

# 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, 27 children were resident. The children prefer to be called students.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting on 2 March 2020 to carry out a full inspection. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

### Inspection dates: 22 to 24 March 2022

**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 **good**

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

**Date of previous inspection:** 2 March 2020

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

The students make progress as a direct result of their time boarding at this school. Many experience their communication being unlocked, and for some students, this is for the first time. As a result, the students can explore the world inclusively. There is a strong deaf culture at the school, which extends into the local community. This enables many of the students to accept their deafness and embrace their identity as a Deaf person.

The needs of the students have changed over time. The school is adept at tailoring its curriculum and care to students with a broader range of complex needs in addition to deafness. The students are matched to accommodation dependant on their needs and abilities. Once students have demonstrated a range of independence skills, they can progress to more independent living in separate accommodation from the younger students. As a result, the students are supported to learn skills for independence and adulthood.

The students experience well-planned arrivals when they come to stay at the school. There are positive relationships between the staff and the students. Some of the students share bedrooms, usually with their friends. There are risk assessments in place for room allocation and sharing. However, they do not explicitly explore the risks of two students sharing. This is a missed opportunity to demonstrate that the allocation of rooms is thoroughly assessed.

The students' education is valued. Staff ensure that the students' needs are regularly reviewed as they make progress. A particular strength is the school's method of regularly reviewing the students' education and health care plans. This provides the local authority with relevant updates in order to ensure that the students' needs are accurately identified and reflected in EHC plans, with provision in place to ensure identified needs are met.

Overall, the students enjoy staying at school. They spend time with their friends and visit other homes across the school. Trips into the town are popular. The students describe enjoying a wide variety of activities that are on offer locally. However, some older students have been less enthused, and have felt the impact of COVID-19 continuing to affect planned activities due to ongoing lock down restrictions providers of our evening activities.

There are opportunities for the students' opinions to be sought. For example, the student council has raised concerns about the quality and choice of food on offer in the dining room. Many of the students use British Sign Language (BSL) and the staff's skills in this are variable.

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

A culture of acceptance and inclusion enables the students to explore their identity. The staff support the students to develop their own interests and make informed choices. A particular strength is the independence learning program, which encourages the students to take steps towards independence, including caring for their own space. However, one student's room was cluttered and had the potential to have an impact on their safety. Furthermore, there is no clear oversight of health and safety for the residential areas due to a lack of clarity around accountability and responsibility.

Safeguarding practice is Generally good. In almost all instances, concerns have been shared promptly and appropriately with external safeguarding agencies. However, some insular practice has occurred where one student's allegations, although withdrawn had not been shared with the external agencies. Although there is currently no known impact on the student, staff failure to comply with the school's safeguarding policy is an avoidable risk.

Safer recruitment is generally followed. However, one gap was identified in the employment of one staff member and although only in employment for two days the school had failed to seek references from that employer. Furthermore, there was no risk assessment in place for this staff member during their probationary period. Although there was no known impact at the time of the inspection., the failure to safely recruit on this occasion had the potential to impact on the safety of the students.

Governors provide an additional layer of scrutiny. They are trained in safeguarding and regularly sample safeguarding incidents. Leaders and managers have safeguarding on their agenda, and transdisciplinary meetings take place regularly to review any concerns arising. As a result, safeguarding practice is transparent and helps to keep the students safe across the school.

Medication errors are rare. When they have occurred, the learning is used to inform changes in practice. For example, one student's medication dose was incorrectly recorded on the record sheet. This has resulted in a change in practice where two staff check and countersign medication to reduce the risk of human error.

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

Leaders and managers are incredibly passionate. The principal and head of care work collaboratively and ensure that the staff share their high aspirations for the students.

The staff spoke highly of leaders and managers. They feel well supported and find that the training on offer prepares them for working with the students. Many of the staff are working towards higher levels of BSL to better equip them to communicate with those students who have higher levels of BSL as their first language.

The staff spoke proudly of the progress that the students make. They described many students arriving having had little to no communication. Through learning BSL and being immersed in school life, they quickly develop and begin to flourish. Feedback from parents regarding progress was also positive. One parent described the school as 'life changing' for their family. This is a good example of the progress that the students make as a direct result of boarding at this school.

Leaders and managers demonstrated tenacity in continuing to provide a service during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Careful risk management plans were implemented and the principal's efforts were key in securing vaccinations for the staff. Routine testing for the staff further reduces the risk of infection for the children who are using the service.

Managerial oversight is in place. However, the current systems did not reveal the shortfalls identified during this inspection, nor did the other mechanisms for reviewing the quality of the service.

## **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 standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 6.2 The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of children are ensured.
- 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.
- 14.1 Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

### **Recommendations**

- Risk assessments for children sharing bedrooms must be explicit regarding the matching criteria, risks and risk reduction measures. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 11, 6.3)
- Frequent consultations with the children regarding the quality of communication used by the staff would add value to the children's experiences. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards', page 17, 17.1)

### **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 (Principal)

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Sarah Olliver, Social Care Inspector

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