

Deaf Academy

The Deaf Academy, 1 Douglas Avenue, Exmouth, Devon, EX8 2AU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The Deaf Academy is a non-maintained special school for deaf children. The majority of students have at least one additional physical, learning, social, emotional, mental health or medical need. The residential provision currently accommodates 32 students, 16 of whom are under 18.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 March 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected 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: 18 October 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from attending an accessible and inclusive environment where they grow and develop their identity and sense of self. Children develop their understanding of Deaf culture, as well as skills and confidence to participate in the wider community. Staff provide nurturing and homely spaces to support children's communication needs. Deaf staff become role models for children, helping them to develop their own aspirations for the future.

Children are happy, settled and well cared for. Children say it is a great place to be and feels like home. Children enjoy meeting new people and making friends. Children speak fondly of staff. They enjoy the range of activities on offer, such as swimming, sports, crafts and going to the beach. Staff encourage children to help out with cooking, developing their skills and creating opportunities to experience new flavours. Much of the support is focused on independence. Staff recognise how important skills such as ordering food and travelling independently will be for the future. Newly opened accommodation for post-19 students offers the opportunity to stay and continue learning.

Children receive support from a multi-disciplinary team that works across education and residential time. The school, care and therapy teams work closely together to provide holistic support for children. Leaders have increased the capacity of the therapy team, which has led to targeted work with children starting. This includes support around healthy eating, personal care skills and being active.

Staff use and maintain plans to help them know how to support children. Clear targets are set to help children achieve their goals. Consequently, staff can monitor the progress children make. When children make progress towards their goals staff take photos and document the achievements.

Leaders involved children to develop new child-friendly versions of the statement of purpose. These documents are adapted to different levels of need. Children are also able contribute their views about their experiences at the school through regular key working sessions and student surveys.

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

Children feel safe and have support from consistent staff who know them well. Children regularly stay in touch with their families, who share any concerns raised with staff. An advocate visits the school fortnightly, spending time in the communal areas. She is known to children and offers an independent way for children to raise any worries or concerns.

There are strong safeguarding arrangements in place. The welfare team is well resourced and has good oversight of the issues or concerns that arise. Staff are

vigilant and alert to possible concerns and report these appropriately. Leaders commission external oversight, which provides reassurance that practice is safe and responses to concerns are appropriate. A new recording system for concerns has been implemented and this is in the early stages of use. Leaders have evaluated this and identified that it helps to better identify areas for support.

Behaviour is well managed. The residential environment is a calm space. Staff proactively identify support needs, such as those around friendship groups, or small disagreements from living together. Some children have higher needs. Here staff intervene early to prevent escalation, and use strategies to help calm children and reduce the intensity of incidents. Some children arrive at the school with little communication, impacting their levels of emotional literacy. Staff support children to develop their communication skills and help them to better understand their emotions.

Safer recruitment processes are followed. Referrals are made to safeguarding authorities when there are concerns about staff practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders understand the strengths and areas for development well. There are clear development plans in place which realistically identify how to move the provision forward in a manageable and achievable way. Leaders understand areas for development and make changes as needed. External consultants support oversight while recruitment takes place for a new residential manager. A new post of deputy manager has been created as a result of the increased management oversight and support needed. Leaders have worked with families and local authorities to introduce respite provision, responding to the changing support needs seen.

Leaders have changed staffing arrangements to provide more consistency and stability to children. By working with smaller groups of children, staff say they get to know them well. Staff enjoy their role, and feel well supported, with time to complete training. Most care staff have some training in British Sign Language (BSL) to support them to communicate with children. However, this is not yet to the level that is required by the school. To address this, leaders have increased the capacity to provide in-house BSL teaching. Leaders have experienced some staffing and recruitment challenges. The commitment and dedication of staff has meant the subsequent pressure created has been held by them, minimising any impact on the children.

Staff supervision sessions promote reflection and address practice concerns. Staff understanding of safeguarding is promoted through the use of scenario discussions in supervision. However, some supervision records lack detail and clarity. Leaders have identified this and have taken action to improve recording through additional training for supervisors. Team meetings take place regularly and are well attended. These support staff with practice development as well as considering practical arrangements for children.

Parents say their children enjoy their time in residential. They are confident their children receive the support they need to be safe, and see their children's independence grow. One parent told school staff that their child is on their way to finding their Deaf identity. Parents feel communication with staff is positive. A professional said that working relationships are positive, with good communication.

Governors have good oversight of the provision and provide scrutiny and challenge to leaders. Leaders welcome independent visitors to the school, who provide thorough scrutiny and identify areas for improvement.

National minimum standards are met and the provider has already taken action to address the areas for improvement.

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: SC022216

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Sylvan Dewing

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

Clare Nixon, social care inspector

Sarah Sheffield, social care inspector

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