

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 I Can. 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.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 March 2022

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: 17 September 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are supported by committed and skilled staff, who clearly understand each child's needs. This support is underpinned effectively by a multi-disciplinary approach to care and education, which includes occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and health professionals. As a result, there is genuine consistency across all settings.

Children make significant progress due to accessing the residential provision, for example with their goals and targets as identified in their education, health and care plans. The children's development and learning are monitored effectively throughout their residential placement. This is supplemented by a separate residential curriculum. Staff and children talk with genuine pride about the level of progress children make.

Leaders and staff were creative in their response to COVID-19, which resulted in the school being able to stay open. For children who were not able to attend the school, online work was set and calls were made so that they still felt connected to staff and friends.

Children enjoy access to a wide range of activities. After-school clubs and evening activities ensure that children have choices and there is always something to do. Parents commented that these activities provide opportunities that would not be readily available at home.

Children are supported to talk about their emotions. They are beginning to be able to describe why they feel the way they do. This is significant, given the communication challenges that the children have. Staff have worked well with children to develop the work on the school's 'zones of regulation' to help children with their emotions.

Children who are new to the residential provision are welcomed sensitively and with careful and considered planning. Children are given the opportunity to have their rooms decorated in the way that they like. Children who want to share rooms with their friends are supported to do so where appropriate.

There are clear, consistent and appropriate boundaries. Children develop skills and strategies to manage conflicts and difficult feelings through developing positive relationships with staff.

Children are supported to express their views in a variety of ways, such as one-to-one time, questionnaires and children's forums. Minutes from these are presented in pictorial symbols to ensure that all children can understand.

Children have good contact with their families every day and this is done by internet calling or phone. This ensures that important relationships with parents are maintained while children are away from home.

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

Children feel safe when they stay overnight. Extensive work has been done to ensure that all children understand who they can talk to if they have any ongoing concerns. Children know who their trusted adults are and staff ensure that children have a voice and can raise any issues.

Detailed children's risk assessments record how concerns are both understood and managed by staff working with the children. The residential services manager has good oversight of the assessments and ensures that they are regularly reviewed and updated. Children are supported to take age-appropriate risks as part of their development of independent living skills.

Children are supported to develop positive relationships with each other. Staff are proactive in recognising underlying issues between children and put together social stories to assist children to overcome any disagreements they have with each other. Positive behaviour is promoted consistently throughout the school. There is good praise from staff for students and achievements are keenly acknowledged.

On the whole, recruitment records show suitable checks for staff. Not all staff, who have been employed for a significant number of years, have complete recruitment checks by more recent standards. Where this applies, a risk assessment is on file. However, these are not always completed consistently and the level of risk is not always identified.

There has been one allegation that has not been responded to effectively. The school's policy was not consistently followed and the allegation was not reported to the designated officer. On another occasion, a concern about a child was referred appropriately to the designated officer. However, the school's leaders and managers undertook their own investigation into the concerns before confirming advice from external safeguarding professionals. The school's policies are clear and include appropriate actions to take. However, on these two occasions, the school's policies have not been followed. This means that here is the potential for compromised safeguarding investigations.

When concerns have been raised about a child and their circumstances outside school, these have been promptly shared with the social worker. However, on one occasion, when leaders were not satisfied with the social worker's response, there was a lack of escalation.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There has been significant change in the school since the previous inspection, with a new headteacher and senior leadership team in place. They are supported by a newly formed governing body, in which governors' skills have been carefully matched to their roles.

The school leadership team is aspirational for the children. The head of residential care has high expectations for the children and these are shared with staff. Children are provided with every opportunity to access a wide range of services across the school. As a result, children make good progress.

Staff are provided with regular training and supervision to support them in their role. There is ongoing assessment of practice through a robust appraisal system. Training provided is specific to the needs of the children, which ensures that staff are well equipped to support the children to progress.

Varied approaches to monitoring and evaluation of the service lead to a genuine and reflective understanding of the quality of care provided. Children's progress is monitored to ensure that the residential provision remains appropriate for them.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- 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.
- 20.2 Most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include:
 - checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of reasonable force, risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children;
 - evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded;
 - assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and
 - opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitor (in private if they wish).

Recommendations

- Ensure that safeguarding discussion in supervision notes is detailed.
- Ensure that concerns about a child or their family are escalated to the appropriate agencies within good timescales.
- Ensure that any risk assessments written in relation to recruitment are detailed and regularly reviewed.

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: Kim Bent

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01932 872302

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Inspectors

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector (lead)
Emeline Evans, Social Care Inspector

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