

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, Liverpool, is a non-maintained charitable school. It provides education and accommodation for children who have visual impairment and/or a wide range of complex needs. The school provides up to 90 places for children aged between two and 19 years. It offers residential provision for up to six children at any one time, in a detached house in the school grounds. Children use the residential provision in a mix of Monday to Thursday placements and overnight stays. The school's multidisciplinary approach includes the involvement of specialist staff such as teachers, nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and a speech and language therapy team.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 October 2021

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

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

Date of previous inspection: 14 May 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are happy at school and make progress in improving their communication skills, social skills, spatial awareness and understanding of the world. This is because they are supported well by a consistent team of residential staff who care about them. The staff build positive relationships with the children and help them to feel safe. It is evident that children's views are listened to and acted on giving them control over their lives. They have fun, learn new skills and think about their futures. An area of strength is the way in which children are supported by staff to understand and manage the impact that wide-ranging and complex needs can have on children's emotional, social and learning capacity.

The staff have a good understanding of how children are affected by sensory difficulties. The school uses a national accredited approach to work with blind and sight-limited children more effectively. This was evident from observation of the evening activities, and time spent with children. Children explore their environment so that they have increasing confidence and appropriate independence in their movement. Parents enthusiastically described the progress that their children have made because of their residential experience. This progress includes having friends, attending specialist music groups and learning to be responsible for their personal care. One child told inspectors about her aspirations to get to music college. She proudly played her favourite tunes in an impromptu concert for the inspector.

Care staff understand children's communication, behaviours and expressions. This knowledge enhances their understanding of how the children need to be supported, and helps to ensure that the children's wishes are attended to well. Parents said that their children have improved their independence, well-being and sociability. One parent said that the residential provision gives her child the invaluable opportunity to talk to children and staff, and described how this is helping him to improve his vocabulary and articulation. Parents said that staff keep in touch regularly and that this open approach gives them confidence and trust in the staff to keep their children safe and happy.

Children stay in comfortable and spacious residential accommodation that is well equipped to meet their needs and interests.

Children enjoy friendships in the residence because staff help them to appreciate the wishes and feelings of others. Activities in the community are beginning to open again following closures or limited availability as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. More purposeful community activity for children will stretch their experiences and enhance their progress. Nevertheless, children have fun and develop new skills that enhance their quality of life. Children make progress because staff help them to overcome barriers to success through an understanding of their education, health and care plans. On occasion, staff do not formally review their approach or set clear

goals to make sure that there is the right balance of support and challenge for children, so that they can continuously improve.

Children benefit from the support of a multidisciplinary team that includes specialist professionals who provide particular elements of the care that children receive. Children's health needs are supported well and staff are knowledgeable about what to do if a child's health is deteriorating because they have had training that is relevant to individual children's specific health conditions. Parents praised staff for taking prompt emergency action when necessary, to ensure that children get specialist healthcare when they need it.

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

Care staff know the children well and take positive action to help to keep them safe. Staff work with children to help them develop the skills they need when they are out in the community, at the shops or visiting other places outside the school. Staff are attentive to the children's needs and help them to explore safely, which supports them to develop essential skills in spatial awareness.

Children demonstrated that they are confident in the staff's ability to keep them safe and help them participate in positive experiences. This was evident in the way that children welcomed the inspectors to the residence after staff had introduced them. Children wanted to interact with inspectors and share their play experiences, including inviting inspectors into their sensory tent and enjoying rhyming games with them.

Managers have designed effective, child-centred recording and evaluation to capture children's support and supervision needs. They use this information to formulate children's staffing requirements. This enables children to benefit from extra support when necessary, to help them to stay safe and to have a prompt response to their health needs. This improves the progress children make.

Since the last inspection, managers have adopted a new computer system for creating and maintaining risk assessments, safeguarding plans and positive behaviour plans. This is yet to be embedded in practice across both care and education. Staff are being trained in its use.

A recently appointed senior manager is taking over the role of designated safeguarding lead. Effective liaison with the previous postholder is ensuring continuity in the oversight of concerns about children's safety and welfare. The school has strong links with other agencies and external safeguarding professionals, and these are used well when it is necessary to take prompt and appropriate action. All allegations against staff are appropriately investigated in line with local area guidance.

A strength of the service is that all children have positive handling plans. One plan was not updated to include an emerging need for behaviour support and this led to

some inconsistency in the staff's approaches to intervention. However, the speech and language therapist was working to define the best approach for staff to use. The school culture promotes a positive approach to meeting children's emotional and physical needs.

Children know what helps them to manage their feelings. One child told the inspector about how she uses her iPad to find extracts of her favourite sounds when she is feeling cross or frustrated, and this helps her to go to sleep. Staff sensitively intervene to redirect children and remind them of their skills in keeping themselves safe. Inspectors observed that staff will quietly problem-solve for children who have become too anxious to work things out themselves. The residential house is a haven of calm and child-focused activity.

The system in place for the recruitment and selection of staff is appropriate, and senior staff have undertaken safer recruitment training.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The senior leadership team has undergone significant change since the last inspection. A new headteacher started in April 2021. The previous headteacher was absent from October 2020. Governors appointed existing department heads as temporary replacements but did not reflect on and plan these appointments. Senior leaders, such as the head of residential, and the deputy head of school now occupy different management roles. A new leadership team has been created to respond to a rapid growth in the numbers of children who attend the day school and the residential provision. Monitoring and oversight of the residential service are weak, leading to shortfalls in relation to the national minimum standards.

The challenges presented by COVID-19 have been considerable. The school has remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and residential children have continued with their overnight stays. Leaders have worked under difficult circumstances to provide safe continuity of care and education for children. At times it has been necessary to use agency staff. A minority of parents of day pupils have expressed dissatisfaction with the standard of communication between school and home. Parents of residential pupils have praised the school and the residential staff for providing safe and individualised care for their children.

The new headteacher is working diligently with other managers to improve matters. She is revising the residential development plan so that the residential provision can be integrated into the life of the school more effectively. She is revising leadership roles to ensure that they include oversight of and liaison with the residential service. She has reviewed home-school relationships and is providing more opportunities for parents to be present in school. Any complaints are dealt with promptly, and include referral to governors and trustees when matters cannot be resolved. Parents told inspectors that the school is regaining its 'family feel', which was lost through rapid growth and the impact of government restrictions on social contact.

Annual reviews of children's progress demonstrate that they are doing well in their academic and social development. The school uses each child's annual review to make relevant and necessary changes to their education, health and care plans.

Managers do not systematically monitor children's outcomes and care plans to ensure that the residential service is as good as it can be. A minority of children's records are not up to date; in one instance, a record did not contain all of the required information in relation to a child being looked after by the local authority. It is unclear whether children are reaching their full potential, although all are doing well.

New leaders have failed to include the residential service when monitoring how well medicines are stored and have not identified that the recording of medicine administration is poor. Governors have a weak understanding of the residential provision and this limits any opportunity for constructive challenge and development within the residential service. Shortfalls found at this inspection do not directly affect children's safety or welfare, because children are the focus of the residential staff's activity and attention.

Children remain at the heart of the school. Care staff continue to provide good-quality care for children. New staff and agency staff have an induction that includes training in the school's approach to communication to meet children's identified needs. Staff meetings are child focused, but do not provide sufficient challenge to develop the residential service. Night staff do not have regular supervision. More focused opportunities for professional reflection will enhance children's progress, because staff will be able to plan proactively rather than reactively to meet their development needs.

The school has effective and productive relationships with a range of professionals who support the children in school and out of school. This means that children have clear plans in place to help them to move on to their next placements. These placements have included college and supported living, and on one occasion a return to local mainstream education.

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:

- 3.8 All medication is safely and securely stored, and proper records are kept of its administration. That prescribed liquid foods are labelled with children's names, the medicines cupboard is relocated and updates to medication doses are written on new administration records.
- 19.6 All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. That the residential manager supervises night staff.

Recommendations

- 10.1 Children develop to their full potential through planned staff support of their speech and language development, with clear goals and activities for children in the residence and in the community.
- 13.1 The school governing body monitors effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of boarding and welfare provision in the school, and takes appropriate action where necessary to provide constructive support and challenge.
- 21.1 The placement plan identifies the needs of the child that the school should meet, and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day-to-day basis. Specifically, that the information in behaviour support plans is up to date and all necessary plans for children looked after are available in the school and regularly reviewed.

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: SC040720

Head of school: Ms Vicky Dwyer

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Inspectors

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