

Mary Hare School for the Deaf

Mary Hare School, Arlington Manor, Snelsmore Common, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 3BQ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school is a non-maintained special school that provides education and accommodation for children aged 5 to 19 who have severe and profound hearing loss. There are 145 children on the school roll, of whom 84 are currently boarding.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 January 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: 1 October 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make substantial progress in the residential provision. For many children and their families, the process of moving to the school has a transformative impact on their lives. One parent said, 'My child has found a deaf peer group that has been essential in helping them to understand their identity and where they fit within the wider world and society. The school is a truly special place.' Another parent said, 'My child loves the school. The support in place is very high quality. My child is happy and content and now really engaged in their learning.'

The staff team demonstrate a strong understanding about the importance of recognising that children make progress in many ways. For some children this may be academic or sporting excellence, and for other children this may be a successful transition into the school or increasing their spoken vocabulary. The celebration of all these achievements helps children to know that staff recognise their efforts.

There is a highly inclusive culture across the school and when some children already feel isolated due to their deafness, staff embrace their uniqueness and help children to explore their individual characteristics. This helps children to make important connections with their peers in the school and in wider society.

Since the last inspection there has been an increased focus on supporting children to develop peer relationships in the local community and this exposes children to a range of predominately speaking environments. These aspirations are threaded throughout the school and help to break down existing barriers for children and misunderstandings about deafness. Children are enriched through these experiences as sometimes they have to find new ways of communicating or adapting to unfamiliar environments. Key staff remain present to help children during these times.

Children are offered a wide variety of activities after school and during their prep time. Additionally planned activities are provided for children throughout the year and adapted accordingly in response to environmental factors. Staff are working hard alongside children to develop a new youth club in the school. While this is still in its early stages, it is intended to provide a much wider range of extra-curricular and social opportunities for children. The youth club will also enhance opportunities for engagement with the wider community.

The arrangements for the assessment and admission of new children into the school are very well established. A comprehensive multi-disciplinary approach ensures that children's needs are well understood, and proactive early intervention helps to identify children who may require residential provision. Pre-admission meetings help to ensure smooth child-centred transitions.

Children who previously struggled in mainstream settings are thriving socially and academically, with improved confidence and engagement in learning. Residential staff have been a key contributor to the development of communication profiles for all children. This has enhanced the ability of staff across the whole school to understand each child's communication needs and preferences.

As part of developing their autonomy and independence, children are supported and encouraged, where appropriate, to take increasing ownership of their own self-care needs. This naturally increases as children grow and progress and provides an organic way of helping to prepare children for adulthood. One parent said, 'Children gain a real sense of independence, learning valuable life skills, such as making their own snacks and doing their own washing, and have practical experiences that help them grow in confidence and self-reliance.'

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

The arrangements for safeguarding are comprehensive. They ensure that any concerns for children's welfare are well understood and thoroughly investigated when new concerns arise. Key staff involved in safeguarding have an excellent understanding of individual children.

Those responsible for the management of safeguarding ensure that required responses are monitored, and that effective action is taken to increase safety for children which always prioritises their welfare. Detailed records are kept. This helps to promote transparency and enables the safeguarding team to build a better understanding of children's emerging needs over time. As a result, children benefit from extra support as soon as it is required.

The provision of support and safeguarding advice extends beyond the school. Residential staff routinely provide support and advice for parents when children are back at home. For example, staff help parents with strategies to respond to children's emotional or behavioural needs and provide guidance regarding online safety for children.

Senior leaders demonstrate excellent oversight and understanding of the safeguarding factors that may impact on children, keeping their knowledge and skills up to date. Joint working between residential staff, senior leaders and other staff from across the wider school helps to create a united and cohesive network of staff around children.

A high proportion of the children in the school use auditory oral communication and are assisted through cochlear implants or other hearing enhancement devices. The school maintains a core group of children who prefer to use British Sign Language and who are proud of their 'deaf identity.' Although most of the residential team do not use British Sign Language, they take pride in finding ways to communicate with

children and understand them as an individual. This helps to promote positive relationships between staff and children.

Children know who they can speak to if they need to raise a concern and peer-to-peer support is an important part of children's experience of living in the school. Residential staff provide a wide range of targeted support to children, with assistance from specialist professionals from across the school as needed.

The monitoring and oversight of safer recruitment is well understood and those responsible have a strong understanding of the actions required to ensure that safe staff work in the school. The single central record is kept up to date and regularly monitored, with additional oversight from governors.

Health and safety matters are well managed across the school. The building requires a schedule of ongoing remedial work, and this is monitored closely by leaders. Changes to procedures are made when leaders identify barriers or delays in necessary works being completed. This has led to widespread improvements in the speed of repairs. Ongoing training has helped to improve the understanding for children and staff about how to respond in an emergency situation.

Children benefit from an extensive range of opportunities to share their wishes and feelings, such as through their key workers, house meetings or the student council. Despite this, several students feel that they do not always receive timely and informative responses to their requests. The leadership team is committed to ensuring that adaptations are made to ensure this does not continue in the future.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Senior leaders demonstrate how the experience of living in the school helps children to make exceptional progress in their education, or through the development of their social and interpersonal skills.

Residential staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of the model of care used throughout the school. They have high aspirations for what children achieve and understand the importance of their roles as primary caring staff. Staff feel that it is a privilege to work in the school.

Specialist staff, including speech and language therapists and wellbeing practitioners, embed targeted support across education and residential provision. These teams coordinate strategies so that consistent approaches are reinforced throughout the school. This promotes the development of improved communication skills and emotional resilience for children.

Staff say they are well supported through training and supervision, and new staff are happy with their inductions. The introduction of a new administration system has led to improvements in efficiency and quality of recording.

Governors have strong oversight of the residential provision, and this includes regular visits and strategic oversight. Governors provide a well-informed understanding of the primary areas of focus for boarding. There are regular meetings and scrutiny of the school and boarding is considered in specific committees. Governors maintain oversight of key leaders such as the principal and senior boarding managers, providing professional support and challenge.

Since the last inspection, there has been a restructure of the residential staff rota. This has helped staff to be able to improve the time they spend with children and better align their own working patterns. This has had a positive impact on staff morale and relationship building between staff and children.

Senior leaders have continued to work hard on enhancing the role of 'residential staff' and promoting role equality with other colleagues across the school. The foundations of these aspirations were first apparent during the last inspection, and now residential staff are embedded as central professionals in children's lives. Their expertise and relationship-based approaches are well valued by their professional colleagues across the school.

Residential staff are as an instrumental part of the communication process with children's families. Parents value the support that staff offer, with one saying, 'The residential staff go above and beyond, I could not speak highly enough of them.'

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

Point for improvement

- Leaders and managers should ensure that children receive suitable and timely feedback in relation to any requests they make about their experience of living in boarding.

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: SC011137

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Robin Askew

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 01635 244200

Email address: r.askew@maryhare.org.uk

Inspectors

Ashley Edwards, Social Care Regulatory Inspector (Lead)
Emma Haskell, Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Peter Jackson, Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Glen Strowbridge, Social Care Regulatory Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children’s social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children’s services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2026