Royal Blind School
Edinburgh
24 June 2014
Education Scotland and the Care Inspectorate (Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland) inspect schools in order to let parents and young people know whether their school provides a good education. Inspectors also discuss with staff how they can improve the quality of care and education.

At the beginning of the inspection, we ask the senior managers and staff about the strengths of the school, what needs to improve, and how they know. We use the information they give us to help us plan what we are going to look at. During the inspection, we go into classes and join other activities in which young people are involved. We also gather the views of young people, parents, staff and members of the local community. We find their views very helpful and use them together with the other information we have collected to arrive at our view of the quality of care and education.

This report tells you what we found during the inspection and the quality of care and education in the school. We describe how well young people are doing, how good the service is at helping them to learn and how well it cares for them. We comment on how well staff, parents and young people work together and how they go about improving the school. We also comment on how well the school works with other groups in the community, including services which support young people. Finally, we focus on how well the school is led and how staff help the school achieve its aims.

If you would like to learn more about our inspection of the school, please visit www.educationscotland.gov.uk. Here you can find analyses of questionnaire returns from young people, parents and staff, and details about young people’s examination performance. We will not provide questionnaire analyses where the numbers of returns are so small that they could identify individuals.

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1 Throughout this report, the term ‘parents’ should be taken to include foster carers, residential care staff and carers who are relatives or friends.

2 The term ‘school’ includes the nursery class or classes where appropriate.
1. The school

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 sited on two campuses in Edinburgh. The school offers full and part-time education or day education with residential placements, to children and young people with visual/dual sensory impairment and complex additional support needs. The roll was 52 at the time of the inspection in May 2014. Twenty-six children and young people were residential. Young people come from various areas of the UK although most live in Scotland. Attendance is in line with the national average. Following a strategic review of the school in 2012, all young people will move to one campus at Canaan Lane in August 2014.
2. Key strengths of the school

- Confident, happy young people who are supportive of each other and well-engaged in their learning.
- High-quality learning experiences, resulting in confident young people who are able to talk about the positive impact the school is having on their lives.
- The range of local, national and international partners who contribute positively to young people’s learning and achievement.
- Opportunities for young people to develop skills in mobility and independence through well-planned, challenging habilitation programmes.
- In the residences, strong partnerships across care, nursing and therapy resulting in a well-coordinated approach for individualised care and support.

3. How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Children and young people are learning and achieving very well. They are enthusiastic about their learning and enjoy being at school. In care and education settings, staff have warm, positive relationships with young people who respond well to the high expectations set for them. Most teachers make young people aware of what they are expected to learn in lessons and provide good feedback to them. This is not always consistent across the school. Children and young people have very good opportunities to learn in a broad range of learning environments, including in the local community. They particularly enjoy learning and socialising with other young people at the Dolphin Swimming club, Braid Scout group and the Canongate Youth project. Young people are listened to, can express their views and make suggestions for improvements at Residential House meetings, at the Food group and pupil council.
They are also aware of how to help others by raising funds for local and international charities such as ‘Mary’s Meals’.

The school works very well with partners to provide challenging experiences that help young people develop their self-esteem, confidence and skills for learning, life and work. Young people achieve success across a wide range of activities, including performing at school shows and competing nationally at swimming and athletics. Young people take part in various educational trips, such as the Francophone Games in Nice or the Kielder Challenge. During these and other trips away, learners are challenged by the range of activities which help them to become more confident, resilient and better able to understand risk. Almost all children and young people are making exceptional progress in developing their orientation and mobility skills, as a result of the very effective support from the habilitation team.

Children and young people are making very good progress in their literacy skills, including in braille skills, where their understanding of the braille code and speed of reading is given a suitably high priority. Storytelling is being used well to help children prepare for the move to the shared campus at Canaan Lane. Young people are also making very good progress in health and wellbeing, learning to make appropriate choices, adopting a healthy lifestyle and managing relationships with others. Practical activities, such as shopping and using public transport, are helping young people to make good progress in their numeracy skills. All young people attain well across a wide range of SQA qualifications from Access 1 to Advanced Higher. Staff recognise the need to further extend opportunities for young people’s achievements to be collated and accredited.

4. How well does the school support children and young people to develop and learn?

The school’s approaches to supporting children and young people to develop and learn are highly effective. Staff have a clear vision for providing a curriculum in care and education which prepares all
learners to participate fully in society, by equipping them with the skills they need for life and work. There now needs to be a more consistent approach to developing the curriculum across the school, to ensure that children and young people can attain as highly as possible. Staff are developing some good opportunities for young people to make links across learning. For example, young people in S1 to S3 come together in mixed class groups to learn about the Commonwealth, develop greater resilience though the ‘Mindfulness’ programme or work in the school allotment. Young people have been running the weekly ‘Commonwealth Café’ for several years, practising and applying their literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing skills in a real-life situation. A group of young people and staff are currently involved in the ‘Comenius Step Up Project’ with eight other European countries, raising awareness and developing resources to support young people with a visual impairment. At the senior phase, young people have access to a very good range of programmes leading to national qualifications. They would benefit from more choice and access to college courses.

The school is very well resourced, allowing staff to focus on meeting individual learning needs. The visual and communication needs of children and young people are well met across the school. Braille, tactile diagrams and audio resources are well integrated into the curriculum. Staff use speech, signing, on-body signs, symbols and signifiers to help children develop their communication skills. Switches and other technology are embedded in learning and used effectively to help young people access the curriculum. Support staff are valued team members who provide strong support in classrooms and in the community. Teachers make very good use of assessment information when choosing motivating and challenging activities for young people. However, therapists and healthcare staff could be more included in working together with teachers to set targets within children’s plans. Across care and education, strong partnerships with parents support children’s learning.
5. How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Staff are strongly committed to improving outcomes for all children and young people. They demonstrate a deep knowledge of visual impairment and work well together to improve the learning and achievement of children and young people. Staff are currently developing ways of tracking learner’s progress across all aspects of their learning. The school regularly seeks the views of parents, children and young people, staff and partners on a range of issues. The improvement plan has too many targets which do not always make clear how they will improve outcomes for learners. Staff need to ensure that new developments are making a difference to the learning of all children and young people. All staff benefit from continuous professional learning opportunities. They should now give priority to the development of the curriculum in line with national guidance. The management team monitor planning, assessment and the quality of learning and teaching. The senior leadership team has a shared vision of what is important for children and young people and their families and their commitment underpins the very positive school ethos. During this time of significant change, it is important that the team continues to work together to take forward further improvements.

6. What happens next?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school’s self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further visits in connection with this inspection. The Board of Governors will inform parents about the school’s progress as part of the Board of Governor’s arrangements for reporting to parents on the quality of the school.
We have agreed the following areas for improvement with the school and Board of Governors.

- Further develop the curriculum in line with national guidance.
- Improve the collation and accreditation of the full range of young people’s achievements and attainment.
- Ensure that improvement planning projects have a positive impact on learners’ experiences and outcomes for children and young people.
- Ensure that those with leadership responsibility continue to work together to take forward improvements in the school linked to the vision, values and aims.

Recommendations from the previous inspection were met or were in the process of being met and progress has been made e.g. on the use of SHANARRI indicators in care planning.
Quality indicators help schools, education authorities/board of governors and inspectors to judge what is good and what needs to be improved in the work of the school. You can find these quality indicators in the HMIE publication *How good is our school*?

Here are the evaluations for Royal Blind School.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Improvements in performance</th>
<th>very good</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners’ experiences</td>
<td>very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting learning needs</td>
<td>very good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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We also evaluated the following aspects of the work of the school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The curriculum</th>
<th>good</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improvement through self-evaluation</td>
<td>good</td>
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</tbody>
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**HM Inspector:**
Olwynne Clark
24 June 2014

**Care Inspector:**
Shelagh McDougall
When we write reports, we use the following word scale so that our readers can see clearly what our judgments mean.

- excellent means outstanding, sector leading
- very good means major strengths
- good means important strengths with some areas for improvement
- satisfactory means strengths just outweigh weaknesses
- weak means important weaknesses
- unsatisfactory means major weaknesses

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/RoyalBlindSchoolEdinburghCity.asp

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