

# St Mary's School and 6th Form College

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**

St Mary's School and Sixth Form College is a non-maintained special school which currently provides day and residential placements for children and young people between the ages of 7 and 19.

The school provides education for pupils who have communication and interaction difficulties associated with autism spectrum disorder. There is room for 40 children to attend the residential provision; 11 children were in the residential provision at the time of this visit.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, Ofsted suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Ofsted last visited this setting on 6 October 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

This was a welfare only inspection.

### **Inspection dates: 8 to 10 March 2022**

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected      good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers      good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of previous inspection:** 9 July 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement to be good

## **Inspection judgements**

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children make good progress as a result of the nurturing care and support from the committed and skilled staff team. Parents are positive about the role of the school in promoting their child's progress and social development. Close communication with staff helps parents to feel positive and assured about their child's experiences while they are in residential care. Parents said their children are more outgoing, have friends and attend parties, which they would not have done otherwise. Children in the school who do not attend the residential provision often aspire to join in the fun.

Children move seamlessly between the school and the residential provision. Residential staff communicate effectively with education colleagues ensuring consistent joint work across the school. Reading time at the end of the school day allows children to reflect on their day, have a snack and practice their reading before starting their evening activities. Consequently, children begin their evenings calmly and are ready to attend planned activities.

Children's views are central to the planning of the residential provision. Group meetings, alongside individual discussions, provide spaces for children to share their views. This may include managing disputes within the group or deciding on charitable causes to support, such as donations to the local foodbank. Children have access to a wide range of activities, often provided following children's suggestions. A judo club, for example, has been recently re-introduced. Other activities, such as café trips and shopping, and close links with the therapies team, helps children to explore their interests and develop their communication and practical life skills.

Children have easy access to specialist support. Residential staff work closely with the school staff and on-site therapy teams. Staff are knowledgeable about children's plans and needs, ensuring consistency in their care. Staff are skilled at communicating with children and use a range of communication styles and techniques, tailored to each child. Children have clear plans that help them to make progress educationally, socially and emotionally. This has led, for example, to children proudly demonstrating their newly acquired skills such as making breakfast independently or planning routes to the local shops.

Children's individual health needs are also well understood through careful plans. Staff are well trained in how to respond to specific medical needs. The nurse holds a vital role in the school through effective liaison with partner health services and teaching health and well-being as part of the curriculum. Medication is stored securely and processes for the monitoring and administration of medication in the school and residential provision are an exemplar of good practice.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

Staff are knowledgeable about the risks children face and are aware of each child's particular vulnerabilities. Staff are confident in the procedures to follow should they be concerned for a child. Joint working across the school and with external partner agencies leads to strong safeguarding practice and oversight. The electronic reporting system provides a clear picture of children's needs due to consistent good practice with regard to recording any concerns.

Children do not go missing from the residential provision. Plans in response to children going missing are clear and staff are knowledgeable in how to respond. On the one occasion a child left school, a swift response meant the child was quickly found through effective joint working from partner agencies. Bullying is not tolerated across the school and differences in relationships are managed well. Children do not report that bullying is an issue and staff are vigilant as to how children are interacting with each other. Children learn how to maintain positive friendships through additional support from the speech and language and occupational therapists.

Children are supported to develop positive self-esteem and to learn about appropriate touch. Puberty and sexual development are explored sensitively in line with the child's age and development. The introduction of the school nurse to assist in these sessions provides another helpful perspective to inform children.

Children are supported to understand and manage how they are feeling. Staff recognise behaviour as a form of communication and thoughtfully support children to explore what they are trying to communicate. Staff are skilled at giving children space to calm and physical intervention is rarely used. Plans are clear and debriefs are a valuable tool in learning to support the child in the future.

Children are protected from avoidable risk through effective safer recruitment practice, ensuring that only suitable people can work or volunteer in the school. The residential building is well maintained and regular monitoring ensures that any risks are quickly rectified. Children have an excellent knowledge of their roles in fire evacuation and confidently demonstrated this to inspectors. Risk assessments are clear, illustrating an informed insight of children's needs. Children are supported well to take reasonable risks in the community to improve their independence skills. There are good protective measures in place to help them do this safely.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

The principal is highly effective in her promotion of a positive and enabling culture across the school. Children are encouraged to succeed to the best of their potential and there is a whole-school approach to developing children's skills and abilities. Leaders ensure that the care children receive is effective. Close links between the residential, education and therapy teams enables children to receive the help and

support they need. The monitoring of plans by leaders is thorough and identifies areas for improvement that are quickly put in place. Children therefore benefit from a continually improving service that is focused on meeting their needs.

Staff are valued by senior leaders and they are empowered to feel essential to both the children's and the school's success. Staff are confident in approaching senior staff with any ideas or concerns they may have and they are confident that they will be listened to. Staff have regular developmental and challenging supervision which promotes their professional growth. Annual appraisals provide a clear insight into the developmental needs of staff, but also recognise the skills and knowledge that they already hold and how they can make the most of these.

Leaders have developed a culture of acceptance and tolerance across the school. Children are free to explore and grow emotionally. Disability or communication style is not a barrier to friendships or access to the school or local community. Children's progress is monitored daily. Statutory plans are reflected in goals and progress trackers. The focus on independent living is exemplary. Staff across the school are aspirational in guiding children towards achievable career goals that promotes a culture of self-worth. A careers week held during the inspection informed children on their potential next steps and carefully considered with them how they could access a career they would enjoy.

Leadership is underpinned by proactive governance that provides exacting professional challenge and scrutiny. The independent visitor provides balanced scrutiny from monthly visits and reports to the residential provision. This also contributes to continuous improvements. Development plans for the residential provision are aspirational and demonstrate the high value that is placed on the resource. It is an integral part of the school, providing children with experiences they would not otherwise enjoy.

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

### **Recommendation**

- Review the use of language in records to be more descriptive of what has happened and in a manner that enhances the child's understanding of their experiences while at the school.

### **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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:** Ms Natalie Edwards

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspectors**

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Matt Nicholls, Social Care Inspector

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