

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 for deaf children is in St Albans, Hertfordshire. The school provides education for 113 students aged three to 16 years. There are currently 11 children who use the residential provision for up to four nights a week. The accommodation is in a two-storey building linked to the main school.

The residential provision was last inspected in July 2018.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 February 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 good

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: 20 June 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

This highly individual school offers a small and unique residential provision. The children are extremely happy and develop a strong sense of belonging. They confidently use their preferred communication method, British Sign Language. Children flourish at this residential school, where they become fully prepared for the hearing world.

A clear structure to the day ensures that the children are busy and purposefully engaged. Children take pride in the running of the house. The children take turns to do household chores and look after the house rabbits. The children help with a breakfast club bus on a rotational basis. They stock the bus shop, sell items, use functional mathematics and learn about a small business model.

The staff prioritise children's attainment and progress in education. The staff provide excellent support to help the children with their homework during the evening. The staff actively support accelerated reading schemes. The children read at lunchtime and in the evening to strengthen their reading levels and support their future life-skills. A parent said that their child, who was behind academically, now has very good education levels and is a confident signer.

The staff provide excellent role models. The majority of the staff are deaf and therefore understand the world from the children's perspective. The staff build the children's independence to enable their access to equal life choices. Two members of staff are an ex-pupil. This provides staff with whom the children can easily identify. The children enjoy spending time with the staff. During the inspection, the interactions between the children and staff were observed to be warm and engaging.

The children are highly productive members of the local and international deaf community. They make active contributions to and benefit from exciting first-hand experiences. A small team of children is taking part in an American quiz bowl competition, giving them an opportunity to compete and use American Sign Language. The school choir takes part in the Hertfordshire Schools' Music Gala. The children have undertaken a successful fundraising project to provide a school bus for children in The Gambia. The bus project has given children the opportunity to explore human and physical geography. The children have considered others in the wider world. They raised money, loaded the bus with essential items and tracked its journey across several continents. This strong promotion of deaf culture gives the children a sense of pride and builds their deaf identity.

The children make significant progress in their personal development. Children who previously had limited independence skills start to manage their personal care, make healthy food choices and prepare meals. Some children walk with their peers

independently and attend a youth club for deaf children in London. Parents reported a huge increase in their children's independence and self-care.

The children develop their tastes by sampling new foods and different textures. Some children prepare appetising breakfast options that are healthy and nutritious. The children demonstrate superb culinary and baking skills, decorating birthday cakes to a high standard.

The children benefit from an extensive array of exciting activities with ample choices. Football is a firm favourite; the children excel and demonstrate sporting talent. Boys' and girls' teams thoroughly enjoyed a football match, gaining first and second places. Ice-skating, snorkelling, canoeing and swimming are regular options. One child who initially lacked water confidence has excelled in the water and plays regularly in the water hockey team. The extensive variety and scope of activities help the children to develop their skills and self-confidence.

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

The children are extremely safe and very well supervised in the residential provision. The stable, calm environment encourages the children to feel relaxed, comfortable and at home.

Behaviour is exemplary, and the children are kind, polite and welcoming. They naturally accept one another's differences and include one another. Bullying is not a concern and very few behavioural incidents occur. The children benefit from the security of an orderly, well-run house where there is an agreed understanding of the behavioural expectations.

The staff uphold clear rules that provide structure and clarity for the children. The children remind one another of these rules. The staff provide quick and clear interventions when required and give the children meaningful consequences that they can learn from.

There are clear safeguarding procedures that are understood by the staff. Named safeguarding leads oversee any investigations. The staff are well trained and highly competent in their knowledge of reporting and investigating safeguarding concerns. They work collaboratively with external agencies and the designated officer to refer concerns or allegations and follow these up tenaciously.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There have been significant changes to the senior leadership team. The lead residential support worker is on long-term leave and the previous headteacher has retired. The headship is a new, joint post. This transition was planned and is working very well. Together, the headteachers provide a good blend of experience and skills. They have managed the lead residential support worker's absence with resourceful

and versatile cover arrangements. A temporary lead support worker is providing cover and is supported very well by the senior leadership team. She has the expertise and experience to temporarily manage the residential provision. This ensures that the children receive good continuity of care.

The senior leadership changes and new staff arrangements are working well. There is one policy that reflects dated guidance and prior to the new headship there are some records with elements missing. These shortfalls have not made a difference to the superb quality of care provided; however, they have the potential to do so.

There is an ongoing and ambitious drive to keep the residential provision exceeding good outcomes for children. Senior staff strive to include the latest research and use their staff and field experts to trial new approaches. A school development plan includes refurbishment plans for the communal living area.

The staff are trained in British Sign Language. Deaf staff use this and hearing staff are highly proficient in sign language. The expectations are that staff develop their signing to the highest possible level in order to communicate seamlessly with the children.

A new electronic learning log enables parents to access videos and photographs of their children when they are at the school. This colourful and interactive system captures the children's efforts and achievements. Families who are a distance from the school benefit from this source of information and interaction. The communication between the staff and parents and carers is extremely positive. Parents reported unanimously that they are well informed about all matters.

Parents provided extremely positive feedback. A parent said, '[My child] has moved forward in ways that we never thought he would, and we thank the school for that.' Another parent said, '[My child] had been out of school for a year. The staff have been good at building my child's confidence and skills in engaging with the hearing community.'

The judgement of good for leadership and management reflects that there are some areas for improvement, although they do not have a negative impact on the extremely high-quality care. There are no concerns about the way in which allegations are managed; however, the records do not provide clarity on the outcome of investigations and one of the policies refer to old legislation.

Recruitment checks are meticulous and ensure that new staff have the appropriate background and experience. However, there are family members working in close proximity. The potential implications have been discussed, but there is no written risk assessment to reflect how this is managed.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that policies reflect current guidance and that safeguarding records make clear the actions taken and the outcome of any investigations.
- Consider the potential risks for staff members who have a conflict of interest.

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: SC056396

Headteacher: Mrs Lesley Reeves Costi/Mrs Sarah Shields

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Inspectors

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