

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 61 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 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 ICan. It is situated across nine acres in the village of Ottershaw in Surrey. The residential accommodation is on the first floor of the main school building.

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 September 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be 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: 5 November 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff quickly form good relationships with children, which enables children to settle and feel safe when they stay at school for 'sleepovers'. Staff provide child-focused care. They are committed and ambitious in supporting and enabling children to reach their full potential. Children make good progress while accessing the residential facilities and they develop essential life and social skills which promote independence. Children enjoy a range of activities, both on and off site, designed with input from the therapists to help children to develop essential skills in line with their therapeutic plans.

Children are assessed prior to arrival at the school and the residential setting. They visit prior to staying for a sleepover, with their school friends showing them around the residential areas. However, the valuable detail of this process is not effectively recorded.

Staff have regular communication with parents, family members and professionals. They liaise closely with other key staff at the school to ensure that all staff are collectively working together to meet the children's needs. However, this strong liaison is not consistently evidenced in children's individual care plans.

Staff provide effective support to ensure that the health needs of children are met. Staff are trained in a wide range of specific interventions that support children's range of needs. Staff follow plans that advise and guide them when a child experiences a health crisis. One plan viewed did not detail the required action if a child has a seizure. In practice, staff understand how to respond to this child in an emergency.

Staff are alert to potential risks that children may face when eating and drinking. They use individualised table mats which detail for the child and staff how to eat safely. The table mats also provide helpful prompts to remind children of good table manners. Speech and language and occupational therapeutic approaches are integrated into all aspects of school life. Staff follow clear guidance and plans to support children's needs. However, not all therapists spend time with children in the residential provision beyond mealtimes.

Staff regularly encourage children to make choices about their food and activities. The monthly children's meetings provide opportunities for children to voice their views and opinions. Children have visual cards which detail who to speak to if they feel angry, sad, unhappy or in need of help. All children are actively encouraged to participate in day-to-day and more complex decisions about their care. Staff celebrate each child's individual achievements and successes and reward them with stickers. All are treated with dignity and respect, and children are encouraged to help each other and to form positive friendships.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Children are confident, get on well with each other and enjoy positive relationships with staff. They each have a trusted adult to confide in, and they seek help when they are worried or upset.

Staff are competent in their role and responsibilities to protect children, and they understand each child's vulnerabilities. There have been delays in new staff and volunteers accessing safeguarding training. There is insufficient guidance for staff who reside on site about their responsibilities for monitoring visitors.

Staff generally refer concerns raised by children to relevant staff and safeguarding agencies swiftly. Records are well maintained and provide clarity about any actions taken in response to concerns. Staff have effective working relationships with safeguarding agencies. However, in one instance, there was a delay in reporting concerns about staff conduct to those who have responsibility for managing safeguarding concerns in the school. This incident of concern has since been suitably investigated and lessons have been learned to improve practice.

Staff use positive approaches to understand what children's behaviour is communicating and provide the necessary support. Staff have good knowledge of individual children's communication methods. They use natural consequence to actions and encourage children to sit away from others when distressed. This gives children the space to calm down and reduces the impact of their behaviour on other children. Children are encouraged to say how they are feeling and to recognise when they are struggling and feeling upset.

Leaders in the school have not consistently kept recruitment information up to date. The single central record was not current and up to date, and recruitment files had information missing. For example, there was no evidence of DBS checks by the school for a regular agency worker. Staff addressed this shortfall during this inspection, and it was noted that most of the missing information was available at head office. Staff and volunteers who live on site have no formal guidance on their roles and responsibilities outside of working hours, nor the rules around guests and visitors.

Leaders have not consistently ensured that action is taken to ensure that the school is a safe environment for children; this includes risk-assessing which children can share a bedroom safely. A recent change in maintenance personnel has led to the identification of significant gaps and failings, also noted by inspectors. These include some cleaning items not being stored safely, and not all portable items have been tested. Bedroom windows do not have suitable restrictors. In addition, there are still actions outstanding that were identified in a fire risk assessment undertaken in November 2018.

Staff sometimes make use of listening devices in children's bedrooms. This is a

measure designed to increase monitoring and keep children safe; however, this practice is not recorded in children's plans and does not have written parental consent.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers of the school and residential setting have high aspirations for each child and seek for them to achieve their full potential. Staff feel well supported by the head of care and say that they can access her at any time.

Managers ensure that staff receive regular and effective supervision and that their practice is appraised at least annually. Staff say that they find this inclusive approach helpful. Staff are well trained, and they have the skills they need to meet the wide-ranging needs of the children they care for. This includes direct training from speech and language therapists and occupational therapists. Staff who are volunteers or gap-year students were not previously receiving a formal induction and training to support them with their role. This has recently been rectified.

Leaders and managers promote effective partnership working. Staff form and maintain strong links with parents, family, community partners and other professionals. This ensures a consistent experience of care for children. Staff are confident in challenging partner agencies when they do not feel they are acting in the child's best interest.

There have been many changes in the management and leadership of the school since the previous inspection. The new leaders have made a positive start and have taken immediate steps to address identified shortfalls. They were aware of many of the shortfalls identified at this inspection, but their service development plan is vague and, in particular, does not identify reasonable timescales to deliver the changes needed to improve practice. Leaders have undertaken a review of the quality of care provided in the residential provision, but they have not made best use of this to drive improvement.

Leaders and managers know the children well and have keen oversight of the children's plans and targets. They regularly review and monitor records and identify even the smallest amount of progress being made. The school's governors apply a sound additional layer of scrutiny and challenge, and the residential provision's independent visitor also provides a thorough level of evaluation, allowing the leaders to recognise areas for development.

The leaders and managers of the school have addressed the shortfalls identified at the previous inspection of the residential provision. They have improved training for volunteer staff, and behaviour management plans are now regularly reviewed to reflect the progress that children make.

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(s) for residential special schools:

- 6.2 The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of children are ensured.
- 7.1 The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
- 11.1 The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Recommendations

- Ensure that there is a written agreement between the school and any volunteer or person employed by the school and living on site. This specifies the terms of their accommodation and their responsibilities to supervise their visitors.
- Implement a formal assessment process when deciding which children share bedrooms.
- Review the use of listening devices in children's bedrooms, including making sure that all relevant people are aware of their use and the reasons for this.
- Ensure that all relevant information for all staff and volunteers is available on the single central record.

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: Rob Walton

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 01932 872302

Email address: meath@meath-ican.org.uk

Inspectors

Jennie Christopher, social care inspector (lead)

Amanda Maxwell, social care inspector



The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2019