

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. It is situated on a nine-acre site in the village of Ottershaw in Surrey. 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 2023

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: 8 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children receive nurturing and loving care from a skilled residential staff team. Since the last inspection, the number of staff working in residential has grown, allowing for more children to be able to come and enjoy sleepovers.

New staff have received detailed inductions and have quickly helped to create a team that has a detailed knowledge of all the children and their individual likes, dislikes, social and emotional needs and their communication needs, all of which are significantly varied.

Parents are clear about the impact the school has on their child's life. They can see and celebrate their child's successes. One parent commented, 'My child is no longer a child who is extremely vulnerable in the wider community.'

Children who stay at the residential service make exceptional progress educationally, socially and emotionally. Children grow, both in terms of skills and self-esteem. Children have embraced new challenges, such as learning to cross the road safely and how to catch a bus. Comprehensive annual review reports show the success of the child, but also the true wealth of support that children can receive from staying at the residential service.

Children's views are paramount in the day-to-day running of the residential service. There is a constant flow of communication to and from the children. Residential forum meetings allow children to contribute to decisions. For example, children have been involved in choosing wall colours and new carpets.

Children benefit from a detailed and well-planned residential curriculum that covers a variety of areas such as staying safe, mental health week, black history month, Diwali and Remembrance Day. These varied events provide a good mix of practical, emotional and cultural learning.

Leaders recognise the impact transition has on children and have introduced a super-skills plan. This bespoke plan gives children the opportunity to develop a variety of skills, such as putting on a plaster, catching a bus, cooking a simple meal and managing money.

All work carried out in the residential provision is theory-based. For example, staff work with children on managing emotions and feelings. Children are encouraged to explain how they feel, and for some children who have profound speech difficulties, this is done in a way that is inclusive and ensures that they are supported to express how they feel.

Care planning for the school is a strength. Care plans are written with leads from the relevant departments. Targets are devised with reference to education plans and with input from care staff and the children themselves and their parents.

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

Risks in the school are well understood. Clear and detailed risk assessments are in place for all children and staff can talk confidently about these. When issues are raised that have not been previously encountered, risk assessments are either changed or new risk assessments composed to ensure that all staff are working with up-to-date information.

Children do not go missing from the school. A high staffing ratio and skilled staff with good safety awareness ensure that children are kept safe.

Part of the approach to children feeling safe is based on the use of a 'helper card'. This card clearly supports the child to be able to communicate how they are feeling if things are tricky and reminds them who they can talk to in those moments.

Since the last inspection, there has been a significant change in the safeguarding culture of the school. The appointment of a new designated safeguarding lead has put fresh energy into the oversight and management of any safeguarding concerns.

Safeguarding has become a regularly mentioned topic. It is a feature of meetings, supervisions and monthly bulletins, and a culture of appropriate challenge and whistle-blowing has been created. Staff talk confidently about their expectations of how things are handled and feel part of the system, as they always receive feedback.

When there have been concerns of a safeguarding nature, the designated safeguarding lead has been diligent in holding social workers to account in making sure that risks are shared, and that people are doing what they should. This has resulted in comprehensive safety plans being drawn up before children go home, and child protection investigations being instigated when necessary.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

There has been a change of principal since the last inspection. Leaders have managed to create a truly integrated school which is offering a comprehensive service to the children who attend. Leaders are united in their vision for the children and how they can succeed. Leaders are present throughout the school and all staff, no matter in what department, are clear about the fact that they can speak to leaders if there are any problems.

Communication challenges for children do not prevent them from succeeding, and leaders are able to report several success stories where children have made

significant progress. Leaders have been clear about where children's starting points are and are able to identify what success looks like.

The needs of children are at the heart of all that is done in the school, and this includes residential. Leaders continue to check this practice through observation, direction and the mentoring of staff.

Staff receive regular and well-documented supervision. This focuses on development and expectations of staff while still allowing time for reflection on the challenges that come with working in residence. Actions are consistently followed, and it is easy to see how the residential curriculum is interwoven through supervisions to guide staff.

Strengths and weaknesses of the school are well understood. External monitoring through independent visitor inspections, governor visits and commissioned audits provide opportunities for leaders to continually learn. Actions are immediately responded to and followed up.

Positive practice in the school has been used as the basis for a research project. This research has been widely disseminated to external professionals, with the school being asked to present at a national conference.

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

Point for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that safeguarding chronologies are kept for lower-level concerns.

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

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Inspector

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

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