

St Mary's School and Sixth Form College

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

Inspection dates

16–17 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
16 to 19 study programmes	Good
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected in the residential provision	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Under the unwavering leadership of the headteacher, leaders have successfully managed the school through a difficult period of transition.
- Pupils' experiences are strengthened by an integration of educational and therapeutic experiences. These ensure that pupils make good progress towards their targets.
- Staff put the safety and well-being of pupils at the centre of their practice. Staff are knowledgeable and confident in their safeguarding responsibilities. They implement safeguarding measures that serve to protect pupils effectively.
- Pupils behave well and respond positively in lessons. They are polite and well mannered, and are excellent ambassadors for the school in the wider community.
- Residential pupils enjoy a good standard of care from a dedicated and well-supported staff team.
- Teachers are committed to all aspects of their work, and encourage pupils to achieve. In spite of this, teachers' planning does not always meet the individual needs of pupils. As a result, some pupils' progress is slowed.
- Support workers provide useful guidance to pupils on how to manage their own behaviour. This enables pupils to make good progress both socially and emotionally. However, not all support workers are effective in supporting pupils' learning.
- The sixth-form provision provides a good standard of education. Staff support students effectively to develop skills and achieve qualifications that enable them to access further education, training or employment.
- Governors have an in-depth understanding of the school. They use this knowledge effectively to challenge leaders to improve pupils' outcomes even further.

Compliance with national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - building on the actions already planned to improve the effectiveness of support workers in contributing to pupils' learning
 - ensuring that teachers' planning meets the needs of all pupils so that they make consistently strong progress across the curriculum.
- Strengthen leadership and management in the sixth form by incorporating meaningful opportunities for students to receive impartial careers guidance so that they receive a range of information which supports them to make decisions about their futures.
- Improve the effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision by:
 - further developing written risk assessments so that identified risks, and strategies to reduce these risks, are fully described
 - ensuring that all maintenance issues are addressed promptly
 - refining the recording of outcome-focused targets in the residential development plan.
- Ensure that leaders maintain their capacity when considering the extension of the provision for students beyond the age of 19.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
The effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision	Good
How well children and young people are helped and protected in the residential provision	Good

- The newly appointed headteacher has moved quickly and built effectively on the work of the interim management board, in place until August 2017. Despite some considerable challenges, leaders have implemented a positive shift in the school's culture. As a result, leaders have made tremendous strides in the school's journey of improvement since the last inspection.
- Newly developed assessment systems are precise and closely track the progress pupils are making, both academically and against their individual targets. Leaders' views of how well pupils are doing across the school are accurate and based on close monitoring of assessment outcomes.
- Senior leaders' evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning is accurate. They know what is working well and what needs to be developed. They have identified clear and precise action plans in order to address any areas that need to improve. Consequently, the quality of teaching and learning across the school is good.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and appropriately adapted for individuals. Leaders provide interesting opportunities to support pupils' learning. The early integrated work of the therapy and education teams supports all aspects of pupils' learning and facilitates their access to the curriculum.
- Leaders track pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development to ensure that it is threaded through all aspects of the curriculum. As a result, SMSC is embedded well within most curriculum areas, and especially so within physical education and English. The school uses internationally linked school events to widen pupils' experiences of other cultures. For example, leaders planned a Chinese learning week to coincide with the Chinese New Year.
- Physical education and sport premium funding supports pupils in accessing sporting activities that meet their individual needs, such as rebound therapy. Success in these activities is enhancing pupils' development of fine- and gross-motor skills.
- Pupil premium funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils, including pupils who are looked after, in developing their basic skills and in accessing the curriculum. Of note is the positive impact of enrichment activities on targeted pupils' self-esteem and independence. As a result, disadvantaged pupils make the same progress as other pupils in the school.
- Staff work hard to ensure that students in the sixth form are prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. The vocational centre provides pupils with valuable experiences in a variety of workplaces and supports them to engage and integrate with members of the wider community.

- Communication with parents and carers has improved since the last inspection and is effective. Responses to the inspection survey, Parent View, showed that most parents are satisfied with the school and the way that any concerns are dealt with.
- Leaders strive to improve how the school prepares pupils for the next stage in their education, employment or training. To this end, they plan to extend provision for pupils up to the age of 25. Although the justification for this is sound, their plans do not yet show how they will ensure that there is the capacity in leadership to maintain and continue to improve the standards of the current school at the same time as managing the expansion.
- Staff deliver the school's residential aims, outlined in the statement of purpose, in their day-to-day practice. The integrated approach across the disciplines provides residential pupils with consistent levels of care in all areas of their lives.
- Leaders support the established residential staff teams well. The framework for supervision provides staff with appropriate support and direction. Staff benefit from annual appraisals that record areas of strength and development needs. There is regular training for staff, and work is in progress to formalise an annual training programme. Although staff are enrolled on relevant qualification courses, the progress towards completion is very slow in too many cases. The leadership team is taking robust action to address this issue.

Governance of the school

- Governors are highly effective in their work. Since the previous inspection, they have worked tirelessly to ensure that the school provides a good standard of education for its pupils. The governing body has played a pivotal role in the restructuring of key leadership roles and regularly uses a range of information to evaluate leaders' work. Consequently, governors have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- Governance is well led. Governors undertake training regularly, and help to set the school's ethos and vision. They are fully involved in the life of the school. Governors have a good understanding of the impact additional funding is having on the progress of disadvantaged pupils, and hold leaders to account for this spending.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's safeguarding policy is thorough. It clearly sets out the responsibilities of staff, along with the appropriate actions to take in different safeguarding situations. The single central record details all the necessary checks on the suitability of adults to work with pupils.
- Staff apply strong safeguarding systems across the school and residential provision. They know how to report, record and manage concerns under the direction of suitably trained designated safeguarding leads. Leaders work in partnership effectively with stakeholders, keeping the focus on outcomes for pupils.
- Parents, staff and pupils are positive about the school's work to promote the safety and well-being of its pupils. Pupils say that they feel safe. The majority of parents and staff agree that this is true.

- In the residential provision, supporting written risk assessments often lack necessary detail. Recent changes to the site management arrangements have also led to a delay in response to any maintenance issues. Leaders are aware of these issues and have already begun to implement actions to address concerns.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching across the school is improving quickly. Leaders have successfully tackled any previous inconsistencies in teaching and, as a result, teaching is consistently good across all year groups.
- Teachers have high expectations of what they expect pupils to achieve. Most pupils feel that their current work is challenging and encourages them to think deeply about the subjects they are learning.
- Teachers plan work for pupils of different abilities to ensure that they all learn well. On occasion, however, this planning does not meet the individual needs of some pupils. This prevents some pupils from consistently making the progress of which they are capable. Leaders have correctly identified this as an area for improvement.
- The teaching of basic skills of literacy and numeracy is good and is reflected in the good progress that pupils make over time. Teachers' use of well-chosen resources when planning jointly with therapists ensures that pupils make at least good progress in their communication skills.
- Teachers provide pupils with a wide range of opportunities to apply and develop their literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum. Teachers use pupils' individualised English and mathematics targets effectively to consolidate pupils' learning and develop their transference of skills.
- Pupils enjoy learning and are excited about their lessons. Those who spoke with inspectors said that they particularly enjoy physical education and English and appreciate that teachers make learning 'fun'.
- Pupils enjoy reading and read aloud with confidence during lessons. Regular targeted reading sessions develop pupils' fluency and comprehension over time.
- Teachers and support workers know pupils well and make good use of this knowledge to plan lessons that engage and challenge pupils. However, where teaching is less effective, teachers do not deploy support workers well. This limits the impact that support workers have on pupils' learning and progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The introduction of specific therapeutic intervention strategies has a positive impact on pupils' well-being. As a result, pupils are able to access the curriculum successfully, despite the barriers to learning that they face.

- The integrated work of the therapy and education team ensures that pupils make rapid progress against their individual targets. For example, a range of therapy is routinely included in pupils' curriculum experiences during 'ready to learn' sessions within the classroom.
- Pupils and staff celebrate and promote difference across the school and residential provision. Pupils feel well listened to. Leaders actively seek pupils' views and these are included in care plans, along with any action taken. As a result, pupils are safe, happy and making progress.
- The curriculum supports pupils to become independent. Regular trips out in the community provide pupils with the opportunity to develop their independence, increase their self-confidence and improve their social communication skills.
- Pupils know and understand how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations. They learn how to stay safe when using roads and the internet. Pupils told inspectors about the importance of not sharing personal information online when using social media and how they protect themselves from risks, such as cyber bullying.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are excellent ambassadors for the school. They conduct themselves well during lessons and transition times. Incidents of low-level disruption are rare because of the high expectations of behaviour conveyed by all staff.
- Leaders and governors monitor behaviour across the school frequently. Records show that behaviour improves over time.
- Staff are continually alert to signs that a pupil may be feeling upset or anxious. They are proactive in their response to potential incidents of challenging behaviour and calmly reassure pupils. As a result, pupils refocus on their learning quickly.
- School records show that incidents of bullying or the use of derogatory language are infrequent. Visits to classrooms and observations during breaktime show that pupils interact well with each other and are respectful of the differing views that they may have.
- Most staff feel well supported by leaders in managing pupils' behaviour. They particularly value the extra training that they have received to support them in understanding pupils' challenging behaviour.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend well. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance to ensure that groups of pupils are not disadvantaged by poor attendance. However, the monitoring of attendance at an individual level is not robust. As a result, leaders have not consistently followed up cases of individual absence.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils often enter the school with relatively low starting points, due to their level of need. The school's recently revised use of assessment means that staff now gain a clear picture of where pupils' gaps in learning lie. Staff use this information to plan

bespoke programmes of study that meet pupils' individual needs. Consequently, this ensures that most pupils make strong progress in all aspects of their learning.

- Work in pupils' books demonstrates that pupils are making good progress in English, particularly in handwriting, and in mathematics. However, tasks provided by teachers do not consistently match pupils' individual starting points. When this happens, pupils' progress slows.
- Key stage 2 pupils receive tailored support through the therapeutic curriculum. This helps them to develop the skills necessary to access the curriculum in key stage 3 and beyond.
- All groups of pupils achieve equally well. Disadvantaged pupils typically make the same progress as their peers because leaders use the pupil premium funding effectively.
- As well as developing their numeracy and literacy skills, pupils achieve well in a number of other areas, including their independence, confidence, communication skills, and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. As a result, they develop the self-confidence and skills to make a successful transition to the wider community.
- Students at post-16 are making good progress in their accredited courses and in preparing for life beyond school. They are well prepared for the world of work, and the majority of students transfer to further education colleges.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- Leadership of the sixth form has improved since the last inspection and is now good because it ensures that students are making good progress within their programmes of study.
- Teaching in the sixth form is improving strongly and is now good. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and usually provide them with activities that deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- Students follow a range of accredited courses, including literacy, numeracy and a range of work-related learning options. The newly opened vocational centre provides students with the opportunity to transfer their skills across to the workplace. This is having a positive impact on their outcomes and prepares them well for future employment.
- Staff provide students with appropriate support for transition to the next stage of their education. Staff accompany students to college placements and proactively engage with parents and external agencies when decisions about future placements are made. As a result, all students go on to sustained further education, training or employment. However, opportunities for students to receive impartial careers guidance when making decisions about their future are not yet fully developed.
- Students' behaviour and safety across the sixth-form provision are exemplary. Inspectors witnessed students interacting with members of the community in a polite and appropriate manner. Students consistently demonstrate respect for their environment and each other.

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision

Good

- Residential pupils enjoy warm, positive relationships with staff. They engage meaningfully, interacting with young people in ways that respect their individual needs and styles of communication.
- Staff deliver support and encouragement that promote the development of independence. Residential pupils flourish in the enabling atmosphere and acquire new skills that some then try out at home. The range of effective therapeutic provision enables staff to offer supportive services that enhance pupils' emotional well-being. A parent commented: 'After a difficult period, it is fantastic that the positive, caring, child-centred attitude has returned to St Mary's. My child is happy and therefore progressing well.'
- Constructive keywork sessions enable pupils to talk about any worries and help them work towards the targets identified in their care plan. This includes how to maintain friendships and manage conflict. Pupils say that there is very little bullying in the school. Pupils also have the opportunity to meet with an independent visitor each half term.
- Residential pupils demonstrate an awareness of how to keep themselves safe, including online, in accordance with their level of ability. Pupils receive good support, guidance and information on managing personal relationships.
- Residential pupils benefit from the holistic approach of the therapy, health and well-being team. Their healthcare needs are well known and reflected in their care plans. The team has made good progress in promoting the use of community-based healthcare provision that more closely mirrors life outside school. This supports pupils' learning, as does a risk-assessed framework that enables some to be responsible for taking their own medication. Residential pupils receive specialist support where there is an identified need, through art therapy for example.
- Residential pupils enjoy a wide range of leisure, sporting and cultural activities that reflect their individual interests. These are both on site and in the wider community. Examples of community-based activities include judo, creative writing and bowling; on site, pupils swim, play football and participate in karaoke with great enthusiasm.
- Residential pupils benefit from active preparation for proposed moves, in line with their care plan. Unplanned moves between houses are infrequent, but when this happens, it is demonstrably in the best interests of the young people.

School details

Unique reference number	133653
Social care unique reference number	SC050390
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10040938

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	61
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	38
Number of boarders on roll	38
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mary Briggs
Headteacher	Mark Bryant
Telephone number	01424 730740
Website	www.stmarysbexhill.org
Email address	smunn@stmarysbexhill.org
Date of previous inspection	20–21 January 2016

Information about this school

- St Marys School and Sixth Form College is a non-maintained special school, with residential provision. Both the education and residential provision are part of the Talking Trust. The school caters for pupils aged seven to 19.

- The current headteacher joined the school in September 2017. Prior to this, an interim management board was responsible for the leadership of the school.
- All the pupils have an education, health and care plan. The vast majority of pupils have speech, language and communication needs, and a high proportion also have other identified needs, including autistic spectrum conditions, social, emotional and mental health needs and/or medical conditions.
- The proportion of pupils who are eligible for support from pupil premium funding is below average.
- Following a period of substantial change at senior leadership level, the governing body appointed the current headteacher in September 2017.

Information about this inspection

- This was an integrated inspection, which took place at half a day's notice.
- Inspectors observed seven lessons or parts of lessons across all departments, all jointly with members of the senior leadership team. Pupils' behaviour during lessons, as well as in and around the school, was observed.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, those who have responsibility for safeguarding, leaders of the residential provision, staff at the school and groups of pupils, including day and residential pupils. A discussion was held with the governing body.
- Inspectors analysed school documentation, including the school's self-evaluation, reports provided by external advisers, education, health and care plan information and tracking information about pupils' achievement, attendance, behaviour and exclusions.
- Safeguarding policies and procedures were scrutinised, including correspondence between the school and the local authority safeguarding board. Records linked to work with other agencies were reviewed, as well as those relating to how the school has responded to complaints.
- Inspectors looked closely at the experiences and progress of residential pupils. They 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 the help and care provided.
- Inspectors considered 22 responses from parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View.

Inspection team

Emma Sanderson, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Maire Atherton	Social Care Regulatory Inspector
Andrew Whippy	Her Majesty's Inspector

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