and 19 years of age who are deaf, with some children having additional complex needs. The main form of communication used is British Sign Language. English and Sign Supported English are also used. Children board Monday to Friday in residential houses which are adjacent to the main school site. At the time of this visit, 38 children were resident. The children prefer to be called students.

Inspection dates: 2 to 4 March 2020

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

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

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 children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 12 March 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students make exceptional progress as a result of staying in the residential provision. For some students, their language skills have developed from no communication to being able to sign with fluidity and ease. Other students have learned how to manage their frustrations and accept being deaf. Some students have been able to celebrate their deafness and take an active part in the school community. All students benefit immensely from spending time in a supportive, enabling and, in some cases, life-changing environment.

The views of students permeate throughout the school and there is a culture of active listening and a keenness to make positive changes. Students are happy, confident when they articulate their views, and enjoy an active residential life. Some of the older students express frustration from time to time. They do not see the school rules as necessary as they are adults. Senior leaders fully recognise students' differing levels of adolescence and young adulthood. There are clear plans in place to differentiate the care given to older students.

The quality of individualised care is excellent. The head of care plays an active role in assessing risks to students, and students' care plans are reviewed and absolutely targeted to individual needs. There is a focus on finding what is important for each student and 'finding out who you are'. This ensures that staff are fully aware, and respectful, of students' diverse needs. The dignity of students, irrespective of any communication or complex needs, is firmly promoted. All students are treated with respect, fairness and are fully supported and encouraged to live their lives as independently as possible.

The residential site is split into several houses. Each house has a distinct identity and welcomes students, when appropriate, from other houses. Inspectors observed evenings when students visited each other and engaged in a wide range of house and community-based activities. Some older students live in a house which is geared more towards independent living. They are supported to budget, plan their meals and meet their own laundry, cooking and cleaning needs. Students in this house value the opportunity to develop these life skills while benefiting from the support of staff should they need help or guidance.

Younger students are fully encouraged, and supported, to enjoy their childhoods. Play-based activities are promoted, and students enjoy spending time with each other. The houses provide ample space for activities and the staff team needs no encouragement to take students out into the local community. Inspectors observed exceptional staff practice in the houses. For example, in one house, the staff team led an activity where students made jewellery while one of the student's friends came to visit. The staff team normalised the experience for the students and ensured that all students took part and had the most enjoyable time.

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

The safety, welfare and protection of students is a strength of the school. Recent changes to some key safeguarding systems have made further improvements to the school's processes. The governing body takes an active role in assessing, testing and monitoring the effectiveness of these arrangements. The principal of the school, supported by the senior leadership team, takes full responsibility for the safety of all students. All staff are encouraged to be alert to any signs of risk, worry, concern or danger. Students are encouraged to raise concerns to any member of staff.

Since the last inspection, two missing episodes have occurred. Both were short lived and skilfully managed. Staff provided appropriate support to both students and fully explored the reasons behind these events. Parental involvement, along with internal reviews, mean that any lessons are shared. Students were encouraged to reflect on these events and think about better ways of spending free time in the local community or with their friends at parties.

Some students, especially when new to the school, can find communication challenging in an environment where sign language can be fast paced and frequent. This can lead to students expressing their frustration through challenging behaviour. The staff team responds calmly and with complete reassurance. All staff role model positive communication and the environment is supportive, inclusive and differentiated to the needs of individual students. When behaviour becomes challenging, staff are highly skilled in defusing any tensions.

All staff are alert to signs of bullying, including online or through sign language. All incidents are reviewed and records maintained to a high standard. The head of care identified a brief spell where the occasional sanction record did not make clear if students' views were sought. This was very quickly identified and resolved. There has been a small number of safeguarding concerns. These have all been rigorously managed and all appropriate actions have been taken. The school has built a working relationship with the designated officer in the local authority and staff are effectively trained in how to recognise and report concerns.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The head of care provides excellent leadership to the residential provision. This is firmly supported by the school's leadership team and all staff, from all disciplines, comment extremely positively on the support, commitment, enthusiasm and passion of managers. The school's principal sets exceptionally high standards and ensures that these are met and, wherever possible, exceeded. There is a culture of continual review and a continual striving towards excellence. Senior leaders and governors have a clear plan for the residential provision and are fully committed to seeing this through.

Leaders and managers are passionate about every student achieving and students' needs are at the very centre of everybody's practice. The multi-disciplinary team focuses on every student making clear, measurable progress each day. Students on

the fringes of slowing their progress are reviewed and the ideas of all professionals are actively sought and acted on. This means that there is always a swift and timely intervention to help any student.

Teachers, therapists, care staff, parents, medical staff and placing authorities are keenly involved in supporting each student to meet, and exceed, their potential. All this progress is captured in ways that are meaningful for the student. For example, consent is gathered to video record students who can now sign coherently from a starting point of having no sign language. This exceptional progress informs the reviews of the residential operation and motivates the staff to achieve even more for the students.

Staff are confident to raise concerns internally and, should they need to, externally. They are supported to voice any issues and senior staff regularly challenge other agencies where required. This secures good outcomes for students. Senior staff promote tolerance and inclusivity throughout the residential site. A range of advocacy services are promoted in the school and staff promote the rights of students and ensure that everybody has a voice and is listened to. All staff treat deafness as a unique characteristic that can be celebrated and embraced, as opposed to a difficulty which must be overcome.

All staff are effectively trained and supervised. There are clear lines of management accountability and accessibility. Staff are confident in their roles, supported in their duties and encouraged to enhance the lives of students. Regular supervision and appraisal ensure that staff's development needs and performance are assessed. Regular monitoring visits to the residential provision provide further scrutiny and the governors are actively involved in residential life. For example, one of the governors takes an active role in inducting and training new staff. Another governor provides expert, and critical, peer challenge to the principal. These robust arrangements mean that the likelihood of issues not being identified are reduced. However, senior leaders are not complacent. They actively seek out opportunities to review their systems and processes. This has led to further improvements in the school's recording systems and how staff access key information.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: Billy McInally

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Inspectors

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