

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

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

Inspection dates

12/02/2019 to 13/02/2019

Context of the inspection

The school was inspected on 30 October 2018 to 1 November 2018. It was judged to be inadequate, with seven breached national minimum standards (NMS). This monitoring visit was completed to assess the provider's progress to meet the NMS.

Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

There continue to be serious failings and weaknesses in the school, which means that children are not protected, or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded. Consequently, the care and experiences of children is poor.

Despite staff receiving additional safeguarding training, they continue to lack an understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The members of the designated safeguarding team do not have sufficient knowledge and understanding of legislation, guidance and safeguarding procedures to fulfil their role. Senior leaders and staff have continued to fail to report all safeguarding concerns to the appropriate safeguarding agencies. Safeguarding records are muddled and do not provide clear, concise evidence trails. Concerns have not been monitored or evaluated to ensure that all actions have been completed. No one person has an overview of concerns, patterns and trends and so concerns have been missed and not referred to others.

The quality of internal investigations is weak. They have been completed by a person who has no professional understanding of child development, child protection or good practice. Investigations are poor and sometimes delayed. Records that inform them are chaotic, lack clarity and detail of what occurred. In some cases, matters have been closed because the lack of information and detail has meant that the investigator could not reach a conclusion. In some instances, investigating officers have suggested that a child's low cognitive ability means that concerns they may raise are less valid.

Risk assessments continue to be weak and lack clarity. Those reviewed by staff still do not contain all the relevant practical information and advice to guide and support staff to manage and minimise risk.

There have been staff changes since the previous inspection. This has negatively impacted on many aspects of the school and hinders staff's ability to provide consistent, stable care to children. Staff have not ensured that all information is shared with relevant staff and no one takes overall responsibility and accountability for children's

welfare. Children have been put at risk due to poor staff supervision and oversight.

Staff apply behaviour management methods which are inappropriate and not as described in children's behaviour support plans. Staff have, on one occasion, used an unofficial hold which had not been agreed or reviewed. Managers did not identify this and so have not reviewed these incidents. Behaviour management records are incomplete and lack information and detail. Managers do not regularly review and monitor records. Pupils are not given an opportunity to discuss their views and feelings following a physical intervention or significant incident.

An independent consultant assessed the school medication processes in October 2018. This review found serious failings in the administration of medication and further errors that could jeopardise the safety of pupils. Since then, several significant medication errors have occurred, two of which have been very serious, putting children at risk of harm. Investigations into these errors have been hindered by poor record-keeping.

Seven complaints have been made since the previous inspection. These have not been responded to in line with the school's complaints policy and procedure. Governance, policy, process and accountability concerning the management of complaints is confused. The responses are not timely and do not set out a clear investigation process concluding whether complaints have been upheld or not and the underpinning rationale and evidence supporting findings. It is clear from documentation that parents have little trust in the rigour and transparency of the complaints process. Some complaints are closed without a clear statement of outcomes or a conclusion as to whether they have been upheld.

A strong blame culture prevails in this school. There is no clear accountability or willingness to take responsibility for the failings found during the previous inspection and during this visit. The action plan formulated following the previous inspection is not fit for purpose and does not address the concerns raised.

National minimum standards

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- 3.6 The school has, and implements effectively, appropriate policies for the care of children who are unwell, and ensures that children's physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing is promoted. These include first aid, care of those with chronic conditions and disabilities, administration of medicines (including controlled drugs) and dealing with medical emergencies. Policies for administration of medication should reflect guidance provided by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (Handling of Medicines in Social Care).
- 6.3 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.
- 11.1 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.
- 12.4 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.
- 12.5 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.
- 13.2 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.
- 13.4 The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met.
- 13.5 The school's leadership and management actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.
- 13.9 The issues specified in Appendix 3 are monitored, and action taken to improve outcomes for children as appropriate.
- 14.1 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.
- 18.1 The school has, and follows, an appropriate policy on recording and responding to complaints that is compliant with the relevant regulatory requirements.

- 18.2 The school's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to residential provision, and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

Inspection team

Amanda Maxwell	Lead social care inspector
Nick Stacey	Her Majesty's Inspector
Sarah Olliver	Social care inspector

Information about this 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. The residential accommodation is currently provided in five houses, four of which are on the main school site and one is located within the nearby local community. During the inspection, 62 children were attending the school and 30 of these are residential pupils.

School details

Unique reference number	SC050390
Social care unique reference number	1022989
DfE registration number	845/7000

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

The inspection was conducted at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

Type of school	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	127
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to 19
Headteacher	Rory Fox
Date of previous boarding inspection	30/10/2018
Telephone number	01424 730740
Email address	smunn@stmarysbexhill.org

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.co.uk/ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.co.uk/ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.co.uk/ofsted
© Crown copyright 2019

