

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 202 students on the school roll, of whom 153 are currently boarding.

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 January 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: 1 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive support from dedicated staff who are passionate and enthusiastic. Children make great progress academically, and many spoke of their growing confidence and sense of identity since joining the school. Children speak powerfully of the journey from mainstream education into specialist provision, which for some has been a challenging and protracted process. They highlight a sense of belonging, the value of a shared experience and the strong friendships and bonds that they make with other children.

Children who are new to the boarding provision are welcomed sensitively, with careful and considered planning. Overall, the quality of planning and support is good. While health support for specific conditions, such as diabetes, is well documented and managed, it has not been as easy to find more general health information, and health plans could be clearer.

Children have trusted and secure relationships with the adults who are looking after them. Staff know the children well. They listen to them, spend time with them, protect them and promote their welfare. Children have a strong sense of community and belonging.

Children feel that they have lots of opportunities to contribute to decisions that affect their daily lives at the school. An active school council promotes the voice of children. Leaders have also worked hard this year to ensure that children at all stages of development in their communication skills are included. Initiatives such as the use of British Sign Language interpreters and the addition of more signing staff are praised highly by children.

Children enjoy access to a wide array of social, educational and recreational opportunities, including activities in the local community as appropriate, irrespective of any disability they may have. Children participate in after-school activities, community-based activities and school trips. Children's free time has a good blend of structured and unstructured activity. Children enjoy spending time with their friends and have lots of choice in how they spend their time outside of school hours.

Children are supported to develop their independence according to their individual needs. Expectations increase as children become older, and children enjoy and recognise the benefit of developing their living skills, such as cooking, doing laundry and spending independent time in the community. Staff highlighted some concerns about the structure and capacity of support in the sixth form-boarding, but this is already subject to a full review by the director of care.

All boarding houses are clean and tidy, but the condition, fixtures and fittings of some homes are variable. Some students felt that their houses had not received the same investment as others. Children enjoy the fact that they have some level of choice in

who they share accommodation with and also have opportunities to access single-person accommodation if that is their preference.

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

Children benefit from positive developments in the structure and leadership around safeguarding at the school. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is skilled, knowledgeable and highly competent. She is effectively supported by a broad-based safeguarding team with representatives from across the whole school.

An excellent partnership is developing between the new director of care and the DSL. Their close working relationship ensures that safeguarding issues are dealt with quickly and appropriately. Staff praise the enhanced quality of communication and feedback around issues relating to the safeguarding of children.

Governance and oversight of safeguarding are strong and has been further enhanced by bringing in additional governors with extensive knowledge of safeguarding, particularly with disabled children.

Staff use the school's reporting mechanisms effectively and have a clear understanding of safeguarding processes. Staff ensure that they maintain vigilance and are able to readily identify signs and indicators of potential safeguarding issues. Safeguarding training is delivered as part of induction for all staff and regularly refreshed. This ensures that boarders live in a safe and secure environment.

Staff praise the principal's clear vision for promoting positive behaviour across the school. They highlight strong leadership responses to poor behaviour, and they have high confidence that they have the support of leaders to address any concerns or issues when they arise. New leadership structures in the boarding houses are helping to ensure that actions are taken quickly, and staff are feeling empowered and confident in their approach to managing behaviour.

Staff and children spoke of improvements across the school. Boundaries and expectations around positive behaviour and forming positive relationships with others are clear. The principal skilfully promotes these expectations across the whole school setting, ensuring that everyone is 'on the same page.' Parents have been brought into this partnership to provide consistency for children across school and home.

There have been some incidents of bullying identified at the school this year. The principal acted quickly and decisively to ensure that perpetrators experienced clear consequences for their behaviour. Support for victims has also been high quality. While the school is alert to the potential for bullying to occur, they are developing a culture of zero tolerance. Educative and restorative work with children is very good. Children can identify significant progress in this element of the school culture and feel confident that they can raise concerns quickly with trusted adults and that their concerns will be addressed and managed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The new principal has made a very positive start to his tenure. His passion for the school and desire to raise standards are strongly evident. He has engendered the trust and confidence of staff and children across the school.

The introduction of a dedicated director of care has been very well received by boarding staff. Staff feel that leadership structures have been improved across all boarding houses. They say that this has helped to develop their confidence and autonomy. The staff demonstrate a sense of excitement and motivation for the future of the school.

School governors play a strong role in the oversight and monitoring of practice. They share a passion for and commitment to continuous improvement. They continue to grow and develop the governing board and have recently enhanced the skill set and experience of the governors with some well-targeted recruitment.

Leaders share an excellent understanding of the needs of children. They recognise areas for development and have created clear action plans to support continuous growth. Leaders recognise that the timely review and updating of policies and procedures have not always been on target. They have set up a policy review panel to bring this into line.

Staff feel well supported and valued. They say that their experience and knowledge are respected, and they have many opportunities to contribute to decisions made about life at the school. They benefit from regular supervision and appraisal to support their personal and professional development. Training for staff is of a high standard, and the school makes good use of internal and external professional expertise to enhance the learning offer for staff.

The principal champions the importance of high-quality relationships with parents and professionals. Parents, in the main, praise communication and feel connected to the school. Where parents have raised concerns or questions, the principal has maintained detailed records of actions taken to address them. Professionals who come into contact with the school have high regard for the quality of support offered to children.

Inclusivity and acceptance of difference are championed across all areas of the school. Children spoke of a safe space where they could express their identities confidently and safely.

Leaders share a commitment to place the views and wishes of children at the heart of school life. They take time to listen to children and ensure that children feel integral to all aspects of decision-making that affect their lives.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should set a plan to bring the quality of fixtures, fittings and decor into line across all boarding houses.
- School leaders should continue to focus on ensuring that policies and procedures are reviewed and updated in a timely manner, adhering to the published dates and targets specified by the school.
- School leaders should consider adapting and updating children's plans to capture a full picture of children's health needs in a readily accessible format.
- School leaders should spend time with sixth form boarding staff, reviewing staff sufficiency and ensuring that older boarders have age-appropriate and safe levels of supervision.

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

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Inspectors

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