

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. Most students have at least one additional physical, learning, social, emotional, mental health or medical need. The residential provision is registered to provide accommodation for 37 students. 13 children are currently staying in the residential provision.

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

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 January 2025

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: 13 March 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children enjoy their residential experience and make timely progress because their health, education, well-being and independence skills are prioritised by the adults who care for them. Their outcomes have significantly improved since they moved to stay here. The children said that they enjoy staying here and that they get on well with the adults who care for them. They enjoy doing activities with staff and seeing their friends. They also participate in meal planning and preparation. During the three days of the inspection, the children enjoyed playing badminton and going swimming. Children enjoyed making fresh bread to go with their soup, and one child spoke to inspectors about their plans to prepare ramen.

Children are provided with particularly good levels of care, and they respond well to the routines and boundaries that are in place for them. The adults who support them are very committed and enthusiastic about providing a caring and supportive environment so the children can really thrive. The staff are skilled and knowledgeable, and they know the children well. They have a good understanding of the children's emotional, health and care needs. The staff work with a broad range of external agencies to strive for the best outcomes for the children. Parents and professionals provided positive feedback about the impact that the residential school has had on children. Many said that they had been impressed by the levels of nurture and care that their children receive.

When children move into the residential provision, clear plans are identified to help them manage this successfully. The adults recognise the need for early planning for children who are due to move into their care. They work well with families, social workers and other professionals to support them with this process. The staff make regular visits to children at home or in their previous school setting so they can really get to know each child before they move in.

Children attend school regularly and are making timely progress with their education. Staff encourage children to be healthy and physically active and to make healthy choices about food. Children and staff participate in preparing meals together, and staff teach children the skills they need to be more independent. Children are supported to use public transport and access their local community. This important level of support reassures the children that they have adults who care for them, which helps them to make progress.

Children are provided with important levels of support to develop their independence skills so that they can function well as young adults when they leave here. When children move on, the adults think carefully about how best to support children with their plans. The staff have a clear understanding of the challenges to this and are committed to ensuring that any challenges can be overcome as well as possible.

The residential flats are clean, spacious and well maintained. They have a homely feel that enables children to feel relaxed and at ease. There are comfortable sofas in the lounge and spacious kitchen and dining areas so the children can enjoy meals together with staff. There is space for the children to socialise with others and space for quiet time when this is needed. The garden areas have been developed so there is play equipment for children to use and a space for outdoor dining in the summer. Children are able to access indoor areas of the school during their stays so they can play badminton or other sports.

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

The children said that they feel safe when they stay here. They have good relationships with the adults who care for them. They can talk to them openly if they are feeling worried or anxious about something. The adults work hard to tackle any risks that children are experiencing, which helps to reduce risks and ensure children's safety. When children express that they are worried, this is followed up promptly by the staff. When one child expressed strong emotions before a planned school holiday, the staff remained in contact with them and their family throughout the school break to ensure that they were safe and kept in mind. This positive action would have reassured the child that they are loved and cared about.

When safeguarding concerns arise, they are managed well. There have not been any episodes of children going missing and there has been no need for any restraints. Staff work hard to identify potential safeguarding concerns and take prompt action to reduce these. When one concern was raised about children's mobile phones, prompt action was taken to address this issue and to seek advice from the relevant agencies. Leaders reflected on their practice when an issue was identified and has amended some policies around children's mobile phone use.

Staff worked together with children so they could better understand their wishes and views around their residential stays. Important conversations have taken place with children in response to safeguarding incidents that have occurred. Although children are in receipt of formal education around their personal development and sexual health, this has not been explored with children in the residential setting.

Communication with education staff, families, social workers and other professionals is timely and effective in helping to keep children safe and promote their welfare. There are important links between staff in education, health and residential that ensure the whole child is being thought about. These positive arrangements ensure that there is a team around each child whose members are all working together. When concerns were raised about the safety of one child's school transport this was discussed with other professionals, but there were no changes made to this arrangement. Although challenged, there was a delay in this being escalated effectively by leaders and managers, and this issue remains unresolved. This matter has now been escalated to the relevant professionals.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

A strength of the leadership team is its commitment to ensuring that there is a stable and skilled group of staff caring for the children. The leadership team is committed to providing staff with opportunities to complete specialist training and to develop their knowledge in key areas. There are regular opportunities provided for staff to meet so they can discuss and share good practice, knowledge and any challenges.

Staff said that they feel valued and well supported by their managers. They are motivated and enthusiastic about providing children with the best levels of care. One member of staff has been recognised with a national award and had been instrumental in enabling a driving instructor to learn British Sign Language so that they were able to teach more children how to drive.

The members of the leadership team are active in sharing their knowledge, skills and practice with other professionals. They have developed an open culture within the residential school, so family members and professionals are regularly being invited to visit. There are regular open days, and professionals regularly visit the school to learn about the good practice here. Family members visit regularly for open days, workshops and training.

Leaders and managers have developed clear plans for improving the care that children receive, but this is not always reflected in documentation. The children at this setting have an identity that is unique to their experiences. Leaders and managers are clear that the children are part of a deaf community and together they have developed a culture around this. However, this has sometimes been overlooked when considering children's needs as part of their plans.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that they robustly challenge any arrangements for children that they feel are impacting on children's safety and wellbeing.
- School leaders should ensure that they review records to ensure they include important information around children's culture and identity. They should also ensure that children's plans are clear and records reflect children's day-to-day experiences.
- Staff should explore with children their views on important issues such as consent, healthy relationships, sexual health and their culture and identity.

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

Sarah Sheffield, Social Care Inspector

Hannah Spencer-Townsend, Social Care Inspector

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