

Royal School for the Blind

Royal School for the Blind Liverpool, Church Road North, LIVERPOOL, L15 6TQ

Inspection dates 7 – 9 October 2015

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Quality of care and support

Outstanding

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

Young people are safe and feel safe here. They enjoy extremely positive relationships with staff and their friends. A parent said, 'our son loves his nights in residential, it is like a sleepover with his friends.'

Leadership of the school and residence is exceptional and provides high quality care and support to young people. The headteacher and head of care are well supported by governors and trustees.

Young people are thriving because of the highly committed staff team who work tirelessly to ensure young people receive the best possible care. Young people flourish because they are highly valued as individuals and are actively encouraged and supported to 'reach for the stars.' Staff say there is no such word as 'can't.' The whole school reverberates with the sound of fun and laughter.

Communication and choices are key strengths of the school. Staff are intuitive and use an extensive range of spoken word, signs, symbols and gestures to help young people understand what is happening around them and to have a say in what they want to do.

Partnerships with parents, carers and other professionals are extremely effective. Honest, open discussions with everyone involved in the young person's care means nothing is missed.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance further the recording systems by considering streamlining some records and documentation to remove the risk of conflicting information and ensure all records are up-to-date with regard to young people's medication and missing from care risk assessments.
- Consider creating photographic diaries or scrap books as visual records of the young people's time in the school.

Information about this inspection

The school was contacted on the morning of day one by the lead inspector to announce the inspection. The inspection took place over three days with feedback provided on day three. During the inspection records and documentation were examined. Interviews took place with the residential pupils, head of care, headteacher and staff to secure their views upon the quality of care provided. A tour of the premises and grounds was undertaken. Evening activities were also observed over one night as agreed with the school due to a birthday celebration.

Inspection team

Chris Scully

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

The Royal School for the Blind is a non-maintained charitable school that provides education and accommodation for children and young people with visual impairment and a wide range of complex special needs, including learning and physical disabilities. The school provides up to 66 places for children and young people aged from 2 to 19 years, with residential provision for up to 20 children and young people during weekdays in term time. There are currently 22 children on roll. Eleven pupils use the residential and afterschool provision; seven male and four female pupils. There is a variety of boarding arrangements available depending on the needs of the child, ranging from one to four nights each week. The school currently provides residential accommodation in two separate units on the site. The school has a multi-disciplinary approach, which includes the involvement of specialist staff, including nurses, physiotherapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists and mobility therapists. The residential provision was last inspected in November 2014.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people **Outstanding**

Young people thoroughly enjoy their time at the school. They relish the opportunities to stay in residence. A parent said that their child shakes with excitement when they know they are coming to stay.

As a result of their stays young people are making exceptional progress across all areas of their development. For example, a young person who would only sleep on a duvet on the floor now happily sleeps in a bed, not only in residence but at home too. This was because of the commitment and patience of staff who over several weeks, supported, and encouraged the young person to make those steps to sleeping in a bed. This is a massive achievement for her and her family.

The word, 'can't' is something that does not exist in staff's vocabulary. They are constantly looking at ways of overcoming barriers to young people's engagement. For example, supporting a young person to attend the circus for the first time. Staff said, she thoroughly enjoyed herself and smiled throughout the performance. This activity was supported by a well constructed and carefully considered risk assessment to support her should she become distressed and need to go to a quiet space to settle. As it was this was not needed.

Developing young people's independence is a key strength of the setting. Young people are actively encouraged to be as independent as possible in relation to their starting points and disabilities. As a result young people are actively engaged in aspects of their self-care needs and are encouraged to be as mobile as possible. This includes encouraging young people to make their own way to the gym for fun exercise activities. Although during the inspection this young person decided he did not want to do this and made his feelings very clear that he did not want to move. However, when staff went for his hoist he decided to 'make a run for it' laughing as he did so. He smiled in delight as staff laughed and called him a cheeky boy.

Young people have wonderful relationships with staff. Parents say staff 'are like our second family, they are always there for us and our children.' A key strength of the setting is the emphasis on fun and laughter. Young people's laughter can be heard throughout the residence and never fails to put a smile on staff and visitors faces. Young people love to spend time with their friends in residence and on trips in the community. They enjoy an extensive range of activities that incorporate their individual needs, preferences and interests. These include playing football with Liverpool football club, theatre trips, swimming, bowling, rebound therapy and curling.

Highly effective partnerships between the residential provision and school means nothing is missed. Home school books and daily handovers at the beginning and end of the day ensure all staff are fully aware of any issues that may impact upon young people. Consequently, care staff are able to effectively adapt their evening routines to meet the ever changing needs of young people. For example, one young person who felt tired did not want to attend football that evening. So, he went for an evening stroll with a member of staff instead and then 'chilled' on the unit.

Quality of care and support

Outstanding

Young people receive exceptional care and support from a highly committed, dedicated staff team. Nothing is too much trouble for them and they go out of their way to ensure each young person has everything that they need to live happy, fulfilling lives. For example, sourcing the most appropriate sleeping arrangements to ensure they have a good night's sleep and remain safe throughout the night.

Staff have an innate understanding of each young person's individual needs. They take swift, effective action to reassess young people's needs following any changes in a young person's health. For example, one young person returned to school after breaking their leg. They were exceptionally well supported to re-engage in their learning and after school activities. Although staff acknowledged while, 'he is happy to be back, he is not pleased he cannot go swimming at this time an activity he 'loves'.'

Young people's communication needs are extremely well supported. Staff are skilled at using a variety of communication systems; for example, braille or moon writing as well as signing and pictorial guides. Their wishes and feeling are at the heart of everything the school does. This means they have a strong 'voice' in the school.

Care plans are of the highest quality and allow the uniqueness and individuality of each young person to shine. Staff truly capture the personality and character of the young people and this pours through the documentation. Records are usually up-to-date. However, on a small number of occasions the medications lists have not been updated, although staff are extremely aware of the changes in young people's medication. This is a recording issue and does not impact upon the care provided to the young people. Young people's health is extremely well supported and means they receive the right support and medical attention when they need it.

Young people are becoming much more independent. For example, the use of technology such as iPads has opened up the world to them. They enthusiastically access a range of sites to listen to music or watch their favourite programmes. Young people confidently alert staff when they have insufficient 'bars' to use the internet and guide staff or visitors to where they think they will get a better reception. Some have learnt through staff how to order food on the internet. They recently ordered a pizza and cheeseburger, though the order was not completed as they did not have the means to pay. Staff have said eventually they may be able to pay for this as well. This is an effective life skill for them to learn about the use of technology to order shopping or other items.

All young people are treated with the utmost dignity and respect. The school continues to stand out as a beacon for equality and diversity. Personal care needs are managed sensitively and young people are encouraged to be as independent as possible in carrying out these tasks. Staff are strong advocates, actively encouraging young people to see to their own needs where possible. For example, encouraging young people to brush their own teeth and maintain good personal hygiene.

Staff listen intently to young people. They are genuinely interested in what they have to say and welcome their suggestions as to what they or the home can do differently. For

example, when discussing the new school menus, young people were keen for lasagne, sausage, mash and beans and chicken enchiladas to remain. This happened.

Young people know how to make a complaint and know that this will be taken seriously by staff. There has only been one grumble in the last two years. This was from a young person whose television had broken. He reported this to the head of care and she quickly resolved the issue for him. This meant he could settle at night watching his favourite Postman Pat DVD. Effective systems are in place to help young people know how to make a complaint; this includes electronic recording devices which are situated throughout the school. These provide verbal information as to who the complaints officer is and how to contact Childline and provides access to someone independent who can respond to them should they feel the need to raise a worry or concern. This helps to keep young people safe.

Partnerships with parents is a key strength of the school. Parents said 'nothing is too much trouble for staff.' Staff keep them regularly updated on their child's progress and alert them to any concerns. For example, if their child is unwell this means they are able to take effective action to support them. Parents said, staff are 'wonderful, fabulous and that they cannot thank staff enough, because he is happy and enjoys school.'

Parents are confident to call the school at any time and know that someone will be there for them. Some ring daily to chat to their child and this is very well supported by staff. This provides effective reassurances to the young people, some of whom live a long way from home and their families. Parents visit for special occasions, such as birthdays and on a recent visit parents bought a take-away for all the staff and children to celebrate.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Young people's safety is given the highest priority. Staff are extremely vigilant, but are not risk averse. They encourage young people to take safe risks and develop an understanding of the world around them. For example, mobility training enables young people to develop the skills they need to safely explore the wider community. Rebound therapy has also been key to this for some young people. This is because it has enabled them to experience new activities and safely judge distances and boundaries. One young person, who is extremely active, responds well to staff instructions on trampolines. This means he can now judge where he is and move back to the centre of the trampoline. Others can now safely navigate around the school and grounds, effectively supporting their independence.

All staff are trained in safeguarding and child protection. Some have recently undertaken a bespoke child protection training course with the NSPCC for children with visual impairments and disabilities. Staff said this provided them with the forum to explore child protection with their children specifically in mind. Robust reporting procedures are in place should staff have a concern about a young person's welfare or safety.

Young people do not go missing. Staff are aware that there is always the potential for this. This risk of this is minimised due to the high staffing levels. They have a clear understanding of the processes to follow should this occur, but as yet there are no individual missing from care risk assessments in place for young people. This would aid

the communication between school and the home should this occur.

Staff can quickly identify when young people are feeling upset or anxious. Consequently, they can initiate strategies to support young people and reduce their anxieties, such as listening to music, going for a walk or simply talking to staff. This means physical interventions are not used. Young people learn to share and take turns. For example, taking turns with the iPad. They are getting much better at this and are developing an understanding of sharing. This is because of the consistent messages and reassurances from staff about when it will be their turn.

Young people stay in warm, homely environments. Their bedrooms are personalised to their individual tastes and interests, whether this be Liverpool football club or animals. Photographs of young people adorn the walls in the residential unit and show the fun times they have here. Photographs are regularly sent home to parents, but the school does not keep a photographic diary of the young people's time here. This would enable them, the young people and their families who are new to the school to get a real sense of what the school is about and the extensive fun activities afforded young people.

Robust recruitment and vetting procedures keep young people safe. All visitors to the school and residence are required to sign in and are appropriately supervised while on site.

Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The care provision is led by a highly committed and forward thinking head of care. She works in partnership with the new headteacher to continually improve upon the opportunities available to the young people. For example, the school was asked to make the bathrooms more homely. This has been achieved by refurbishing the bathroom and installing electric hoists. This has improved young people's bathing experience. Also all young people now have televisions in their bedrooms. Staff says this has enabled them to have more quiet time in their rooms if they wish and watch a favourite DVD or programme.

The governing body and trustees invest highly in the school and have a visible presence here. The Chair of Governors visits weekly to meet with young people, staff and the headteacher. The headteacher is constantly looking at ways to raise the profile of the school and open it up further to the community. This is being achieved through the new interactive website which will enable families to walk through a virtual tour of the school, the creation of a parent toddler group that is steadily increasing in numbers and the introduction of water babies' sessions. This is effectively supporting the sustainability of the school.

The staff team have worked together for some considerable time. They are intrinsic to the delivery of the exceptional care and support to young people. This is because of their excellent partnership working and also the fact that they genuinely care about the young people in their care. They provide support to families at weekends and volunteered to take part in the holiday play scheme which began this year. Several have already agreed to support future schemes. They are well trained and say they feel well supported by the head of care and senior leaders.

The care team are integral to everything the school does. They are active and engaged participants in the recently created team around the child meetings. They are confident to challenge others and put forward their suggestions and do so with the best interests of the child at heart. For example, suggesting school uses a back pack for one young person to try and promote their independence. This is now being trialled.

Monitoring is robust and identifies areas of improvement, such as the redecoration of the residential units, which is due to commence over the half term break. Record keeping is very detailed. There are two very minor recording issues but these do not detract from the high quality care and support provided to young people.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	104735
Social care unique reference number	SC040720
DfE registration number	341/7023

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	11
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	2 to 19
Headteacher	Mr P Boulton
Date of previous boarding inspection	13/11/14
Telephone number	0151 7331012
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