

Royal School for the Blind

Royal School for the Blind Liverpool, Church Road North, Liverpool L15 6TQ
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The Royal School for the Blind is a non-maintained charitable school that provides education and accommodation for children who have a visual impairment/ sensory need and a wide range of complex needs. The school provides up to 77 places for children aged between two and 19 years. It offers residential provision for up to 10 children at any one time, in a detached house in the school grounds. At present, children use the residential provision in a mix of Monday to Thursday placements and overnight stays. The school provides a multidisciplinary approach. This includes the involvement of specialist staff such as teachers, nurses, occupational therapy, physiotherapists, a music therapist, mobility officers and a speech and language assistant.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 May 2019

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: 16 April 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

All children who access the school's residential provision make significant progress, taking account of their starting points, in all areas of their development. This is because staff fully appreciate and embrace children's uniqueness and their individual needs. They work with teaching staff and health professionals to pinpoint children's complex needs. Good multi-professional communication underpins the excellent care provided and promotes children's progress. Consequently, staff deliver bespoke care and support.

Children enjoy exceptionally positive relationships with staff, and with each other. This is because staff take time to understand how individual children build relationships. They use this knowledge to support children to develop their social interaction skills and their communication skills, and to appropriately express their emotions. Consequently, children can develop friendships with their peers.

Partnerships between staff and children's families are excellent. Parents and carers spoke with passion and positivity about the impact that the residential provision has on children's growth and development. One parent said, 'I was extremely apprehensive of staff; would they understand him and his extreme challenging behaviours? I was wrong! Staff are outstanding and life-changing. They stepped in and supported him and us.'

The residential provision provides a stimulating and exciting environment for children, where staff consistently encourage them to work on their educational targets. Additionally, staff work with children and their families to identify social, emotional and sensory programmes that will support their transition to adulthood. For some children, this may mean learning basic independence skills such as making drinks and snacks. For other children, this means improving their hand-eye coordination, allowing them to help with their personal care or using a cane safely. Children are immensely proud of their achievements. They grow in confidence and self-esteem because of these opportunities.

Children participate in a wide range of exhilarating, fun and educational activities. They are fully involved in decisions about how they spend their time during their stays. Staff support children to take part in community projects, recreational activities, trips and social occasions. Managers and staff make sure that children's visual impairment and complex needs do not curtail their leisure options. This means that children are not defined by their disabilities. Staff structure children's residential experience around celebrating their abilities. This further supports their progress and enhances confidence.

Children are supervised around the residential provision without taking away their independence. They are encouraged to mentally map out the environment by trailing

and exploring objects of reference. The residential provision has been carefully planned using contrasting colour schemes and furnishings for children with a visual impairment to navigate their environment safely.

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

Children are safe and protected from harm. Staff are extremely competent in assessing children's risks and identifying strategies to reduce these.

Staff are very mindful of children's individual anxieties. Staff use a multi-sensory approach to communication, involving tactile, auditory, olfactory and taste stimuli. Because the children enjoy this approach, they become more confident. One parent said, 'I know he is safe here and that's massive for us as a family. I don't think about him when he is here as I know he's safe and that they will do everything that they can to ensure he is happy.'

Staff recognise that children's challenging behaviours may be reflective and symptomatic of their often-complex health needs. A collaborative approach is taken if pupils are demonstrating challenging behaviour. The staff have a planned strategy meeting, TAC, (team around the child) involving all of the staff who work with the child to resolve the situation. In addition, the head of care ensures that they have enough staff on each shift to provide children with one-to-one support when necessary.

The head of care works closely with other members of the senior school leaders' team to ensure that they appropriately record, manage and address any concerns, regardless of severity. This enables managers to build a full picture of children's circumstances. Consequently, this integrated approach promotes children's safety and welfare.

Staff benefit from regular safeguarding training. This includes modules relating to child sexual exploitation, bullying and radicalisation through the 'Prevent' programme. Staff are fully aware of their responsibilities and are confident in their use of referral systems to highlight any safeguarding or child protection concerns. Furthermore, strong and consistent governance by the designated officer, senior management team and safeguarding governor means that safeguarding practice is monitored effectively. This helps to keep children safe.

The members of the dedicated maintenance team ensure that they regularly complete all relevant health and safety, fire safety and environmental checks. They quickly address any known hazards or risks to children's safety. This means that children reside in a safe and secure environment.

All residential and school staff are subject to robust recruitment processes. Recruitment records include verified employment references and a range of suitability checks. This ensures that staff are safe to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Senior leaders and residential managers are inspirational and lead by example. The head of care and deputy head of care are innovative. With the support of the headteacher, they continually review the positive impact the residential service has on outcomes for children. Leaders and managers prioritise children's progress. They create a 'can-do' culture across the residential service. The committed and motivated residential staff embrace this ethos and have high aspirations for all children accessing the service. Parents and carers appreciate this. One parent said, 'For our son, the residential facility has been the most successful part of his school life and this is due to the professionalism and dedication of the residential staff.'

Leaders, managers, staff, governors and independent visitors continually assess and evaluate the residential provision. This ensures that they have a clear understanding of the service's strengths and any areas for development. The school nurse is continuing to update the care planning process so that children's care plans better capture their progress. Once this work is completed, it is the hope of the senior leadership team that this will provide a more comprehensive and inclusive description of children's needs and achievements.

The head of care ensures that staff have the skills and experience that they need to support the children. Although most members of residential staff are long-serving, managers continually seek to offer new training and use research to enable them to reflect on and to review practice. This ensures that staff practice and performance continue to evolve to meet the children's changing needs.

Partnerships between leaders and managers and support services are strong and effective. These relationships are further supported by an active governing body. The members of the governing body fully understand the positive impact that the residential provision has on children's progress and development.

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

Recommendation

- Further enhance monitoring of the quality of medical welfare approaches used by staff to improve outcomes for children, particularly regarding the administration of medication. (National minimum standards 13.9)

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: SC040720

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Paul Boulton

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Elaine Clare, social care inspector (lead)

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