

Meath School

Meath School, Brox Road, Ottershaw, Chertsey, Surrey KT16 0LF

Inspection dates

11/01/2017 to 13/01/2017

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- The children have developed positive relationships with an accomplished and dynamic staff team which interacts well with them, in a calm and relaxed manner.
- The children are given the opportunity to build and maintain friendships while experiencing a wide variety of activities in both the residential setting and the community.
- The staff actively consult children regarding the residential provision and discuss rules and boundaries in children's meetings, which gives them ownership.
- The children are treated with dignity and respect and are taught to respect each other's differences effectively. They are encouraged to help and support each other with independence and communication.
- Children are given the opportunity to have fun and thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. Staff are not risk-averse and want children to have new experiences.
- Children have been able to personalise their bedrooms, which helps them to feel safe and secure when away from home.
- There are robust monitoring visits from an independent person when time is spent with children to gather their views, wishes and feelings.
- Children make excellent progress during their time in residential and have been able to develop social and independence skills.

- Staff understand that transitions, both in and out of the residential provision, can be difficult for both children and parents. They work closely with the school's family support worker to ensure the best outcome.
- A dynamic and forward-thinking management team ensures that staff are fully trained and supported so children continue to reach their full potential.
- Staff work closely with parents, speech and language therapists and occupational therapists to support children successfully.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that there is a picture of, and information about, the independent visitor to help children recognise the person and understand the role.
- Ensure that the actions and outcomes of safeguarding incidents are recorded in one place, making them easier to track.

Information about this inspection

The school was notified of the inspection three hours before it commenced. Time was spent in the residential area, meals were eaten with the children and activities were observed. Interactions between children and staff were observed throughout the inspection. Discussions were held with parents, the headteacher, the residential manager, staff, parents, governors, the independent visitor and other professionals. Children's views were sought through face-to-face contact during mealtimes, activities and observation of interactions. The online questionnaires in Parent View were considered during the inspection.

Inspection team

Trish Palmer

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Meath School is a day and residential non-maintained special primary school. It fosters an integrated model of support that includes education, speech and language therapy, occupational therapy and residential care. It provides for up to 75 pupils of either gender, aged 4 to 11 years, whose primary needs arise from severe and complex speech, language and communication difficulties. The school offers its residential service and an extended school day programme to all its pupils. In excess of 35 of them have accessed the residential provision over the last year. Three children stay Monday to Friday, while others participate in the planned overnight programme. The frequency of the overnight stays is agreed with the parents. The school is owned and managed by the children's communication charity called 'ICan'. It is situated in grounds of nine acres in the village of Ottershaw in Surrey. The residential accommodation is on the first floor of the main school building.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

The children make excellent progress through sharing experiences while staying in this stimulating residential provision. They enjoy substantial opportunities to participate in activities, both in the residential setting and with their peers in the wider community. A parent commented, 'She [her daughter] has the opportunity to participate in activities and have a sleepover with her friends, something that she would not be able to experience if she didn't stay in the residential setting.' The children are clearly central to the residential setting. They have been able to personalise their part of the bedroom, which they were proud to show off. They are consulted about the decor and furniture, while the artwork and information boards displayed have been made and designed by the children. There is an excellent range of purposeful toys, books and games catering for all ages and abilities.

The children have built secure, positive relationships with a highly skilled and dedicated staff team. Staff clearly want children to have the best experiences they can and are passionate about ensuring that this happens by being creative with play. This was observed throughout the inspection. Children commented that they like the staff and that they like staying because they can be with their friends and have fun.

The children have flourished, developing their independence skills in line with their age, understanding and ability. The staff give children the time they need to develop these skills at their own pace. A parent commented, 'It can be difficult at home giving her time in the mornings to dress herself and clean her teeth. When she's staying she has the support of staff and the time to do things for herself, she has made fantastic progress.'

The school has adopted Sign Supported English and all staff are able to use this. There are pictures of how to sign common words and these are regularly changed as children learn them. A parent commented, 'The school also runs lessons for parents to help teach us, which has been supportive.' Children actively support each other when signing.

The older children are encouraged to help younger or new children in both the school and residential settings. There is a buddy system in place and the children were able to explain what was involved. One child explained that he is a buddy and that he was very proud of this. This supports children to be tolerant, help others and be empathetic. It has also supported children with building their self-esteem and self-worth.

The staff understand that transitions can be difficult for both children and parents. A highly experienced and dedicated family worker does direct work with families, children and staff to ensure that transitions are planned and families are supported. Staff complete an individualised creative induction booklet for the children which is bright, child-friendly and explains what they can expect when staying in the residential setting. A parent commented, 'He [her son] had attachment issues but the staff have worked really hard and he loves staying there; it's given him so many new opportunities.'

The children have individual help cards, which they can take to staff if they are worried or upset, for example if they have no friends or if someone has been unkind to them. On

the back is a picture of three members of staff they would like to talk to. A child confirmed its value, saying, 'This is my help card and I can take it to staff if I want help or I am sad, then they help me.' There is a simpler version for the younger children to use.

Children have also been involved in making a 'keep yourself safe' board. This contains information about stranger danger and who it's safe to talk to.

The staff speak to parents daily. They record a detailed log of the children's time in the residential setting and a copy is sent home after each visit. A parent reported that this gives them a good insight into their child's stay.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The staff clearly know and understand the individual needs of the children. They spend quality time talking to and listening to children's wishes and feelings. Staff were observed talking to children about their day. During mealtimes, children were happy to share news with each other and were clearly relaxed talking about home and plans for the weekend.

Children share a positive mutual respect for each other and staff and this is an important part of the school and residential setting. Children are encouraged to help each other when playing games, to give each other time when they are trying to communicate and to share games and books. If they upset another child, staff are proactive in encouraging them to apologise and listen to each other's views.

The children could all name or point to staff that they would talk to if they were worried or upset. There are contact numbers of organisations they can call if they do not wish to speak to staff. The independent visitor meets with the children as part of his visit, although there is no information available or photograph displayed, to explain his role to children.

The children attend regular residential children's meetings where they discuss food, activities, achievements and the decor and furnishing of the setting. Minutes of these meetings are recorded using the words and the symbol system which is used throughout the school. This informs the children of the discussions and subsequent outcomes. This ensures that children can see that they are listened to and their views are taken into account.

Mealtimes are seen as sociable occasions with learning and development opportunities. The children are encouraged to eat a well-balanced and healthy diet. There is always a variety of fruit and yoghurts available at mealtimes. Children's religious and dietary needs are catered for. Each child and staff member has a personalised tablemat showing foods that they do not like or cannot eat and which cutlery they need to use. There are also targets for each child, which range from trying new foods to sitting at the table and listening to others. Children learn how to manage their own diets and look out for others during mealtimes.

The children are encouraged to live a healthy lifestyle. After school, they go to the residential setting where they change and have a healthy snack. They then go into the playground where they play games with staff. Children were observed supporting younger children in a game of cat and mouse, giving them the opportunity to catch them. There is a large woodland area with a substantial range of equipment for children to use. They were keen to show this off and explain all the things they can do. There is a den club where they have the opportunity to build camps and learn about nature. In the summer, they have the opportunity to camp on the field. Staff are forward thinking and enable children with medical needs or physical disabilities to join in actively with their friends by camping in a safe, supportive environment. This ensures that all children have enriching experiences.

The children have been involved in making the rules and setting boundaries in the residential setting and these are revisited termly. This means that children understand and have ownership of how they treat and respect each other. These are then put into symbol form and displayed around the residential setting to remind children how to behave.

The children have residential and school targets in place. Each child has an individual target board with five targets to complete while staying overnight. Children gather before breakfast and take turns to move stickers which depict what they have achieved. Children were observed doing this cooperatively. On a Friday the 'stars of the week' are revealed. Staff give the children's clues and they try to guess who it is. This ranges from helping someone or achieving his or her targets. Children clearly enjoy this, and clap and cheer each other.

Staff record children's targets and achievements. These are regularly reviewed and incorporate both the school and residential setting. An entry-to-exit report is completed during their time to show children's progression throughout their time here.

Care plans are individualised, comprehensive and a live document. They are frequently reviewed and amended when necessary to ensure that they reflect the current needs of the children and are implemented by a knowledgeable staff team. Staff explain them to children who then sign them and a copy is sent to their parents to ensure that they are happy with the residential plan.

Training is seen as an important part of safeguarding and supporting children. All residential staff have completed the level 3 national vocational award and are up to date with their mandatory training. Staff reported that they could ask for specific training if they think that it would benefit the children, and the headteacher and head of care are supportive of this.

The children contact parents during their stay, either before bed or in the morning. Staff work with parents and observe children's behaviours to determine the best time for contact. Some children can manage to speak to parents without staff but they are always available to support them. For non-verbal or very young children, Skype is used.

The children say that they feel happy and safe. There is a wide range of adults they can speak to if they are worried or upset. Children were able to explain or show how they would complain and said that staff would help them.

The staff understand that children need to be able to have new meaningful experiences while learning to manage risks in accordance with their age, understanding and ability, and in consultation with parents. Staff are not risk adverse, which gives the children the opportunity to have new experiences in a safe environment.

Risk assessments are robust, which helps to ensure that children are safe throughout their stay. These are monitored and amended when necessary. The children are able to share bedrooms with their friends, which is also risk assessed. Parents confirmed that they feel that their children are safe and well cared for. The children live in a safe environment. All necessary health and safety checks are in place, and maintenance issues are addressed promptly. The safeguarding governor completes a walk around termly with the health and safety manager and residential manager to ensure that all risks have been identified and acted upon.

The governor responsible for safeguarding draws on substantial knowledge and experience to review policies, procedures and practice. She completes a safeguarding audit with the residential manager and a copy is sent to the Local Safeguarding Children Board to be signed off. This is also taken to the governors' meeting to ensure that all actions are completed and they are aware of any potential issues.

All staff and governors have completed safeguarding training. The residential manager has completed a safeguarding audit with staff so they can identify any gaps or extra training they may require. This also ascertains their level of understanding safeguarding.

Behaviour is exemplary. Children are taught to listen to and respect each other and staff and to include others in their games and conversations. There have been three physical interventions since the last inspection, but these have been very low level. All incidents are well recorded and children are spoken to after the event. All staff are trained in physical restraint. There have been 17 negative consequences (sanctions) since the last inspection; thirteen of these were related to one child who was struggling with the transition out of the school. There is good evidence that staff worked with him and his parents to ensure that the transition was as successful as possible. Children have the opportunity to comment and discuss each sanction. These are monitored to look at their effectiveness, and any patterns or trends. Positive behaviours are encouraged by staff and these are rewarded with certificates; children respond well to positive praise and the receiving of certificates.

Due to the high level of staffing and security, children do not go missing. Staff are aware of the missing policy and action to be taken should this occur.

There have been no incidents of bullying since the last inspection. Bullying is discussed in children's meetings and there is clear information throughout the residential setting to support children to recognise bullying and how to report this to staff. Staff support children in learning how to manage friendships. Children spoken to said they would take

their help card or speak to a member of staff if someone was being unkind to them.

The residential setting and school staff promote good manners and being courteous to each other and visitors, and this is an important part of the school. Children take pride in helping and supporting each other, and staff continuously recognise this.

School and residential staff attend handovers together. This means that patterns and trends are quickly identified and acted upon, so that all staff can support the child. The staff keep children as safe as possible in the cyber-world. All computers have security filters and children are monitored when using these devices. The school does not allow children to bring in or use mobile phones and this is appropriate for their ages. A leaflet has been devised for parents to support them with keeping children safe at home when using the internet or mobile phones. This means that children are helped to keep safe within and beyond the school.

Recruitment is robust and all checks are completed and verified before staff can begin working in the school or residential setting.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Senior managers in both the school and residential setting are dedicated and fully committed to providing effective and efficient leadership to ensure that children have the best possible outcomes. Staff have high expectations and aspirations for the children. They ensure that children learn through play, having fun and feeling safe.

A high percentage of families have attended tribunals in order for their children to be able to attend the school. The headteacher is extremely proactive in supporting parents by attending tribunals to give evidence as to why the school would benefit the child. Parents spoken to commented that she is extremely supportive and approachable.

Staff seek regular feedback from the children in a wide variety of ways. Children attend regular children's meetings; a questionnaire about activities and a yearly questionnaire regarding their stays in the residential setting are completed. Children confirmed during the inspection that staff listen to their ideas and opinions and there is strong evidence that staff have acted on these.

The care that the children receive is exceptional. The adults in the school and residential setting work closely with each other to support the children with their individual needs to enhance the progression of the children.

Staff communicate exceptionally well with parents and have daily contact with them as well as sending home a written account of their time in the residential setting. There is a school-to-home book, which further supports communication. A parent commented: 'Communication with the staff is excellent; we have daily contact and are kept fully informed.'

The children clearly understand rules and boundaries. They have been instrumental in writing these, ensuring that they understand and take ownership of them.

Leaders, managers and staff receive regular supervision, which they record and sign. There are weekly staff meetings where children, care practice and training are discussed. This further embeds the good practice and communication between staff. All staff have had an up-to-date appraisal.

Members of the experienced, dedicated and highly motivated staff team work together to enhance the life experiences of children. There are high levels of staffing. Managers take immediate action if staffing levels fall. Staff will cover additional shifts to ensure that staffing levels remain high enough. A staff member commented, 'We will step in and cover shifts; the children need to feel safe and have people around them that they know and trust.' This ensures that there is continuity for the children.

There has been one complaint since the last inspection. This was robustly investigated and actioned.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	125478
Social care unique reference number	SC013925
DfE registration number	

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	35
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	5 to 11
Headteacher	Janet Dunn
Date of previous boarding inspection	01/03/2016
Telephone number	01932 872 302
Email address	meath@meath-ican.org.uk

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