

Royal School for the Deaf Derby

Royal School for the Deaf, 180 Ashbourne Road, Derby DE22 3BH

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The Royal School for the Deaf, Derby is a non-maintained residential special school.

There are 127 pupils at the school. All pupils have an education, health and care plan for hearing impairment, and some have additional complex special needs.

The residential provision operates on weekdays only, as all children go home at weekends. There are 28 pupils who stay at the school during the week on a full-time or part-time basis. The residential accommodation is set across two residential facilities, in purpose-built blocks. The school is a sign language and speaking community. The school is situated in the city of Derby.

The residential provision is led by a qualified manager. She has been in her post since January 2024.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school. All children were spoken with during the inspection.

Inspection dates: 2 to 4 December 2025

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 **good**

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: 5 November 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Since the last inspection, 12 additional children have been welcomed into the residential provision at the school. This increase of children, to the school and residential provision, is from another residential school. Additionally, some children have been assessed and identified who would benefit from the specialist provision at this school. The existing accommodation, in the residential provision, has undergone significant renovation to provide a high-quality provision for up to 10 children.

The children receive excellent support from staff, who are very committed to them. This has enabled new children to settle into the residential provision and embrace them into the deaf community within the school. Staff aspire for children to have very good experiences, and they make the spaces in the residential provision and school lovely for them. Children choose to spend time with one another in the social areas of the residential provision rather than spending time in their rooms. As a result, the home is filled with joy, laughter and warm interactions between the children and staff.

Children place significant value on the residential provision. They say that they are happy and would highly recommend it to others. They recognise the benefits of staying in the residential provision. This includes the staff support to help them develop their communication skills and the enhanced social opportunities this creates, building their resilience and independence skills. Overall, children excel in many areas of their development, and the residential provision makes an outstanding difference to their lives.

The staff are immensely proud of the children's achievements. For one child, this has meant that they have gone from requiring a great deal of support to meet their personal needs to now being relatively independent. Not only does this empower the child to complete tasks for themselves, but parents are grateful for how their child has been provided with the right guidance to achieve these tasks.

Children attend the school on the same site. This is on a full-time basis. This meets their individual learning needs and improves their overall development. Staff are highly committed to supporting children to engage in education, and they are making excellent progress. Staff work closely with education professionals, to fully understand each child's abilities, challenges and preferred ways of learning. This approach provides children with consistently high-quality care and support, which is invaluable for the children and provides excellent learning opportunities, ensuring that children make sustained progress. One family member said, 'They have gone the extra mile in supporting [name of child]. The staff are absolutely brilliant, and I couldn't ask for more.'

Staff ensure that children receive excellent healthcare. Staff advocate for children to ensure that medical interventions and are in children's best interests and are reviewed regularly to ensure this is still required. This has enabled one child, who previously struggled to gain weight, to do so and maintain this weight gain. Children are also supported to understand the medication they take. For example, visual aids have been implemented to support one child to become increasingly independent with their medication regime.

The children have been empowered to participate in life-changing events. For example, three girls recently travelled to Japan to take part in the deaf Olympics. They won bronze medals. They were also interviewed by a prominent local football club to talk about their experiences. In addition, children have supported a local filmmaking enterprise, and their names were highlighted within credits of the film. Training has also been provided by a local footballer. These experiences are testament to the efforts staff and children make to be fully part of the community and achieve at the very highest levels.

Children have also been provided with a very good opportunity to enhance their independence skills through using student accommodation at a local university. They can experience a week's stay, where they plan, budget, cook their meals, and have a real independent living experience. The staff are available to provide support and guidance to children where required. Although some children said this was a little daunting at first, they shared that they thoroughly enjoyed this experience. A member of staff who supported this project said, 'The young people start the week as individuals and leave as a team, working together to overcome challenges and support one another.'

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

The staff have excellent knowledge of safeguarding, and they understand how specific risks and concerns for each child may present. The staff exercise professional curiosity, and they are confident in following escalation processes in relation to any concerns they may have. The safeguarding knowledge and skills of staff are further reinforced through regular training, team meetings and handover sessions, ensuring that staff remain alert and skilled to the risks and vulnerabilities for each child.

Children say that they feel safe. The children's parents have absolute confidence in the ability of staff to keep their children' safe. Children know how to make a complaint or raise a concern should they have any grievance or concern.

Children receive very high standards of care from staff, who enjoy their jobs and who have worked in the residential provision for several years. This strengthens children's relationships with staff they know and trust.

Staff have a comprehensive understanding of potential risks to children and are proactive in their approach to reduce risk. Staff work with children to develop increased understanding of the children's risks and vulnerabilities, and they are building on their understanding of the agreed safety plans that are in place. Opportunities away from the home are encouraged and this helps to teach children about safety while out in the local community and developing their independence skills.

Staff use preventative strategies to de-escalate situations effectively if children's behaviour becomes more challenging. Staff have not had to physically hold children for several years. This is testament to effective behaviour management strategies that staff employ. The manager monitors trends and patterns in children's presentation to implement strategies to reduce incidents.

The school ensures that safer recruitment processes are followed. This ensures that the staff working with children are safe to do so. The school currently has some building work ongoing on the school site. There are processes in place to ensure that those on site are safe to be on the site with children.

The manager's processes for considering new children joining the residential provision is thorough and child centred. New children are welcomed into residence for a one-week assessment stay. This enables the manager to gain a detailed understanding of the child's individual needs and risks, and to monitor their relationship with others. Staffing ratios are carefully planned to provide additional support to help new children settle.

The manager values the views of staff and invites regular feedback from staff. The manager implements staff suggestions in a safe, child-focused way. This approach ensures a better experience for children by using strategies suggested by staff who know the children incredibly well.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have been effective in ensuring exceptional care for children. They remain child focused and set high expectations for staff. They have continued to drive improvement over the last 12 months, welcoming new children into the residential provision. They have maintained a clear focus on the children while simultaneously working with contractors to improve the facilities within the residential provision. They have also supported new staff to settle into working in the residential provision. There has been a clear focus on ensuring that excellent quality of care is not affected while the building and development work continues.

The manager has a warm and nurturing approach. She is determined in achieving the best outcomes for children. Staff feel well supported by her and enjoy working in the residential provision. She continues work alongside staff to improve and develop their residential care practice. The staff team is very settled, and they refer to themselves 'as a family' and enjoy working in the residential provision

immensely. Consequently, team morale is excellent, and staff have close relationships with each other. This emulates a harmonious environment for children to enjoy.

The manager leads by example and promotes a culture of calm and focused work where children come first. She is supportive to staff and caring toward the children. The manager has high aspirations for the children, the staff and the ongoing development of the residential provision. She has developed a culture whereby the safety and progress of children are of fundamental importance in all that she and staff do.

A staff member commented that the manager is 'truly invested in the outcomes for children'. For example, she regularly meets with each child. She speaks to children, and she acts on what they say, where possible. Moreover, she works closely with external agencies regarding children's plans in order to ensure that children are on track to make progress.

Staff complete mandatory training as required. This includes bespoke training to meet children's individual health needs, equipping staff with the skills and knowledge to respond to medical emergencies. For example, when a child became unwell while in residence, staff responded promptly, ensuring that the child received emergency medical treatment immediately.

The manager has established a culture in the staff team of reflective practice discussions in team meetings and handovers. Learning from incidents and audits is shared with staff and used to inform and improve practice. This creates a continuous learning environment where staff develop professionally, promoting high standards of care, although not all staff have received regular supervision. However, staff say they feel well supported by the manager.

The manager and staff have excellent relationships with parents and professionals. The manager seeks regular feedback and uses this to monitor and improve the service. Feedback from external professionals and parents is unanimously positive. One parent said, 'My child is absolutely thriving. It was the best decision I ever made for him and us as a family.'

The manager has good oversight of the day-to-day work of staff and is visible and always accessible to them. However, because of the changes over the past 12 months, some children's records have not been fully updated, and not all known information has been recorded consistently within these records.

The school head provides very good oversight of the residential provision within the school. He has strong internal systems to alert him to any difficulties or problems, and he generally acts quickly to put things right. However, on one occasion, the head did not contact the local authority designated officer in a timely manner following a concern raised about the conduct of a member of staff. The head has recognised this shortfall and acted quickly to address this issue.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders need to ensure that safeguarding processes are followed and risk assessments capture all needs and how staff should support children.
- School leaders need to ensure that staff have regular supervision.
- School leaders need to ensure that children's records contain the same information.

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: SC002015

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Paul Burrows

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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