

# Heathlands School

Heathlands Drive, St Albans, Hertfordshire AL3 5AY

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Heathlands School and its residential provision, Heath House, is in St Albans, Hertfordshire. It is a local authority-run day and residential school for students aged three to 16 years who are deaf. The residential and education provisions are on the same site. The school provides education for up to 105 students. Currently, 11 children and young people are receiving residential services. Residential students reside at the school during the week. Heath House is a two-storey building that offers accommodation on the first floor in single or shared study bedrooms for up to 20 residential pupils. The residential provision was last inspected in June 2017.

**Inspection dates:** 20 to 22 June 2018

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>Outstanding</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
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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 June 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## **Key findings from this inspection**

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children flourish and make excellent progress as a result of this exceptional school and residential provision.
- The children have access to a wide range of creative and inclusive leisure activities.
- The staff have a clear understanding of how to raise concerns, and these are dealt with promptly by the designated safeguarding officers.
- The school and residential staff work hard to build and maintain open and honest communication with parents.
- The children clearly enjoy the residential experience and, as a result, have flourished.
- The children make excellent social, emotional and educational progress because of the support and opportunities that they receive.
- Children clearly come first in both the school and residential provision. This ensures that children are happy and safe.
- The majority of the staff in the residential provision are deaf and act as positive and inspirational role models for the children.
- A forward-thinking and dynamic management team listens to and values staff's opinions and ideas and supports them to develop new ideas that help the children to progress.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Provide training for staff regarding gang culture and county lines, to further safeguard the children.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Ensure that all staff have training on understanding gang culture and county lines.

## Inspection judgements

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

Children flourish and make excellent progress because of this exceptional school and residential provision. The headteacher and senior staff are enthusiastic about and committed to improving children's life experiences. They strive to continually develop the service and, therefore, the outcomes for children, who are at the centre of practice.

Several children have come to the school unable to use sign language. During the inspection, some children were seen helping a child who has recently begun to sign, by showing her how to sign things that she did not know. The children were caring, kind and patient. This is the ethos that runs through the residential provision. A parent commented, 'Since [my child] started at the school, her communication has improved significantly in a short space of time. This means that she is less frustrated and calmer. It's made such a difference to her and to us as a family.'

Children have the opportunity to build and maintain positive relationships with other deaf children in the residential provision. The children take part in a wide variety of activities in the community such as tennis club and shopping trips. These activities enable children to develop awareness of their surroundings and to manage their money. Two children attend a snorkelling club with their hearing peers. A member of staff interprets the instructions, enabling the children to join in. Parents commented that they have seen their children's communication and confidence grow because they have the same opportunities to attend activities in the community as their hearing peers and siblings.

Children have bright, colourful log books containing photos of them on activities and learning new skills. The staff comment on the photos, and children can add what they have learned from the experience. These books show the children's progress from their starting point and are a wonderful memento to take with them when they leave.

Staff are committed to ensuring that children have the best possible experiences. They continually consult with the children on how the residential provision can be improved, such as through regular house meetings. A child said that they have recently chosen new paint for the boys' lounge, picked curtains for the bedrooms, have a choice of activities and help staff to create the menu. Staff respond to children in writing so that the children understand that their wishes and feelings are important and valued by staff. Governors undertake regular visits and speak to children and staff. A comprehensive report is produced after each visit outlining any actions or recommendations.

The small, enthusiastic and dedicated staff team has built strong and trusting relationships with the children and provides them with consistent care. The staff know the children extremely well, and this knowledge expands to the children's families. The residential provision has three deaf members of staff, who provide

excellent role modelling for children. Parents commented that having a mixture of both hearing and deaf staff enhances their child's experience. Staff clearly enjoy being with the children, and children enjoy staying at the residential provision. Children are welcomed after school and sit with a healthy snack and drink. They talk to staff about their day and plan their evening before doing their homework. A parent said, 'He [my child] brings home routines that he has learned in residential and it's made him more independent. It's great to see.' Children were seen enjoying spending time with staff, with lots of interaction and an atmosphere of fun and laughter.

Children spoken to were able to name staff both in the residential provision and school with whom they would speak if they were worried or upset. A new independent visitor has begun to build relationships with the children by attending activities and staying for tea. Staff recognise that children need to build trusting relationships in order to feel safe, and be able to speak to adults about things that may be worrying or upsetting them.

Children are treated with dignity and respect by staff and the children treat each other in the same way. They were able to explain that staff and other children have to flash the bedroom light and wait for a response before entering the bedroom.

Mealtimes are fun and sociable occasions as well as a learning experience. The children are involved in meal planning and are encouraged to bring in recipes from home. Children have themed nights so that they can try different foods from around the world. This encourages them to try new foods and gives them the opportunity to learn about different cultures.

Staff recognise that transitions for children can be difficult and that some children struggle with being away from home. A parent said that it can be difficult to get her child in the taxi on a Monday morning, but the staff are really supportive and will phone her child to speak to him about plans for the week. Staff go above and beyond, supporting parents with their children's transitions out of the school and residential provision.

Staff help children to develop their independence in accordance with their age, understanding and ability. Parents said that this work has helped their children to develop new skills and confidence. These transferable skills help the children at home and will serve them well in later life.

Residential staff are working to develop the provision to further improve outcomes for children. This work has included hazard workshops for children that involve children role playing an incident such as tripping and falling and then learning what to do. Passport for life incorporates independence skills at each key stage by developing activities to help children increase their skills and confidence by undertaking tasks such as shopping and using public transport.

Children's manners are impeccable; they are welcoming and want visitors to feel comfortable. Children are kind and thoughtful and adapt their sign language to ensure that they are fully understood by visitors. This ethos runs throughout the

whole school.

Appropriate health protocols are in place for children who need them. Medication is administered and recorded by two staff. Staff take a respectful approach to administering medication because children's dignity and privacy are central to the process.

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

Children, their families and professionals all said that children are safe at the school and residential provision. Children can name members of teaching or residential staff who they would talk to if they were worried or upset.

Staff and the headteacher are proactive in ensuring that children are safe. Staff are encouraged to report and record anything that has caused them concern. This system works well because of the openness, honesty and transparency of the school. Residential and school staff undertake safeguarding training together. This gives a holistic and consistent approach to safeguarding children.

The safeguarding governor and assistant head teacher responsible for pastoral care undertake a regular safeguarding audit to identify any issues or extra training required. The governor said that the school staff are always open to learning and improving their safeguarding practices and action any recommendations immediately. The designated officer said that safeguarding at the school is a priority and that, if the headteacher is not happy with an outcome, she will challenge the local authority appropriately. Staff have undertaken training in 'Prevent' duty and managing radicalisation. However, they have not received training in understanding gang culture and county lines, which would help them to safeguard children further.

Strong and effective systems ensure that recruitment is safe. Staff do not start working at the school or residential provision until all checks are received and verified. Staff have regular supportive supervision. Any issues with practice regarding teaching or residential staff are addressed with the staff member concerned, either during supervision or in an additional meeting, to support the staff member to improve their practice.

Staff take internet safety seriously. Children are taught internet safety at school and this is reiterated in the residential provision. Children are clear that they are not to take their mobile phones into certain areas in the residential provision, such as the bedroom corridors, and they sign a contract with staff outlining the rules for using the internet and mobile phones. This keeps children safe while staying at the residential provision.

Staff want children to learn to manage risk in accordance with their age, understanding and ability, and they want children to gain new experiences in a safe environment. Staff take children out to teach them road safety and to be aware of potential hazards when out in the community. Children need to demonstrate to staff

that they are competent before being able to have free walking time.

Children do not go missing from the residential provision. Staff spoken to are confident in the processes to follow should this happen. Comprehensive risk assessments are in place and updated when required. This ensures that staff are aware of any risks or concerns.

Due to high levels of staffing, children's interactions are closely monitored, ensuring that any disagreements or poor behaviours do not escalate. Staff undertake training in de-escalation techniques. Because the staff know the children so well, they can expertly recognise any potential problems before they become an issue. Because of this in-depth knowledge and understanding, physical interventions have not occurred in the residential provision for some considerable time.

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

Knowledgeable, passionate and enthusiastic managers lead this residential provision. There are high aspirations for the children, and staff continue to strive to develop the provision. Professionals spoke highly of the headteacher. They said that the children are at the centre of the school, and that the headteacher and the staff are dedicated to ensuring that the children have fun. Children learn through play and have the same life chances and opportunities as their hearing peers.

Leaders and managers have ensured that the high-quality care has been sustained by continuing to use research to develop their practice.

The school has been working with the Deaf Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service for many years, but are now also employing their own counsellor as an early intervention strategy, to support children before they reach crisis and need the CAMHS team. The headteacher is committed to using this service to support children before they are in crisis, which shows the forward-thinking ethos of the school.

Staff encourage children to think of others who may have disabilities or lifelong conditions. Children are in the process of raising money for a local children's charity. Consequently, children develop empathy and understanding of others.

Leaders encourage and develop staff because they understand the importance of having a well-trained staff team. Staff said that they feel supported by senior managers and that their ideas are listened to and valued. Teaching staff, residential staff and children contribute to the annual review.

The headteacher visits the children in the residential provision and will join them at mealtimes. The children are always pleased to see her, and they can see that she is interested in the residential provision and the children's experiences there.

The school works hard to maintain positive and participative links with families. Staff communicate with parents on a daily basis. One parent said, 'Staff are brilliant at contacting me over any issue and they are quick to sort it out. I have no worries about [my child] being there.' The children are in the process of helping staff plan

and prepare for the annual family and friends barbeque. This is attended by governors and gives the parents a chance to meet them, as well as each other. Parents commented that the event has given them the opportunity to meet their children's friends and families and, consequently, children have been able to maintain friendships during the holidays.

## **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:** SC056396

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mrs Deborah Jones-Stevens

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

**Telephone number:** 01727 754060

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## **Inspector**

Trish Palmer: social care inspector (lead)





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