

# 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

This school is a non-maintained co-educational residential school for children and young people between five and 19 years of age who are deaf and some who also have additional complex needs. The main form of communication used is British Sign Language (BSL). English and Sign Supported English are also used. Children board Monday to Friday in 2 residential houses that are adjacent to the main school site. At the time of the inspection, 13 learners were resident.

The inspector only inspected the residential provision of the school.

### Inspection dates: 10 to 12 February 2026

**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:** 19 March 2025

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

Learners speak very positively about their experiences in the school and residential provision. They describe feeling happier, more confident and far less isolated than in previous settings. Many say this is the first place that truly understands both their deafness and their additional needs. Their pride in their own progress is evident throughout all discussions.

Learners value the friendships they form, the strong relationships with staff and the sense of belonging within a deaf-led community. They talk enthusiastically about the wide range of activities available to them and the warm, family-style atmosphere in the houses. Personalised bedrooms and shared living spaces help them feel settled, safe and proud of where they live and learn. These features contribute strongly to their emotional security.

Staff build warm, trusting relationships with learners and provide consistently high-quality support that promotes their wellbeing and engagement. Staff use their strengths, skills and interests to design purposeful activities that learners enjoy. Learners say that staff are approachable, supportive and genuinely invested in their success. This creates an environment where they feel confident to express themselves.

Communication between the care and education teams is excellent, enabling prompt sharing of information and consistent responses to learners' needs.

Learners benefit from strong encouragement to develop independence and life skills at a pace that suits them. They feel listened to and staff respond sensitively when they need extra support to be prepared for more independent living. Learners value opportunities to study, work part-time and socialise in the wider community. They appreciate the trust placed in them as they take steps toward adulthood.

The residential environment is welcoming, nurturing and carefully structured to support personal, social and educational development. Learners receive tailored help with both English and BSL, enabling them to communicate confidently in ways that suit their needs. Activity choices are meaningful and varied across indoor and community settings. Homes are clean, well equipped and offer spaces where learners relax comfortably together. Leaders recognise that some areas of the accommodation need renovation and redecoration. They have already set aside the funds required to complete this work.

Therapy provision is bespoke, highly tailored and firmly rooted in trauma-informed multi-disciplinary practice. Therapists describe the school as an exceptional environment where the impact on learners is profound. The culture is open, reflective

and continually improving. This enables therapeutic approaches to be responsive and consistently effective.

The therapy team provides coordinated input that is fully integrated across school and residential life. Assessment is timely, joint working is strong and interventions are skilfully delivered. Learners' needs are identified early and supported through clear strategies that promote meaningful progress. This ensures therapeutic support enhances daily routines.

Therapeutic work has a significant impact on learners' confidence, communication and emotional wellbeing. Case studies show learners developing independence, self-advocacy and resilience. Several learners have moved on to further education, employment or personal achievements that previously felt out of reach. The therapeutic culture enriches the curriculum and strengthens identity, particularly for deaf learners and those with complex needs.

Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school's impact on their children's progress. They describe transformational improvements in confidence, communication and happiness, and many say previous settings did not understand their child's deafness or learning needs. Parents value excellent communication with staff, including timely updates and swift responses to any concerns. Several describe the school as "a home from home."

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

Safeguarding is deeply embedded across the school, supported by a well-resourced and highly skilled safeguarding team that provides consistent oversight across both education and residential settings. Weekly meetings ensure that concerns, patterns and emerging risks are reviewed promptly. Staff share a clear understanding that safeguarding is a shared responsibility. This creates a culture where safety is prioritised at every level.

Recording systems are robust and used consistently, with all staff logging even low-level or indirect concerns. This enables staff to identify risks early and respond quickly. Staff notice small changes in learners' behaviour and use these observations to encourage children to share any worries. Learners say they feel safe because adults notice when something isn't right.

Early identification is a particular strength, and several cases demonstrate how swift action and clear planning have prevented risks from escalating. Daily handovers and care meetings ensure staff remain alert to changing needs. These routines embed safeguarding into everyday practice. Learners recognise that adults act quickly to keep them safe.

The strong culture of openness means learners feel supported to talk about their concerns. They report that adults listen carefully and take their worries seriously. This

helps learners develop trust and confidence in the safeguarding processes around them. Parents echo this, saying their children feel “heard” and protected.

Staff work closely with a wide network of agencies to help and protect learners effectively. Partnerships include multiple local authorities, Deaf CAMHS, interpreters, police liaison services and specialist health professionals. This multi-agency approach strengthens assessments and improves the timeliness of support.

Multi-disciplinary practice meets a broad range of needs, from trauma recovery to medical conditions, community risks and family instability. Online safety is given high priority, with strong filtering and monitoring systems in place. Learners benefit from regular education on safe choices, including workshops, assemblies and police-led sessions on consent and digital behaviour. They say these sessions help them understand how to protect themselves.

Leaders think carefully about long-term vulnerability and ensure learners develop communication, advocacy and independence skills that will support their safety into adulthood. Staff create structured opportunities for learners to express their views, including through key-worker sessions, house meetings and access to an independent listener. This helps learners build confidence in raising concerns. They describe staff as approachable and responsive.

Learners receive highly individualised support that reflects their communication needs, emotional development and family circumstances. Staff adapt their approaches to ensure every learner can engage meaningfully in safeguarding conversations. The team provides rapid, wrap-around help when needs become urgent, coordinating health, social care and therapeutic services without delay. Parents value the school’s ability to act quickly and compassionately.

Learners speak confidently about rules, trust and responsibility. Older learners, in particular, reflect thoughtfully on firm boundaries and say they understand the reasons for them. They welcome opportunities to discuss concerns directly with leaders.

Parents express strong confidence in safeguarding and welfare. They believe their children are safe, well supervised and supported to develop independence at an appropriate pace. Families praise staff for staying calm, protective and focused on learners’ wellbeing during periods of uncertainty. Many describe the safeguarding culture as exceptional and deeply reassuring.

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

A new leadership team responded quickly and confidently when weaknesses in residential practice were identified. They carried out a thorough review of health and safety arrangements and took effective action to ensure children experience healthy and positive routines. They took immediate action to raise standards by giving clear direction to staff and setting clear expectations.

Staff understand the importance of working to high professional standards. Leadership capacity has grown, with acting staff taking on new responsibilities and completing the training they need. This has brought stability and greater confidence across the team. Positive practice is now firmly established, with structured routines and clearer oversight of learners' care. Staff say the changes have given them direction and renewed confidence.

Leaders have made sure that all safeguarding, welfare and care processes are transparent and centred on learners' needs. Their clear decision-making and consistent presence on site have driven rapid improvement. Staff describe leadership as calm, supportive and easy to approach. This has helped create a safer and more settled residential environment.

Leaders use briefings, focused supervision and regular checks to ensure expectations are followed. Staff feel well supported and well informed, which has helped build morale. Parents also comment positively on the stability and reassurance provided by new leadership.

Leaders have a strong commitment to staff development. They invest in a wide range of training, including National College programmes and targeted sessions linked to appraisals. Staff receive training in risk assessment, trauma-informed practice and neurodiversity. This has increased staff confidence and strengthened the quality of care and behaviour support to children.

Leaders promote a genuinely collaborative culture where staff, learners and parents help shape improvements. Staff ideas influence activities, community links and wider residential life. Learners are encouraged to share their views on house routines, and leaders respond thoughtfully. Parents say communication is open, respectful and responsive.

Monitoring is rigorous and includes senior oversight, regular audits and prompt action where concerns arise. Leaders track the impact of improvements and ensure progress is sustained over time. Staff say they can see positive changes in learners' confidence, relationships and day-to-day experiences. Leaders now have a clear and well-paced plan for continued development.

Health and safety oversight is strong and reflects a consistent focus on keeping the environment secure. The premises manager responds quickly to maintenance requests and ensures all checks are completed on time. Annual audits and trustee oversight strengthen accountability. This means systems remain reliable and effective.

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

### **Point for improvement**

- School leaders should ensure that they prioritise renovation and modernisation plan for the residential provision.

### **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:** Maree Rhodes

**Interim Care Manager:** Alex Milner

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspector**

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector

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