

Meath School

Brox Road, Ottershaw, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 0LF

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This school is a non-maintained special primary school. It provides an integrated approach, including education, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and residential care.

It currently provides 75 places to children aged four to 11 years, whose primary needs arise from severe and complex speech, language and communication difficulties. The school offers residential services and an extended school-day programme. Up to 15 children can stay overnight for 'sleepovers' at any one time. Children stay between one and four nights a week, as agreed with their parents.

The school is owned and managed by the children's communication charity Speech and Language UK. The residential accommodation is on the first floor of the main school building.

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

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 February 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 last inspection: 21 February 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The children are happy and enthusiastic and make remarkable progress in key areas of their lives, because of the care and support that they receive. They learn to become increasingly independent. For one child, the progress made with their health needs means that they are less reliant on staff and are much more self-confident.

Children thoroughly enjoy staying at the school. They take part in a range of different experiences that help them to have fun, develop relationships and practise the skills that they need in order to be successful when they leave. This includes going to a local gym and on shopping trips and taking part in imaginative play.

Parents feel well informed and have good relationships with staff. They say they are highly impressed by the progress that their children make and the impact that the residential experience has on their child. One parent said the support their child had had with learning to use sign language had been 'life enhancing' for them. Professionals say staff communicate effectively and work well in partnership with them. They also say the children make excellent progress.

Children have strong and positive relationships with staff and feel well cared for. Their views are sought and listened to; these help to influence change and improve the overall experiences of staying at the school. Children know how to make a complaint or raise concerns if they need to. All staff understand children's methods of communication, which helps the children to become more confident and effective communicators.

When children join the school, leaders undertake a thorough assessment process to ensure that they can meet their individual needs and understand each child's vulnerabilities. This helps to inform well-written plans that guide staff to provide high-quality care and the right level of support to enable children to become as independent as they can be.

When children leave the school, this is equally well managed. Children and their families are supported to ensure that appropriate placements are found, and children are helped to have positive and successful moves.

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

Children say they feel safe and happy. They identify adults they can speak to if they are worried or unhappy.

The designated safeguarding lead and other members of the safeguarding team have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe. When

any concerns arise regarding children, these are acted on quickly. However, on one occasion, records of actions taken in relation to concerns were fragmented, which is a barrier to them being easily accessible.

The safeguarding team meets regularly to discuss concerns. Team members have worked to develop excellent links with the wider safeguarding network, including police, children's services and the local authority designated officer. They are responsive and manage concerns well.

There are no concerns regarding bullying in the residential provision. Children are taught how to develop and maintain positive relationships and to talk about their feelings openly with staff and each other to resolve any conflicts.

Staff work with children to help them to understand and explore their own feelings and emotions. As a result of this work, there are very few incidents when children display behaviours that are difficult to manage. There have been no incidents of physical restraint being used since the last inspection. This is because staff are highly skilled in recognising potential triggers that may lead to children experiencing difficult feelings and they are able to support children positively to avoid these from escalating.

Staff have a thorough understanding of each child's health needs and how to support them to be healthy and safe. When children have specific needs that are not covered in routine training, managers ensure that staff receive bespoke training to allow them to care effectively for each child. As a result, children's health is improving. One child is now eating a wider range of foods and another no longer needs to be fed via a tube, as they can eat and drink an adapted diet. The impact on this child's self-confidence is amazing and he was able to speak with pride about his achievements.

Recruitment practice follows safer recruitment principles, in accordance with statutory responsibilities. This ensures that, when staff come to work in the school, they are appropriately checked and all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that they are suitable.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders are passionate and highly ambitious for children's futures and experiences. They ensure that high standards are maintained and that staff share in the children's successes and achievements. Leaders work collaboratively to ensure that they continue to be innovative in their approaches to enable children to be independent and successful. They have worked to ensure that the point for improvement raised in the previous report has been fully addressed and, as a result, records of low-level concerns are clear and well organised. Leaders make excellent use of feedback obtained through various monitoring mechanisms, including regular visits from the governor and the independent visitor. They use feedback to develop and improve the care provided to children.

The arrangements for governance have changed since the last inspection. As a result, there is greater clarity and accountability across the school. This includes a school advisory board and a board of trustees, with clearly defined channels of communication and responsibility. Both bodies have a good understanding of their function and of the importance of the residential provision to the whole school. Those with a responsibility for governance have a clear focus on the experiences of children and provide constructive challenge to maintain high standards.

Leaders are proud of the school's approach to research, and they actively share their expertise with others. They have developed excellent, research-informed practices which they use to provide training to external professionals from around the world.

The residential provision is seen as an integral part of the whole school and there are shared priorities and challenges. There are ambitious plans to further enhance each child's experiences and to develop enhanced learning programmes for children using the residential provision.

Staff receive a good induction when they come to work in the residential provision and benefit from a breadth of training that enables them to feel confident and well informed in delivering high-quality care and support to children with complex needs. They value the regular supervision provided and the appraisal process that allows them to reflect on the needs of children and on their own practice and future development.

Staff have excellent relationships with managers and feel supported and valued in their roles. This has helped to ensure that staff retention is very good.

Staff understand their responsibilities and the vision for the school. They also have an excellent understanding of the progress that children make and are proud to celebrate children's achievements.

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

Point for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that all actions taken to address safeguarding concerns are recorded in a way that is easily accessible.

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: SC013925

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Majella Delaney

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Jay Shekleton, Social Care Inspector

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