

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 students aged five to 19 who have severe and profound hearing loss. There are 157 students on the school roll, of whom 110 are currently boarding.

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

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 October 2024

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: 12 September 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Managers and staff have created a highly aspirational culture that helps children to achieve their full potential and improves their life chances. Many children have faced a difficult educational journey and the experience of moving to the school has been transformational for them and their parents. One parent told inspectors, 'The school is a wonderful place where my child has grown and flourished, and I cannot praise the care team more.' Another parent said, 'The school is an amazing environment for the children to grow and develop. There is a nurturing, supportive culture.'

The leadership team has changed the working patterns of the residential staff team and that has led to a significant increase in the amount of quality time that care staff spend with children. This has had an extremely positive impact on the ability of care staff to build and to maintain strong relationships with children.

While most children communicate in an auditory oral manner, staff understand that children prefer to communicate in different ways and respect their freedom of choice. Some children prefer to use British Sign Language as their primary communication. Staff are clear about the importance of preparing children to live and work in a predominately hearing society. The school is currently developing individual communication profiles to further support children's preferred communication methods.

Children feel able to express their feelings, and the school is invested in ensuring that the voices of children who access the residential provision are represented in the wider school. Some children are appointed through a peer voting process to the school council or prefect roles. They undertake these roles with a sense of pride and responsibility.

Children have access to a wide range of specialist support services, such as in-house therapists and well-being professionals. All staff communicate effectively in order to ensure that there is a holistic understanding of children's needs and day-to-day experiences.

Children enjoy access to a range of social and educational learning opportunities that are planned around the education timetable. Some children are being supported to achieve additional formal qualifications through their extra-curricular activities, such as lifeguarding. This helps children to build their confidence and provides social learning opportunities, and for some children, this has positively influenced the career paths they have chosen.

Admissions processes for children who are new to the residential provision are well organised and carefully managed. As a result, children have positive experiences of moving to the school. Many children moving on from the school go on to further

education at college or university. One child said, 'Moving to the school has allowed me to meet my best friends, express myself and find out who I am as a person.'

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

There is a proactive safeguarding culture that emphasises that there is an individual responsibility on staff to exercise their duty to keep children safe and report any concerns for their welfare. The formal safeguarding team consists of leaders and staff who have expertise and relevant professional experience. Consequently, any necessary investigations are comprehensive and promote children's welfare.

Residential staff make effective use of safeguarding the system to report any concerns about children or practice within the wider school. There is good monitoring of this system, and effective action is taken to respond promptly if concerns arise. Senior leaders make good use of records to determine the help and support children require. Children also have a range of ways to share any concerns, including access to an independent visitor.

Information regarding safeguarding is recorded in a methodical and transparent manner. All staff receive relevant training regarding professional curiosity and reporting safeguarding concerns. The designated safeguarding lead demonstrates an excellent understanding of their wider safeguarding responsibilities. They have built good working relationships with external safeguarding professionals, including the local authority designated officer.

Children feel safe and can identify preferred adults to talk to who are able to communicate with them effectively. Staff receive training from the speech and language team to support the ongoing development of their communication skills and can also undertake more formal training, such as British Sign Language levels one and two. Staff are motivated and persist when there are communication barriers to ensure that children's voices are heard. In one example, a staff member's relationship with two children significantly improved over time due to the commitment they demonstrated to communicating with them. In addition, children sometimes use peer support to help each other to communicate.

Staff recruitment processes are robust and well managed. All staff are suitably vetted and, since the last inspection, time and effort have been invested in increasing the frequency and monitoring of disclosure and barring service checks. The single central record is routinely updated, ensuring that there is effective oversight of staff suitability to work at the school. All staff benefit from a comprehensive induction and training programme.

Staff are attuned and responsive to children's presenting needs and provide additional support for children and their families outside of the school. Senior leaders recognise the important position the residential provision holds as a place of safety and stability for children. They carefully use their resources to provide additional

support to children and their families when required. This helps to cement the school's status as a safe and important part of children's lives.

All children have access to therapeutic and pastoral support from trusted adults who they can seek advice and support from. Staff create individual support plans for children and ensure that children receive the help and support they need to in all aspects of their lives.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders have a highly ambitious vision for children and the progress they can make. They are committed to ensuring the highest standards of care for children. Leaders and staff demonstrate a sensitive understanding of each child's preferred communication method and the importance of respecting each child as an individual.

Senior leaders have demonstrated a sustained commitment to transforming the residential care approach within the school. The impact of this is a fundamental and significant shift in the perception of residential care staff in the wider school. Staff across the school now recognise better the depth of knowledge that care staff have about individual children and the value of the relationships that they have forged with them. This means that children receive more joined up and effective support in both their education and social lives within the school. As a result, residential care staff feel highly valued and have an increased sense of optimism about the positive impact they can have on children's outcomes.

Staff receive regular supervision, and the frequency of this has been increased to half-termly to increase opportunities for staff to reflect and focus on their self-development. Several residential care staff have progressed into other professional roles in the school due to the range of development and progression opportunities that the school provides.

Staff are invested in the ethos of the school and take great pride in supporting development. The morale of the residential care staff is high, and they say that they feel fully supported by leaders and managers to carry out their responsibilities and provide the best care for children.

Leaders and managers demonstrate highly effective monitoring of children's care. This gives them a well-rounded awareness of the progress that children make over time. Leaders and managers ensure that residential care staff are included in multi-agency decision-making and have an important role in the care planning and safeguarding of children who stay at the school.

Leaders and managers are receptive to the feedback that they receive from external monitoring. They strive to continuously improve the experiences of children and staff. Senior leaders adopt a learning culture and ensure that opportunities for growth and progression are fully considered within the wider school development plan.

Leaders and managers have developed excellent working relationships with a range of organisations and charitable enterprises. As a result, children have benefited from an expanding range of experiences and social opportunities, and this has enhanced their experience of living in the school.

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

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