

St Mary's school and sixth form college (part of the Talking Trust)

Wrestwood Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex TN40 2LU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This school is a non-maintained special school which currently caters for both residential and day pupils aged 7 to 19. It offers education and integrated support to those who may have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, speech, language, communication and additional needs.

Inspection dates: 30 October to 1 November 2018

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and/or the care and experiences of children and young people are poor.

Date of previous inspection: 15 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is inadequate because:

- There are widespread and significant failings in how the school ensures that the residential students' welfare is properly safeguarded and promoted. Since January 2018, senior leaders and staff failed to report all concerns raised to the appropriate safeguarding agencies. Records of safeguarding concerns do not provide a clear and concise evidence trail.
- Senior leaders have admitted residential students to the school without thorough consideration of the school's ability to meet those students' needs.
- Risk assessments and plans are not updated to reflect current need or risk and do not detail what staff need to do to minimise and manage known risks.
- Staff do not consistently follow residential students' behaviour support plans or implement the school's preferred behaviour management approaches. Records lack evidence that residential students are spoken to following an incident of restrictive physical intervention. Leaders and managers do not routinely review, evaluate and monitor records of behaviour management or amend plans following an incident.
- Fire drills occur as required but there is no evidence that staff have completed actions to address weaknesses identified in the fire risk assessment.
- The current senior leader of the school is not employed as a full-time member of staff.
- The quality of the residential provision is not routinely evaluated and monitored; therefore, development plans do not detail key issues that require improvement. The facilities are not well maintained.
- Staff are not supported, encouraged, supervised or managed in a manner that enables them to develop their skills.
- Records do not evidence that safer recruitment practices have been adhered to.

The residential special school's strengths are:

- Staff are caring and nurturing towards the residential students they care for.
- Residential students are encouraged to develop independence skills through the completion of daily chores, including basic food preparation and personal care tasks.
- Staff maintain regular contact with families, ensuring that families and others are fully involved in every aspect of each residential student's education and care.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. (NMS 6.3)
- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. (NMS 7.1)
- The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (NMS 11.1)
- Methods to de-escalate confrontations or potentially challenging behaviour are used wherever appropriate to avoid use of restraint, including reasonable force. Restraint, including reasonable force, is only used in exceptional circumstances, to prevent injury to any person, including the child, or to prevent serious damage to the property of any person, including the child's, or to prevent the child leaving the school's premises where this may lead to the child injuring themselves or others. Restraint in relation to a child must be necessary and proportionate. (NMS 12.4)
- All children and staff are given an opportunity to discuss with a relevant adult (who was not directly involved) within 24 hours incidents of restraint, including reasonable force, they have been involved in, witnessed or been affected by. (NMS 12.5)
- There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff. (NMS 13.2)
- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (NMS 13.4)
- The school's leadership and management actively promote the well-being of pupils. (NMS 13.5)
- The issues specified in Appendix 3 are monitored, and action taken to improve outcomes for children as appropriate. (NMS 13.9)
- Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (NMS 14.1)
- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular

supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)

Recommendations

- Further develop written risk assessments so that identified risks and strategies to reduce these are fully and precisely described.
- Ensure that maintenance issues are completed to a good standard.
- Refine the recording of targets in the residential development plan.
- Leaders and managers should scrutinise, critically evaluate and review incidents and concerns to explore effectiveness of the physical intervention and support method.
- Ensure that all students have a good understanding about how to make a complaint or raise a concern.
- Ensure that the use of surveillance equipment (e.g. CCTV cameras) or patrolling of school buildings or grounds for security purposes does not intrude unreasonably on the student's privacy, specifically to ensure that there is a clear comprehensive policy and procedure about its use.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

Widespread failures have had a negative impact on the residential students' welfare, progress and experiences. The staff have not been able to meet the needs of some of the residential students.

Senior leaders admitted students to the school without thorough consideration and assessment of their needs. The staff did not consider the compatibility of the new residential students with those already living in the school. Staff were not equipped, trained or prepared to meet the needs of the new students. This has directly affected some residential students, who now require a new school that can meet their needs. Consequently, some students are experiencing unnecessary disruption in their lives.

New arrivals to the school are given basic information about the school's routines and rules. However, they are not given a guide or handbook that tells them what it is like to be a residential student. There is no complaints policy for residential students; consequently, they do not know how to make a complaint or raise a concern.

The 'child's voice' is gathered through house meetings, the suggestions box and conversations with staff but the impact of this is not obvious in the school. Records and plans do not clearly evidence the residential students' contribution to the daily operation or development of the residential provision.

The on-site health team and therapist provide helpful insight and guidance to staff. Those students with complex healthcare needs have clear and effective healthcare plans in place. However, staff do not consistently follow the plans for the residential students' care or support. This uncoordinated approach to care delivery hinders the progress made by residential students.

Staff encourage the residential students to develop their self-care skills and independence. They offer a variety of evening activities that students enjoy. However, the quantity of off-site activities and community activities has declined. Staff are aware of this situation and aim to improve this. Staff have generally developed good relationships with students and families. They keep families informed and up to date about the students' needs and the progress they make.

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

Since the previous inspection in January 2018, the safeguarding and welfare needs of residential students have not been prioritised. Senior leaders and staff failed to investigate all of the safeguarding concerns that were brought to their attention. Concerns regarding staff practices and conduct were not reported internally or to the relevant safeguarding agencies. Consequently, external safeguarding agencies and professionals have been unable to take swift and necessary protective action.

A poor safeguarding culture left staff unable to challenge colleagues' practice when it was not in line with residential students' support plans. Consequently, some staff's use of non-approved physical restraint methods had not been reported to, nor challenged by senior leaders. Some staff have used interventions and methods of restraint that they have not been trained to use. Poor record-keeping exacerbates this serious shortfall; for example, the failure of staff to record that they have gained the residential student's views following an incident.

The absence of an effective monitoring systems leaves staff's behaviour management practices insufficiently evaluated. There have been occasions when staff have been ineffective in managing difficult situations and this has caused some residential students' behaviour to escalate and become more risky and serious. For example, some residential students have put themselves at significant risk by accessing areas off-site.

In some cases, outdated support plans and risk assessments do not reflect current circumstances, individual needs or strategies to minimise risk. Staff do not routinely assess the impact of residential students' behaviour on their peers. There are also several areas of risk which have not been considered, explored or assessed.

Other areas of poor risk management and practice includes the physical environment. For example, the fire risk assessment and action plan are not dated, and it is unclear which issues have been addressed and resolved. The residential environment is homely and welcoming in some areas while other areas present as institutional in their design and appearance. Records demonstrate that maintenance and repairs to damage are completed in a timely way, but the quality of some repairs is of poor quality.

Poor staff recruitment practice fails to provide the necessary safeguards. The sampling of recruitment records found examples of gaps in employment histories not explored, interviews and selection processes not completed and references from previous employers not obtained.

The school does not have a clear comprehensive policy about the use of CCTV, which is used to monitor some parts of the residential area, as well as at exits and entrances. Consequently, the school is unable to demonstrate that its use is routinely understood and reviewed to ensure it remains appropriate and necessary. Leaders began to address this shortfall during the inspection.

Following the very recent appointment of a new executive head teacher, some of these serious weaknesses have been identified, with plans for improvement. Links are being strengthened with the local safeguarding board and many staff have attended additional safeguarding training. A recent independent review of medication management and administration has resulted in new systems being implemented. These are yet to become embedded.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Significant weaknesses, including safeguarding concerns, have not been identified or dealt with promptly. Governors and the new executive headteacher are now working to address these issues. This work is in the early stages of development and the impact of it is not yet evident. It is also apparent that newly appointed senior leaders were not aware of the full extent of the concerns until this inspection.

There have been many changes in personnel in the school and the residential provision. There has been a heavy reliance on agency staff to supplement staff numbers due to vacancies and sickness. This has created instability and inconsistency in the support provided to the residential students. Senior leaders have plans to improve staffing across the whole school, but this has not yet been implemented.

There has been a lack of effective scrutiny and oversight of practice. Monitoring and evaluation systems fail to ensure that good standards of care are provided. New systems have been put in place to address this to ensure that the care provided is in line with the aspirational ethos of the school.

There is not currently a whole-school understanding about how to meet a residential student's individual needs, with staff lacking consistent knowledge. Senior staff do not have a clear and current knowledge of staff's practice, including the gaps. The support offered to residential students is not yet seamless and consistent in its application.

Staff have not been provided with regular and effective support, guidance and supervision. Some staff have not been held to account for their practice, behaviour or conduct. Staff have their practice appraised at least annually but it is unclear how effective this is, or how their training opportunities are measured and evaluated.

The independent visitor attends the school at least termly and has provided thorough oversight and scrutiny. The reports provide insightful information and advice to senior leaders to promote the development of the residential provision but it is not clear what action senior leaders have taken in response to these reports.

The school states that it has not received any formal complaints. It was apparent on inspection that some parents and carers do not feel that they have been kept informed of changes in the school. Although under review, the statement of purpose is out of date. Senior leaders have implemented some actions to improve relations with others but as yet this is not embedded. Parents' responses to Parent View, the Ofsted online questionnaire, were overall very positive about the support their children receive.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC050390

Headteacher/teacher in charge:

Mark Dale-Emberton Seconded Executive Principal

Type of school: residential special school

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