

Heathlands School

Heathlands School for Deaf Children, 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 is in St Albans, Hertfordshire and caters for deaf children. The school provides education for 134 students aged three to 16 years. At the time of inspection, 18 children were staying at 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 lead has been working in the residential setting for 17 years and has appropriate experience and qualifications.

The inspector only inspected the residential provision at this school.

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.

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 March 2022

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: 11 February 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The children make remarkable progress due to the high levels of nurturing planned care that they receive. The relationships that children and staff have are extremely trusting and full of love and mutual respect. A parent said that the care and support is exceptional.

The children have genuine affection for each other. During the inspection, older children were seen supporting younger children with activities and, in some cases, assisting them with sign language. Children say that it is, 'like living in a big family where you all look out for each other'.

Children recognise the positive impact that moving to the residential provision has had on them. They said that previously, when in mainstream schools, they found it difficult to make friends and often felt they did not fit in. The residential provision helps children to aspire to succeed and thrive in a hearing community. One child said that since coming to the school she has made friends, goes to lots of clubs and enjoys learning. This child spoke animatedly about the positive changes, which was a joy to see.

The staff are exceptional role models. They actively encourage children to develop their individual life experiences and independence. Three of the residential staff are deaf, giving a first-hand understanding of living with deafness.

Staff help children to be healthy. This includes physical health, such as diet and exercise, and mental health. Mealtimes are an important part of children's routine. Meals are fun, sociable and busy. The children are encouraged to help the staff cook. This time is used to catch up on news, and general chat about the day. Children are responsible for choosing the menus and meals are healthy and well balanced.

The school staff support residential children in the homework club two evenings a week for an hour after school. This is embedded into the children's routine and supports their learning.

The opportunity for children to learn independence skills is exceptional. Children have the responsibility of chores in the residential provision and this gives them a sense of ownership of the house. Older children can walk into town with friends, book meals out and use public transport. Staff work with them to give them the tools to manage independent time safely. One parent said, 'This has opened up a whole new world for my child.'

The range of activities children attend is phenomenal, from underwater hockey, football training, swimming clubs and a youth club for deaf children in London. These activities enrich the children's lives and support them to participate with hearing

peers. These connections build their confidence and help them to feel socially included. A parent said that her child did not have these opportunities before as she felt that she stood out. Since being at the school, the child is busy and 'always doing something'.

The school has set up an electronic journal where parents and children can access their own social media page that has photos and records of activities that they have accessed during the week. The child, parent and staff comment on the page. One parent said that it is great to see what her son has been doing and that it leads to conversations about his time in the residential provision when he comes home.

Children actively contribute to the running of the residential provision. Staff seek children's views and their suggestions are implemented. The girls proudly showed off their corridor and bedrooms which have been decorated and refurnished. Children can see that their views are listened to and acted on.

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

The children say that they feel safe in the residential provision because staff and other children flash the bedroom light from outside before entering their room to alert them. When the fire alarm goes off, they have a vibrating button under their pillow and the lights flash. These arrangements help children to feel safe.

The children are happy, relaxed, and polite. They are welcoming and engaging with visitors. The children's behaviour is exemplary, and there is a genuine warmth that runs throughout the residential provision and school.

Comprehensive safeguarding systems are in place. Staff know their responsibilities and report concerns effectively. These are followed up with the appropriate agencies and ensure that children are protected from harm.

Staff undertake a range of safeguarding training, including training on child exploitation, radicalisation and e-safety. Children learn about building and maintaining positive relationships and how to keep safe on social media. Consequently, children's awareness of risks and how to manage them increases.

Children say that they can talk to staff if they are worried or upset and that staff would help them. An independent listener visits the children once a week. The governors complete detailed monitoring reviews twice a term and this involves speaking with the children. The co-headteachers also visit children in the residential provision morning and evening and spend time talking to them. This gives children access to a wide range of adults who they know and can speak to.

The staff complete risk assessments for activities and trips. Staff make use of the detailed knowledge that they have of the children to minimise risk. As a result of

such detailed planning, children take part in a wide variety of activities that are safe and enrich their experiences.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The two co-headteachers lead a strong senior team that is inspirational and ambitious in promoting positive experiences for all children at the school and in the residential provision. Accomplished and confident leadership ensures that there is a thoroughly cohesive whole-school approach to give residential children the best level of care.

Senior leaders recognise the impact that the school has had on the children and how they have progressed from their starting points. There is a real sense of 'can do' at the school, and that any barriers to children's progress 'are there to be stepped over'.

Staff talk about the children with love and pride, and they understand all their individual personalities. This school has a family feel, and all staff clearly want children to succeed in all aspects of their lives.

Senior leaders continue to develop the school using research-based practice to enhance their learning. They have researched new and innovative practice into learning for deaf children. This research has been published and the school presented the findings to a university

The co-headteachers wrote a paper on: 'Who is championing mental health for deaf young people?'. Their research explores children being born into hearing families as well as deaf families, the additional pressures of being a teen questioning self-identity and how staff can incorporate barrier-free communication into their practice.

There is a comprehensive development plan that is child focused. It is regularly reviewed with governors and updated. Comprehensive and detailed monitoring is in place throughout the school and residential provision, and is used to drive improvement.

Senior leaders ensure that there are individual child assessments and comprehensive multi-agency support. The deaf child and adolescent mental health service team visits children at the school when required. This means that children continue to have support for any mental health concerns.

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: Lesley Reeves Costi /Sarah Shields

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Inspector

Trish Palmer, Social Care Inspector

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