

# 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 a school and residential provision which caters for deaf children. The school is situated within easy access of St Albans. It provides education for 144 students aged three to 16 years. At the time of the inspection, 23 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 inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

### **Inspection dates: 5 to 7 December 2023**

**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:** 28 February 2023

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

The children enjoy their time at the residential provision. Social activities provide ample opportunities for children's learning and development. Parents spoken to are appreciative and complimentary about the staff. The children have positive experiences and benefit from increased independence and confidence by being away from home.

Children's educational progress is impressive. Bedtime reading and other educational activities support the children's learning. Residential staff provide children with support and encouragement with daily homework sessions. Staff from the residential provision work well with school staff to help the children make educational progress.

Staff know the children well and have a good rapport with them. Several staff are deaf and understand some of the challenges that deaf children can face. Staff advocate for the children, they are proud of their deaf identity and actively contribute to a positive deaf culture. Throughout the school and residential provision, the staff provide positive role models for the children.

The staff help children to prepare for the future. The independent living programme encourages the older children to have responsibilities, such as domestic tasks, independent travel and problem solving. Consequently, children develop social and independence skills which increase their confidence and self-esteem in preparation for leaving the school.

Children enjoy a diverse and wide range of meaningful activities. For example, underwater hockey, football training, swimming clubs and a youth club for deaf children in London.

Children's activities and personal targets are recorded on an electronic journal. Parents and children can access their own social media page. This has photos and records of activities that the children have taken part in during the week. The child, parent and staff can comment on the page. This means that parents are continually informed of the progress their child is making.

Children can talk virtually to an independent person on a weekly basis. However, the independent person has changed several times and children said that they did not know who they were. This limits children's opportunities to talk to a known independent person who they are confident and comfortable to raise any concerns with.

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

Children appear relaxed in the residential setting. The house is adapted to be a safe environment for staff and children. For example, emergency lights flash when the fire

alarm sounds. Children know they can call staff for assistance during the night by pressing a buzzer which wakes staff.

Parents feel assured that their children are safely supervised while they are away from home. The staff know children extremely well. This assists them to manage any conflict and monitor when children need extra support. Specialist agencies come in to provide support to children with mental health concerns or low mood.

Generally the children get along well. There are some instances of bullying which the staff respond to promptly. The staff look at the reasons and provide children with resolution meetings and support. The children are encouraged to understand the impact of their actions.

There are clear routines during residential time and children understand the house rules. The staff have clear expectations of behaviours and at times children are given consequences.

Children are provided with information to increase their awareness of personal safety. The staff support children and parents in understanding online safety. Staff have conversations with children about social media and relationships outside of school.

The premises are safely monitored, and have regular safety checks. Fire evacuation plans are devised individually. The staff put on practise evacuations to ensure that children know how to leave the building safely in the event of a fire

There are several designated safeguarding leads who are aware who to contact in the event of a safeguarding concern. The staff are confident and competent in their responses. In response to one specific concern senior staff took action without delay to ensure that the concern was investigated and governors provided oversight and support. However, the local authority designated officer was not contacted at this time. This reduces transparency and external oversight.

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

A temporary change in the leadership of the residential provision has meant that managerial oversight is at a reduced level. The staff team have had to adjust to this. During this period the headteachers have provided senior cover and support. One member of staff is on extended leave and one member of staff was appointed and left, This has been recognised and addressed. The senior leaders of the school have ably stepped up to provide clear direction to the staff team.

The headteachers have high aspirations for the children. They know the children exceptionally well and understand the positive benefits that the residential element has on the children's progress.

The headteachers are skilled, experienced and well-respected by the staff. They have a visible presence in residence which allows them to readily monitor staff practice. Consequently, any practice issues are picked up and responded to promptly.

Staff receive supervision sessions that include reflection on practice. When necessary these sessions are increased to ensure that staff have the support they need to provide good role models. This work has helped staff to reflect and note improvements. Consequently, the staff are helped to improve their practice and the quality of supervision and support provided to children.

External and internal monitoring arrangements are good. The governing body has good oversight of operational aspects of residence. Governors spend time with children and an independent visitor makes regular visits to residence.

Complaints, are responded to promptly. However, complaints are not stored collectively and the record of one complaint could not be located. This limits the headteacher's ability to review any emerging patterns arising from complaints.

## **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 for residential special schools:

- The school's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to residential provision, and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The school should also keep a record of complaints made but later withdrawn. The school should keep under review any emerging patterns arising from complaints. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 14.3)

### **Points for improvement**

- School leaders should ensure that the children know who the independent person is and how to contact them.
- School leaders should ensure that they seek external oversight from the local authority designated officer in regard to safeguarding concerns in line with the school's safeguarding policy.

### **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

**Headteachers:** Lesley Reeves- Costi and Sarah Shields

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

**Telephone number:** 01727 807807

**Email address:** Head@heathlands.herts.sch.uk

## **Inspectors**

Rachel Watkinson, Social Care Inspector (lead)  
Deirdra Keating, Social Care Inspector

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