

# 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 168 students on the school roll, of whom 128 are currently boarding.

### Inspection dates: 12 to 14 September 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:** 10 January 2023

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

Children receive care from an experienced and nurturing staff team. Individual children's needs and wishes are well known by care staff. Alongside a trusted person in the houses, there is a large multi-disciplinary support team available to the children including a well-being team, speech and language therapists, activities co-ordinator and other colleagues across the school.

Children talk with great passion about their time in the school. The wide range of activities available to children, planned for by a dedicated activities co-ordinator, ensures that there is always a good variety of things to do. Alongside daily sports clubs and cooking clubs, there are other activities available such as trips to a film studio tour, the local arcades as well as charity walks in London. The use of pupil premium and an in-school fund ensures that all events are available to all children.

Parents, in the main, are positive about the school and the experiences their children have there. Most parents report positive communication from the school and acknowledge the positive impact of the new leadership team. However, some parents are not happy about a lack of updates relating to what happens for their children in the care part of the school.

Children make significant and celebrated progress within the school and all achievements, no matter how small, are recognised. Pupils who have left the school recently have secured their desired university placements or been able to move into their chosen job.

There is a comprehensive system for gathering children's views. This takes the form of questionnaires that are followed up on. This includes allowing children to contribute to any decisions that involve them. Information that is gathered from this is used by leaders to plan work with the school moving forward. Children are also offered the opportunity to regularly speak to an independent listener.

There has been a constant theme through the inspection, from point-in-time surveys, parent feedback and, fundamentally, the views of several children. This relates to not having people available who are British Sign Language trained, as this makes it difficult for some children to communicate at times. Consequently, not all children, in the residential aspect of the school, have their needs fully met. This is because the communication barrier is not fully understood by leaders, managers and staff. There is no implemented strategy in the residential provision to ensure that all children are equally able to communicate.

There have been significant changes to the environment since the last inspection, with the old manor house no longer being used for children to stay in. This has allowed the children who lived there to experience a more homely feel to where they stay.

Children are well prepared for the future. There are expectations of children throughout their social time to take an increasing responsibility for their home environment, depending on their age. There are also opportunities such as 'working' in the school diner, to give children a wide range of skills.

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

Safeguarding practice is a real strength of the school. A dedicated and knowledgeable designated safeguarding lead is supported by a team of deputies and the wider senior leadership team. Everyone in the school, no matter what their role, understands the part they play in keeping children safe. This helps to create a positive safeguarding culture.

Children are also aware of their responsibilities in the safeguarding culture. On one occasion, children were able to raise concerns with care staff when they had seen something that they knew was not alright. They made this decision because they wanted all children to be safe.

Staff take immediate action when there is anything of concern raised. Effective reporting, both within the school and to wider safeguarding professionals, has allowed appropriate action to be taken quickly to minimise any risk to children.

Since the last inspection, there has been the introduction of new practice that allows staff to support children with their behaviour. This new practice and training has been introduced on a school-wide basis and has meant a greater consistency in how best to support children. The importance of relationships and the understanding of early life experiences are at the core of support offered. This has helped staff to focus on the significance of their role when children are upset. There have been no physical interventions since the last inspection.

Recruitment practice for new staff is robust. A dedicated human resources team ensures that all relevant pre-employment checks are undertaken following a comprehensive and detailed interview. Some staff have worked at the school for many years, some exceeding 20 years. Currently, there is no policy regarding renewing disclosure and barring checks, although they are reviewed periodically.

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

Since the last inspection, there has been a further addition to the senior leadership team. Furthermore, the newer appointments identified at the last inspection have now had time to make a positive impact, with some significant changes in the school. For instance, as well as the previously acknowledged behaviour strategy, there has been the implementation of a new rota system.

This rota system has allowed staff to have an increased focus on the work they do by providing opportunities for sharing practice ideas, for example in team meetings,

linking with education staff and having the time to update records. This has also contributed positively to the work-life balance of staff. Although this is a relatively new system, staff are positive about it. Staff are confident to approach senior leaders to discuss if this system is or isn't working, knowing their views will be heard and considered.

One of the outcomes of the new rota system is that care staff now have a greater sense of belonging across the school. This is also echoed by waking night staff, who have received further training and have increased their attendance at team meetings. The leadership team's aim of 'one school' is apparent in all discussions with staff.

All staff receive regular supervision and detailed annual appraisal. Staff are clear that they do not need to wait for supervision to raise concerns, as team leaders or someone from the senior leadership team are always available.

Leadership is well supported by an effective governing body. Care is well considered in all meetings and a subcommittee has been formed in respect of this. There are regular visits to the residential provision to ensure that it is doing what it aims to. The governing body is aware of its role as a critical friend and fulfils this role well. Alongside this, there has been a change in the Standard 3 visitor. All reports viewed continue to support and challenge the school to further improve.

Leaders are clear of the needs of all children and hold local authorities to account when things are not done or if children are at risk.

## **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:

- 18.3 Children are supported to participate in important decisions about their lives using means appropriate to their level of understanding and provided with support where they have additional communication needs. The school does not assume that any child is unable to communicate their views.

### **Recommendations**

- School leaders should ensure that there is a system for checking disclosure and barring information regularly for all staff.
- School leaders should ensure that parents receive regular feedback.

### **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:** Mr Robin Askew

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspectors**

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