

Summarised inspection findings

Royal Blind School

The City of Edinburgh Council

6 November 2018

Key contextual information

The Royal Blind School is a grant-aided residential special school for children and young people from P1 to S6 with a visual impairment. It is situated on a campus at Canaan Lane in Edinburgh. Prior to 2014, the school had a second campus in the Craigmillar area of Edinburgh. The roll was 28 at the time of the inspection in September 2018.

2.3 Learning, teaching and assessment

excellent

This indicator focuses on ensuring high-quality learning experiences for all children and young people. It highlights the importance of highly-skilled staff who work with children, young people and others to ensure learning is motivating and meaningful. Effective use of assessment by staff and learners ensures children and young people maximise their successes and achievements. The themes are:

- learning and engagement
- quality of teaching
- effective use of assessment
- planning, tracking and monitoring

- Staff and children and young people have extremely positive and respectful relationships with each other. They trust each other and enjoy working together.
- Children in base classes are very engaged in their learning. They demonstrate their enjoyment of the lessons and respond very well to the variety of approaches taken, including direct involvement in sensory stories. They are patient if there are technical problems and will wait to contribute once the learning episode begins. They are very skilled at communicating in their own way and making their feelings known to staff.
- Children and young people in other classes are also very highly engaged in their learning. They work very well with staff and are extremely well motivated by the subjects which they undertake. They clearly enjoy their learning and are encouraged by staff to do their best at all times. They understand that staff are very empathetic towards them, will actively listen to them and are completely focused on helping them to do their best at all times.
- Staff successfully use a range of appropriate approaches such as mindfulness to make a connection with children and young people across the school and to engage them in their learning.
- The school's very successful approach to interdisciplinary learning (IDL) has helped learners across the school to make the link between topic activities and their subject lessons. Children and young people enjoy working together in different groups for these activities. They appreciate developing skills for life during learning activities as well as the opportunity to socialise with learners from other classes. They enjoy the learning which takes place outside the classroom. There is flexibility in this approach to be able to follow the interests of learners, which keeps them very engaged in their learning. The school's IDL approach has included involving all children and young people, whatever their support needs or levels of communication, in a multi-media festive show for parents, featuring movement, music-making and costumes. This event, coordinated by drama staff, has had a significant positive impact on the wellbeing of children and young people, school staff and parents.

- The learning experiences of children and young people are further broadened by a range of different trips, including travelling to a local farm, visiting a pizza parlour and an excursion to France. These experiences informed and enhanced learning experiences once the children and young people returned to school.
- Young people in the senior phase are extremely motivated by the development of their life skills, including independent travel and cooking. They also appreciate the organisation of appropriate work placements, linked to their abilities and interests, which have included financial institutions, care settings, radio stations and the local Sheriff Court. Careers education is embedded through a whole school approach and has been developed in line with national Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) expectations.
- There is an outstanding positive inclusive ethos within the school which informs and enhances the interaction between staff and learners. Staff demonstrate at all times that they are well aware of the needs of children and young people in their classes. They design their lessons appropriately and carefully consider what is most helpful for each child or young person in the class. They understand the importance of using 'wait time' to give learners time to think and formulate an answer before they give a response. There is a commendably high level of consistency across classes of high quality teaching and well-designed learning experiences. Teachers, support staff and other partners work together as a closely knit team, within and between classes, to meet the needs of all learners.
- Teachers and other staff ensure that there are appropriate learning intentions and success criteria for each member of the class as well as for the class as a whole. They carefully and appropriately differentiate work as required for children and young people in the class.
- Staff use a wide range of technology very effectively and appropriately to enhance and support learning, including tablet computers, switches, braille machines and touchscreen computers.
- Teachers and support staff use sector-leading approaches to assessment to gauge how well children and young people are learning and to allow them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and their skills and capabilities in different lessons. For learners in base classes, this is based around skilled observational analysis. Staff watch children and young people very carefully during learning to see what they respond to, how they react to particular situations and what their preferences are. Initial assessments of children's and young people's abilities and preferences can be challenging if children and young people find communication difficult, but staff are skilled at timeously drawing the appropriate conclusions from their observations and matching learning experiences to them. Staff also carefully assess and record important medical aspects of children and young people such as their mood and whether or not they have suffered any seizures.
- There is a more common approach to assessment for young people studying for accredited courses, which includes discussion, analysis of written work and formal tests. Where necessary, young people get access to a reader and a scribe to complete assessments.
- Across the school, staff are extremely skilled at using a range of questions to check learners' understanding and to challenge their thinking. This is particularly successful with young people who are undertaking formal qualifications.
- The school is developing its use of an electronic approach to recording, tracking and monitoring the individual progress of children and young people. This tool is capable of holding a rich collation of assessment outcomes for learners across the curriculum and can be regularly updated. The information is organised on a learner by learner basis. The tool also

contains the individualised educational programme (IEP) for each learner which gives helpful information about their preferred learning environment including pace and time, position, people, motivations, context and use of senses. Newer staff report that it is an extremely helpful way to get to know about individual children quickly. There is a section which collates learner achievement over time related to individual subject areas which is in development. Overall, there is great potential for this approach once it is used more consistently.

- Senior leaders know all of the children and young people extremely well. They facilitate meetings about individual learners to discuss their needs and they are keen to continue to develop the electronic tracking and monitoring tool. They are aware that the next step will be to enhance the tool to facilitate a whole school picture of attainment and achievement.
- The Royal Blind School Learning Hub is a national resource centre for vision impairment which is an integral part of the school's provision, offering a variety of services including e-learning, specialised materials, equipment, support, assessment and training to education bodies throughout and outwith Scotland. The school also supports schools, families and pre-school children through its outreach service. Where necessary, support can be offered within a home or care setting. The school also delivers a peripatetic vision impairment service to schools across East Lothian Council.

2.1 Safeguarding and child protection

- The school submitted self-evaluation information related to child protection and safeguarding. Inspectors discussed this information with relevant staff and, where appropriate, children and young people. In addition, inspectors examined a sample of safeguarding documentation. At the time of the inspection, there were no identified areas for development.

3.2 Raising attainment and achievement

very good

This indicator focuses on the school's success in achieving the best possible outcomes for all learners. Success is measured in attainment across all areas of the curriculum and through the school's ability to demonstrate learners' achievements in relation to skills and attributes. Continuous improvement or sustained high standards over time is a key feature of this indicator. The themes are:

- attainment in literacy and numeracy
- attainment over time
- overall quality of learners' achievement
- equity for all learners

- Overall, children and young people at The Royal Blind School make very good progress across a range of subjects and areas such as communication, independence and engagement according to their individual needs. Parents report high levels of satisfaction with the school and with the outcomes children and young people achieve.

Attainment in literacy and numeracy

- Across the school, children and young people are making very good progress in literacy and English and numeracy and mathematics. Teachers are at an early stage of using a new data system to plan learning and to provide appropriate interventions and support. Almost all children are achieving targets set within their IEPs.
- Children and young people are developing an understanding of their vision impairments through a range of approaches. They are learning how to navigate in society through the habilitation programme and are becoming increasingly confident and resilient in the community in which they live.

Literacy and English

- The school can demonstrate how each child and young person is making progress with their literacy, both on an individual basis and as a group. According to information provided by the school, each child and young person is making appropriate progress with their literacy skills.
- There is an extremely wide range of communication needs and approaches across the school. In base classes, some children are learning to respond to, and to make, basic on-body signs relating to personal needs or class work. Some children and young people are using other signing methods and utilising electronic response devices such as switches. Other children and young people are learning to use braille for both reading and writing. The school is well provisioned to allow them to do this and staff are constantly enhancing their skills to enable these many communication methods. The school views these approaches as ways which the children and young people can communicate with other learners and adults, can access the curriculum and can prepare themselves for the transition from school to the next stage of their life.
- Children and young people are encouraged to read in whichever way is most accessible to them. This includes signing from others, large print, braille or standard books. The school has a transcription service to allow teachers to adapt and create appropriate resources in this medium. Children and young people also have access to audio books or to stories being read to them in class.

- Children and young people, where appropriate, will write in braille. Some young people are extremely competent and are using their braille skills to undertake courses at an advanced higher level, writing complex essays and reports.
- A number of children and young people in the school have difficulty expressing themselves in words. However, almost all can communicate in some form, including the use of signing and the use of switches.
- Children and young people listen attentively to staff in lessons so that they can engage in learning activities. They are patient with classmates who find it difficult to remain quiet at all times.

Numeracy and mathematics

- Overall, children and young people in the base classes are making very good progress in relation to their additional support needs. Young people in the senior phase are highly motivated and are attaining very well at National Qualifications. During inspection activities, the development of numeracy was observed during specific numeracy lessons and embedded across learning during class routines and other aspects of the curriculum. Staff should increase opportunities for children and young people to develop numeracy skills through interdisciplinary and discrete learning.

Number, money and measure

- There is a strong emphasis on developing learner's understanding and application of numeracy in real-life contexts in all base classes. The close proximity of a range of shops is enabling regular opportunities to raise children's and young people's awareness of how money is used.
- A range of approaches is used in base classes to develop children's and young people's understanding of time. Most, with appropriate support, are aware of daily routines. A multi-sensory approach is helping learners to experience the temperature, textures and smells associated with cooking.
- Songs, technology and games are used effectively to support children and young people in the base classes to understand number. These are used particularly well to engage learners in the sequencing of number and one-to-one correspondence.
- Children and young people in the base classes are beginning to use comparative language such as short and long. They measure the growth of plants by counting the leaves as they open.
- Senior learners recognise place value to 1,000 and beyond. They are confident in the use of two, five and ten times tables. Learners apply these skills to write, for example, a holiday brochure using numeracy to work out temperatures, currency and time zones. They enjoy learning about profit and loss.

Shape, position and movement

- In the base classes, children and young people are beginning to understand their position in space. They are exploring tactile shapes.

- Senior learners can identify the circumference and diameter of shapes as well as the radius and height of cylinders, spheres, circles and squares.

Information handling

- In the base classes, children and young people can, with support, use their counting skills to collect and organise objects into groups. Senior learners can complete surveys around the school and produce a braille tally chart and tactile bar charts. Using tactile discs, senior learners can complete partially developed pie charts.

Attainment over time

- All children and young people have personal learning targets set in IEPs for literacy and English, and most for numeracy and mathematics. Targets are specific and personalised to the needs of each learner. The school knows its learners very well and is confident about the progress learners make over time. Almost all children are making very good progress across the curriculum according to individual need.
- The school is at an early stage of collecting data about the achievement of personal targets. It is too early to be able to use this data in a meaningful and robust way. The school should consider how it uses individual data collection to inform whole school strategies for raising achievement and attainment further.
- Moderation of teacher evaluations within the school and using the benchmarks is at an early stage of development. Further moderation with colleagues from other schools and across sectors will help support teachers to make robust and reliable judgements on children's and young people's progress and attainment.
- The school is able to provide data for National Qualifications over a three-year period. Young people are achieving very well across a range of courses and units including health and wellbeing, literacy, modern studies, mathematics, expressive arts, science and technologies. Whilst the majority of young people are achieving national accreditation at National 1 and 2 level a few young people are currently achieving at National 3,4, 5 and Advanced Higher levels.
- There is a collegiate approach with colleagues and partners at points of transition to ensure next steps in learning are built on prior learning.

Overall quality of learners achievements

- The school celebrates the successes and achievements of all learners. Children and young people take a special satisfaction in sharing their successes with each other, parents/carers and staff and any visitors to the school.
- The overall quality of learner's achievements is good. Senior learners have opportunities to gain Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) accredited courses and units over a wide range of subjects. Children and young people have opportunities to display their skills and achievements through a range of events for parents and families such as performances and presenting their learning during annual review meetings.
- Young people at the senior stages are successful in achieving Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) Personal Development and Achievement Awards and younger learners successfully achieved the Junior Award Scotland Scheme (JASS).

- Children and young people across the school are gaining skills and experiences important to living as independently as possible. They are building self-confidence through a variety of experiences both in school and the community. A few young people are benefitting from learning new skills such as working with others and putting these into practice in annual work placements.

Equity for all learners

- The school has a strong understanding of the barriers children and families face as a result of visual impairment, other additional support needs or social circumstances. They have identified a range of equitable supports to reduce barriers and increase engagement in learning for learners.
- The school has a clear rationale focusing its Pupil Equity Fund to support a targeted group of children and young people to improve their wellbeing and mental health in order to fully access learning opportunities. As a result, children's and young people's attendance has improved, they are growing in confidence and demonstrating stronger resilience. The targeting is due to need rather than deprivation factors.
- Effective staff training in visual impairment, and approaches to communication with and through partnership working is resulting in an accessible environment. This is ensuring all children and young people have access to high quality and inclusive learning experiences. Staff are proactive and creative in how they remove barriers to enable children and young people to make choices and engage in their learning.
- Attendance levels are high. Children and young people who may be absent from school for extended periods due to health needs are supported with activities that parents can engage in with their child to help continuity of engagement and learning.
- The Royal Blind School places great emphasis on supporting young people to move onto positive, sustained destinations. They provide high quality, equitable targeted support, which enables many young people to successfully transition home, back to mainstream school or into further training or employment.

3.1 Ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion – wellbeing

- Children's and young people's wellbeing is central to the work of the Royal Blind School. This holistic approach to ensuring wellbeing is improving outcomes for learners and their families.
- There is a caring and supportive culture throughout the school. Staff understand each child's and young person's unique strengths and needs well and this is supported by very positive relationships between staff and children. Children, young people and their families are treated with the utmost dignity and respect. This is resulting in children and young people establishing secure relationships with staff and enjoying attending school. Children and young people told inspectors that they feel safe in school and this was echoed by parents. This is creating an environment where learners and families trust school staff and feel safe and secure.
- The school places a strong focus on developing children's and young people's communication and independence. The learning environment supports children's and young people's wellbeing through the use of symbols, signifiers, signing, on-body signing, deaf blind manual signing, braille and large print. This is supporting children and young people to develop greater independence and skills for learning, life and work. Teachers and support staff use a wide range of assistive technologies to communicate with children and young people.
- Staff have been trained in a range of approaches to support their understanding of children's and young people's emotional wellbeing. These include how to help children and young people de-escalate their behaviour if they become distressed and how to positively manage their emotions including whole school mindfulness. Staff are skilled at identifying and intervening quickly and appropriately when a child becomes anxious. This is ensuring calm, productive learning environments across the school where almost all children and young people engage well in their learning.
- Staff take very good account of children's and young people's additional support needs when planning to meet their needs. The school uses a range of assistive technologies to support children access their learning. Effective interventions and support are provided by staff across the school in collaboration with a range of partners. Allied health partners including speech and language therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and nursing contribute well to planning and provide advice and support to ensure children's and young people's visual, sensory, physical, health and emotional needs are met very well.
- Planning for children's and young people's learning takes good account of parents' views. The school works closely with parents to develop shared approaches to enable children and young people to be as independent as possible, for example building independent living skills. Parents/carers report that this helps them to better support their child at home and their child learns better through coherent approaches from school. There are plans to increase support for parents in habilitation (orientation, mobility and independent living skills).
- The school offers training through the Learning Hub to parents and colleagues in mainstream schools in a range of teaching and learning approaches. Colleagues and partners comment positively on the impact of this training on outcomes for children with vision impairment attending mainstream schools.

Other relevant evidence

- The school's approaches to initial and ongoing assessment of children's and young people's additional support needs.
- The school's approaches to meeting the additional support needs of children and young people.
- The school's holistic approach to the curriculum, in particular IDL, and the education of children and young people with additional support needs.

Care Inspectorate evidence

1. Quality of care and support

We found that the Royal Blind School provided a high quality service where children and young people led very busy and constructive lives. Children and young people appeared happy and relaxed.

Levels of personal care were very good. This meant that young people were healthy, dignified, comfortable, clean and tidy.

Support plans were child centred and included aspirations for each young person. Support plans were based around the SHANARRI (safe, healthy, active, nurtured, achieving, respected, responsible and included) wellbeing indicators contained within Getting it right for every child. Very good care planning ensured that young people worked towards their full potential.

Children and young people were presented with appropriate challenges that promoted independence, developed self-esteem and confidence.

The service was very good at ensuring that children and young people's wishes were known, including those who needed help with communication. Children and young people were able to exercise choice as regards diet, activities and use of free time.

Children and young people benefited from the skills, knowledge and expertise of the range of professionals across the campus including physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech and language therapists.

A Senior Nurse and a team of nurses provided health care to children and young people and advice to care staff. We saw that nurses were fully integrated in to the care staff team.

Due regard was given to healthy eating and special dietary requirements.

Very good risk assessment/management plans were in place. This meant that young people were kept safe.

We saw that staff worked hard to involve children and young people in educational, leisure and sporting activities. Individual interests of young people were promoted and nurtured.

Parents told us that communication with the service was effective and that they felt that their young person was well cared for and happy.

Residencies were very well equipped, decorated, furnished and maintained.

Care Inspectorate grade: very good

ibid

3. Quality of staffing

We found that the school had very good staffing arrangements in place.

Staff presented as skilled, knowledgeable and committed to their work. We found a very good sense of team and child centred interdisciplinary working.

We saw that staff enjoyed very good relationships with the children and young people in their care. This meant that children and young people felt listened to, safe and included. We saw that positive touch and verbal reassurance featured largely in day-to-day interactions. Staff showed high levels of affection toward young people.

Recruitment arrangements were robust with all relevant checks and references carried out.

Very good induction, appraisal, supervision, changeover and meeting systems were in place. This ensured effective communication and consistency of care.

Staff told us that they felt supported in their work and that they had access to seniors and managers on a daily basis. Managers operated an 'open door' policy.

Staff were appropriately qualified and registered, or conditionally registered, with the Scottish Social Services Council (SSSC) or other relevant body.

There was a wide range of policy and procedural guidance which staff were familiar with and referred to, ensuring that the organisations standards were maintained.

Parents/carers were confident that their child was well supported and cared for by a staff team evidencing genuine affection and compassion for their child.

We formed a view of a supported and supportive team and concluded that the service was well-managed and staffed.

Care Inspectorate grade: very good

During the previous Care Inspectorate inspection, the school had no requirements and two recommendations. These recommendations have been met. As a result of this inspection, there are no requirements and one recommendation.

Recommendation: The residential aspect of the school should ensure that the move from paper records to computerised records should be completed as soon as possible to allow for better and clearer access to information pertaining to the care of the children and young people. Health and Social Care standards, 4.27: 'I experience high quality care and support because people have the necessary information and resources'.

Explanation of terms of quality

The following standard Education Scotland terms of quality are used in this report:

All	100%
Almost all	91%-99%
Most	75%-90%
Majority	50%-74%
Minority/less than half	15%-49%
A few	less than 15%

Other quantitative terms used in this report are to be understood as in common English usage.

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