

Meath School

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

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 currently provides 56 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 at any one time, each staying 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: 6 to 7 November 2018

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 previous inspection: 7 November 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children flourish in their boarding house. They make excellent progress, such as learning to manage their own behaviour.
- Children benefit from the highly effective specialist services.
- Feedback from parents is extremely positive. One parent referred to the impact of the 'Meath magic'.
- Children benefit from a dedicated core staff team. Three staff members have a total of more than 60 years of experience working within the boarding house.
- Behavioural management is highly effective, minimising the need for restraint.
- Staff continue to be extremely inventive in finding new and better ways to work with children. A new video system allows staff and parents to record and analyse their interactions with children.
- Work with parents is a major strength of the school. Staff work in close partnership with parents so that they can replicate learning targets when the children are at home.
- Staff advocate on behalf of children to ensure that they receive key services.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- This inspection noted four minor shortfalls. These include the structure of the independent person's reports, fire risk assessment, provision of training to volunteers and the level of information and views of children in behaviour plans. These shortfalls do not affect the quality of care offered to children.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that volunteers in the boarding house receive adequate training and support to ensure that they can care for children more effectively.
- Ensure that behaviour plans for children contain a full evaluation of progress and the views of children.
- Ensure that a fire risk assessment is carried out by an approved person.
- Ensure that the reports of the independent visitor contain a full evaluation of the safeguarding of children.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thrive in their boarding house. Boarding is integral to their development and progress. For many children, staying in boarding is the highlight of their week. Boarding allows children valuable time to socialise with their friends and with staff, developing their independence skills. For many children, their communication difficulties previously limited such opportunities.

Children make exceptional progress. In particular, the development of children's speech and self-care skills significantly increases their resilience and raises self-esteem.

Partnership work is outstanding. Staff work in close partnership with specialist services offered by the school to replicate the work of speech and language and occupational therapists. The results are clear. One child informed his mother, 'Somebody turned my sounds on.'

Children who board receive good support for their educational needs. Planning for moving on to secondary provision begins one year in advance. This permits a comprehensive programme of assessments and introduction to the receiving school.

Children enjoy a rich variety of activities. These include attending a local gym and exploring local woodland. Each activity is chosen to help nurture fine and gross motor skills.

Staff are highly aspirational and delight in children's progress. Children learn a vast array of new and vitally important skills. These range from improved personal care skills, to significantly expanding their vocabulary, to sharing a meal together with other children. Staff support children with compassion and perseverance.

Care is consistently child centred. Staff skilfully adapt the environment to teach children new skills, such as managing their own behaviour. Children now enjoy using a 'feelings board', where they indicate their mood and a suggested coping technique such as spending some 'quiet time'.

Expectations of children's behaviour are very clear and consistent. The central ethos for the boarding house is showing kindness. Staff use their close relationships with children to intervene quickly when children are struggling. Expectations are adapted to support the development of each child's language and social skills. There is no use of internet devices within boarding. This enables children to focus on their interaction with their peers and the staff team.

Staff are highly skilled in engaging children. Staff use sign language, storyboards or computer programmes to ease communication. Staff listen to children's views. The recent refurbishment of the bathroom area followed a request from the children's council.

Feedback from parents and children is extremely positive. One parent refers to the progress of their child as 'unbelievable', while a child stated that they 'love spending time with my friends on sleepovers'.

Care is extremely inventive and effective. Staff use 'wait wheels' to help children to understand time, remain patient and take turns. However, at present target setting is limited in detail and does not fully reflect the views of children.

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

Children communicated to the inspectors that they felt extremely safe in the boarding house. They form very close and trusting relationships with staff and each other. Staff understand the complex needs of each child. Such supportive relationships are the basis for children's outstanding progress.

Excellent case recording supports comprehensive and thorough risk assessments. Assessments allow children to take managed risks and reach their potential. Risks are identified very quickly, and safeguarding action is proactive and creative. Assessments incorporate all of the recommendations of statutory education assessments and give clear guidance to staff as to areas of concern or development.

Work with parents is a major strength. Family support work helps to prevent family breakdown. One parent described the support as 'invaluable' and commented on dramatic improvements in their child's behaviour and sleeping patterns. A family support worker offers home visits and works in partnership with placing authorities to ensure that children and their families gain excellent access to support services.

Support for children is holistic. For example, a recent referral to a carers' project helped to provide support for a child's brothers and sisters. Staff share very helpful hints and important strategies with families on topics such as safe use of the internet, which helps to ensure consistency and safety for children.

Partnership work is prioritised and helps to improve outcomes for children. Boarding staff are employed in the day school and demonstrate excellent knowledge of the behavioural and academic progress of children. This enables boarding staff to set appropriate behavioural and academic goals for children, such as spelling the days of the week and managing meal times.

Safeguarding work is highly effective. Advice and guidance are promptly accessed

from the host local authority and any recommendations are acted on.

Highly effective direct work supports children to keep safe. Children engage and learn from work on issues such as safe touching.

Children do not go missing from the boarding house. Staff understand the procedure that they should follow in the event of such an incident occurring.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Children who board at the school benefit from a committed and highly dedicated head of care. She has been in post for over 16 years and is highly respected by staff and children. Managers promote an outstanding child-centred and caring ethos.

Managers are highly ambitious. They have implemented all of the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. In addition, managers have updated the school website following a suggestion made during this inspection. The website now contains more information regarding the boarding provision.

The ongoing development of boarding is a key focus of the school. The high quality of management audit and oversight drives service improvement. A new computer system is in place to further monitor and evaluate children's progress.

Managers have known the children and their families for a lengthy period of time and, as a result, they understand the dynamics within families. Managers enjoy an extremely supportive and cohesive relationship with the school's senior management team and the governing body. Governors are visible and provide strong oversight and challenge to the school.

At present, the reports of the independent visitor offer insufficient analysis of the safeguarding arrangements within boarding; this limits the scope of managers to implement and monitor improvements.

Managers promote a strong sense of community with parents. A parent recently completed a cycle ride from John O'Groats to Land's End to raise more than £20,000. These funds are being used to purchase new equipment and subsidise activities.

Managers advocate extremely strongly for children. When difficulties occur, managers quickly convene reviews. These meetings assess the possibility of further support or consider the viability of a child's placement.

Admissions to boarding are handled in a very thoughtful and caring way. Children are introduced to boarding at their own pace and are supported by high levels of nurture and care. Managers are very well informed about the individual needs of each child and their behavioural plans. This informs extremely good decisions on issues such as the allocation of rooms.

Staff morale is very high and staff turnover is minimal. One staff member commented, 'I love my job here.' Staff reported that they receive high levels of support and supervision from managers. This supports staff confidence and security in their working practice.

Volunteers working in boarding do not currently have access to restraint training. While volunteers do not work alone with children and are not expected to take part in incidents regarding the use of restraint, this shortfall poses a potential risk to children. Managers acknowledged the need for such training to be provided.

Managers ensure that the boarding house is safe and well maintained. Repairs are completed promptly and all necessary health and safety risk assessments are adhered to. Despite a recent fire risk assessment being conducted by the experienced site manager, the boarding house lacks a formal fire risk assessment from an approved provider.

There have been no complaints or allegations since the last full inspection. Rigorous systems are in place to address complaints or allegations, should they arise.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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

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Inspectors

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector (lead)
Kate Malleon, Her Majesty's Inspector



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