

Hamilton Lodge School for Deaf Children

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114619
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	326050
Inspection dates	26 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Mike Kell

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Boarding provision	Hamilton Lodge School for Deaf Children
Social care URN	SC050400
Social care inspector	Elaine Southall

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5–17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	70
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Charlotte Holtam
Headteacher	Graham Sheppard
Date of previous school inspection	29 June 2006
School address	Walpole Road Brighton BN2 0LS
Telephone number	01273 682362
Fax number	01273 695742

Age group	5–17
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors, working alongside two social care inspectors who were responsible for making judgements on the quality of the boarding provision.

Description of the school

The school's residential facility enables it to admit pupils from a very wide geographical area. Approximately three quarters of pupils are boarders. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs for severe/profound hearing impairment, although a number of learners have additional learning needs. All pupils require signed communication to access learning, and in the vast majority of cases their first language is British Sign Language (BSL). Pupils stay at the school until the age of 17 years, but this is not in specialist post-16 provision; the school has an agreement with sponsoring local authorities for pupils to spend three years in Key Stage 4. There are approximately twice as many boys as girls on roll, and most pupils have a White British background.

The school has School Achievement and Healthy School awards and Positive about Disabled People recognition. It is a Football Association Charter Standard School. The principal at the time of the previous inspection was not present during the inspection, and left shortly afterwards. He was not replaced until the current principal took up post in April 2007.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

Hamilton Lodge School for Deaf Children provides a good quality education that is supported by outstanding residential provision. The school's outstanding promotion of equal opportunity reflects leaders' excellent approach towards establishing community cohesion. Their success in this respect is founded on the very strong links that have been forged with the school's partners, including parents and carers. They are very supportive of the school and express views such as: 'It is a very caring school that meets the individual needs of all its pupils.' Outstanding provision for pupils' pastoral care encourages them to make excellent progress in their personal development.

Pupils love going to school and attend as often as they can. Comments such as: 'A really brilliant place' and 'The school has improved my life' are typical of pupils' views. They behave extremely well in lessons and around the building. They are very enthusiastic learners and are taught well as staff are skilled communicators. Therefore, pupils are in a good position to benefit from the activities with which they are provided and so learning proceeds at a good rate. Pupils' delayed language and communication skills mean that standards of work are extremely low, but despite this pupils achieve well from their starting points. Their work is assessed regularly and teachers are becoming increasingly skilled at determining pupils' attainments with reference to P / National Curriculum (NC) levels. However, these procedures are not yet totally reliable and, therefore, measures of pupils' progress over time are not always entirely accurate. The shortcoming in assessment procedures also reduces the quality of academic guidance and support that pupils receive. This is not as effective as that for supporting their personal development because work-based targets that are linked to P / NC levels are not shared with learners. As pupils do not know their goals, they do not feel so involved. The curriculum is good, with a well-balanced enrichment programme.

The current leadership team has only been together since the summer of 2007. The principal leads the team effectively. He and his colleagues responded very well to the difficulties that they faced following a period of uncertainty for the school, when it did not have a permanent principal. They restored stability, and subsequently began to implement change. They lead and manage the school well and are keen to develop it further. The team's ability to do this fully is currently being limited by its eagerness to move forward on too many fronts at the same time. Leaders collect large amounts of information about all aspects of the school's work and the data are scrutinised in order to inform school development planning. However, the data are not sifted in order to prioritise the few most important developments that will have the most impact on school improvement. Governors are not in a position to contribute greatly to this process because they do not have sufficient first-hand insight into the school's work. Despite its historical difficulties, the school is now in a good position to move forward and it has a good capacity to do so successfully.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 1

The school provides residential provision of the highest quality. It is a safe, caring and stimulating environment in which young people develop as individuals and fulfil

their potential as deaf young people living within the wider community. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding, lying at the heart of the school's practice, in clear recognition of the varied and complex needs of the young people. There are four boarding units, located within the main school building or in neighbouring houses. All provide very comfortable and extremely well-furnished and equipped accommodation. Most bedrooms are shared, but the space around each bed is decorated according to the young person's own choice.

Senior staff now provide leadership and stability and have established a culture that promotes good practice in all areas. Regular self-evaluation and the school improvement plan ensure that the Every Child Matters outcomes inform all aspects of the care provision. A very skilled and committed staff team provides a consistently outstanding quality of care and guidance to the young people. They work closely with teaching and health staff to identify and meet individual needs, although the current structure of central records prevents key information being accessed easily. The young people are fully involved and consulted about all aspects of their care.

There is excellent provision for promoting the health and well-being of boarders. Care plans are completed to a very high standard, with individual medical, physical and emotional needs carefully assessed and monitored. Plans are regularly reviewed. The school works very closely with external specialist services for deaf children and with their families. Healthy eating is promoted extremely well. Menus are varied and offer a wide choice, and the young people enjoy good quality food. Specific cultural and dietary needs are met. Mealtimes in the school dining room are relaxed and sociable occasions.

Staff show respect for the privacy of young people at all times; a flashing light system is used before they enter young people's bedrooms. They show great sensitivity when translating the young people's views and feelings in conversations with visitors who do not use signed communication. Young people are confident in expressing these thoughts and feelings and are clear about whom to contact if they have any concerns. For instance, all the young people know and recognise the independent visitor, who makes unannounced visits to the units and who is available if the young people wish to speak with him. Records show that the number of complaints is very low. Information is stored securely.

Individual care agreements include the young person's right to feel safe and to be respected by others, and boarders confirm that bullying is not a problem. Child protection procedures are well structured and keep young people safe. The principal and head of care hold joint lead responsibility for child protection, and they work closely with other local agencies with responsibility for safeguarding. Risk assessments are completed to a particularly high standard and regularly updated. Robust health and safety procedures are in place. All necessary environmental safety checks are up to date and young people are clearly aware of the fire evacuation procedures, which employ systems that are adapted to their hearing difficulties. Care staff are well trained and clear about their role and responsibilities. They are all trained in physical intervention, although it is rarely used. Young people are further protected by an excellent recruitment procedure, with all necessary checks being completed before new staff begin work. The school has an outstanding approach to

managing behaviour. Behaviour targets are set, and their successful achievement is celebrated with rewards. Sanctions are applied appropriately and in timely fashion.

The level of individual support provided is outstanding. Detailed and sensitive care plans ensure that each young person's specific circumstances and needs are identified and recorded. Young people are fully involved at every stage of the planning process and their thoughts and feelings about their day-to-day life at the school are taken into account. The school council meets with the principal each week. The minutes are circulated via email and the weekly newsletter contains a report of what has taken place. All boarders return home at weekends and staff work hard to ensure that the young people maintain regular contact during the week. The young people use telephones, email and Minicom to do this, and family members' visits to the boarding units are welcomed.

The school prospectus and website give a good description of the boarding provision. A very stable staff team provides consistency of care, and line managers maintain regular supervision. The training programme ensures that staff are equipped with the skills that they need to recognise and meet the needs of the young people. Communication between staff across all departments in the school is outstanding. Day-to-day issues are communicated using email, handover sessions at the beginning and end of each school day, and at whole-school weekly staff meetings. Good practice is promoted and maintained through robust monitoring by the head of care and senior care staff, ensuring that very high standards of reflective practice are sustained. Excellent monthly reports from the independent visitor provide an objective evaluation of this extremely good practice.

What must be done to secure future improvement to the boarding provision

Ensure that the structure of central records enables key information to be accessed more easily (NMS 32).

What the school should do to improve further

- Streamline school improvement planning by prioritising the few initiatives that will have the most impact on the school's development, and involve governors more in the process.
- Implement more rigorous and consistent assessment procedures to determine pupils' attainments so that their progress can be determined more accurately.
- Share National Curriculum level targets with pupils and make more frequent use of the level descriptors to show them what they need to do to make progress.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

Standards are inevitably very low compared with national expectations because of the nature of pupils' special educational needs. However, the school's success in dismantling these barriers to learning by developing pupils' language and

communication skills ensures that pupils achieve well. As pupils become more competent communicators, their confidence and self-esteem increase and so their rate of learning gains momentum. As a result, they make good progress in acquiring key literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Consequently, they are successful in the accredited courses that they follow in Years 10 to 12, to the extent that higher attaining pupils achieve grade C or above in some subjects, such as art. Lower attaining pupils and those with additional learning needs are beginning to make better progress as recent school initiatives start to have an impact. The resource base provides more intensive, one-to-one teaching and support, and the extended range of courses offers less able pupils the chance to celebrate their good achievements with qualifications. Pupils achieve well against their individual targets, which are based on P / NC levels, but the system is not refined enough. The NC targets are not necessarily based on entirely accurate assessment information, nor are they routinely shared with pupils, particularly older ones. Therefore, pupils do not have this spur to really stretch themselves.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Pupils' outstanding personal development is underpinned by the great strides that they take in their communication skills, including their awareness of others, and independence, such as independent travel. They develop into mature and courteous young people who are willing to take on responsibilities. The school council is a particularly impressive and effective group. Overall, pupils make a very good contribution to the school community and they have a good perspective of much wider communities too, such as via the school's link with a school for the deaf in Ethiopia. They have the confidence to communicate with strangers, using well-established strategies for mixing with hearing people. Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to remain healthy. They know the difference between right and wrong and how to deal with unacceptable behaviour, such as bullying. Their social development is very strong. By learning from the many opportunities that they have to work collaboratively, pupils develop the personal skills valued by employers. At other times, they develop self-study skills by working diligently and independently. Consequently, they are prepared well for leaving school and all leavers in 2008 transferred successfully into further education or training.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

All lessons are characterised by very good relationships between adults and pupils. Teachers try hard to develop pupils' communication skills and there is generally very efficient two-way communication. However, just occasionally they do not manage question and answer sessions as effectively as they might by targeting individual pupils to make sure that they are fully engaged. Adults have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and so lessons are orderly, being well structured and organised with teachers and teaching assistants working smoothly together. Teachers use ICT effectively to grab pupils' attention and enhance their learning, and they generally provide a variety of learning activities that maintain their interest. A good proportion of teaching and learning is outstanding, but on a very few occasions activities are not

sufficiently different to meet every pupil's particular learning needs in classes that contain pupils with a wide range of attainment. At these times, learning does not proceed as rapidly as it might.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The school provides a good breadth of learning activities, which are supported by a well-planned programme of educational visits into the local and wider communities, and visitors into school. These events bring class-based learning to life and encourage pupils to practise their social and communication skills in real-life situations. The curriculum is carefully planned to meet deaf pupils' particular needs. Leaders have maintained a strong focus on developing core literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, supplemented by very good personal, social and health education and work-related learning programmes. These elements of the curriculum make particularly good use of partners for work experience and college links. The curriculum is adapted creatively to meet pupils' needs that are more specifically associated with their deafness. The school has removed a modern foreign language and music from the curriculum and replaced them with Deaf Studies and drama. Deaf Studies is an accredited course that gives pupils an appreciation of deaf culture as well as honing their BSL skills. The curriculum of a very few pupils is modified even more as they may be taught one-to-one in a resource base. This and other developments, like the wider range of accreditation, are relatively new. Their impact on addressing more effectively the needs of the lowest attaining pupils and/or those with the most delayed language and communication skills is not yet clear, although the early signs are promising.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pupils have an excellent awareness of how to stay safe, and they confirm that they feel very well cared for. All the necessary child protection and safeguarding procedures are securely in place, and risk assessments are carried out routinely. Very effective systems are used to monitor pupils' behaviour and the school responds very well to the information that it collects. Interventions and support are brought into play so that pupils are helped to manage their own behaviour. This approach is very effective in improving aspects of behaviour, such as pupils voluntarily leaving lessons only for agreed 'time outs'. Staff's perceptive understanding of pupils' personal needs and pupils' knowledge of their targets are the reasons why the school is able to do such very high quality pastoral work. Neither of these features is so evident in the procedures for guiding and supporting pupils' academic progress. Not all teachers assess accurately the P / NC levels at which pupils are working and so the targets set may be insecure, making it more difficult to evaluate the actual progress that has been made. In addition, pupils do not know their target levels and so staff are unable to use them to show pupils exactly what they need to do to improve in order to move up to the next level.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The school went through a particularly turbulent period immediately prior to the previous inspection and during the following few months. There was no substantive

principal for nine months and staff morale suffered. It was only following the promotion of the vice-principal to the post of substantive principal that school leaders were able to take meaningful steps forward, such as addressing the areas of development set out in the previous inspection report. Their amendments to the curriculum look like being important developments, but they have been less successful in making significant changes to the effectiveness with which the governing body carries out its monitoring role. Although governors do spend time in school, they do not do so with a critical eye that enables them to evaluate and question what is going on. Leaders monitor practice very well and they examine carefully the information that they collect, with the outcomes of their analyses feeding into school improvement planning. However, they do not then prioritise the few things that will have the most impact on improving the school's work. Despite this, they have established a school with high expectations and a growing understanding of exactly the direction in which it wishes to proceed.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Annex B

27 November 2008

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Hamilton Lodge School for Deaf Children, Brighton, BN2 0LS

Thank you for making us feel so welcome when we visited your school and a special thanks to those who gave up their time to speak with us.

You think that yours is a good school and we agree with you. The boarding houses are excellent. Staff at your school look after you extremely well and you told us that you feel very safe there. Lessons are good and you make a lot of progress in your work. The school gives you many interesting things to do and some of these are especially good, like work experience and going to college.

We were very impressed with the way that you grow up as young people. You learn lots about how to communicate with people and how to work together, paying attention to other people's ideas. You obviously love going to school because you attend as often as you can and behave very well. You have an excellent understanding of how to stay healthy and safe. You contribute very well to the way that the school runs, such as representing your classmates on the school council. The staff prepare you well for leaving school, and it is very pleasing to see that all of your friends who left school this year went to college.

The people who run the school do a good job. They have ideas about how they can make things even better, and we have given them some things to focus on:

- Choose the few most important things that they need to do to make your school better.
- Check in detail that every one of you is doing as well as you possibly can.
- Make sure that you know your target in every subject and that they show you in detail exactly what you need to do make your work better.

You can help them to do this by continuing to go to school as much as you can and behaving well. Thank you once again and I wish all of you the very best of luck in the future.

Yours sincerely

Mike Kell
Lead inspector