

St Bernard's School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Mick Walklin
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Date of last inspection	26 February 2008

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

St Bernard's School is a day and residential school for pupils with severe learning disabilities aged between two and 19 years of age. The school also provides a respite service to children with disabilities over weekends and holidays. The residential facilities comprise of two lounges, a dining area, sensory room and a kitchen. Young people have single bedrooms on the ground and first floor. The residential area is equipped to meet the needs of young people with mobility difficulties. Resources, such as the swimming pool and other educational facilities are available outside school hours and provide varied opportunities for recreational pursuits. St Bernard's School is located in Louth with access to local shops and community facilities. The school provides appropriate transport to access these facilities and the wider resources in the surrounding areas of Lincolnshire. Four young people were present during the inspection.

Summary

At this announced full inspection, all National Minimum Standards were inspected. This is a good service in most respects. The residential provision at the school actively contributes to young people's educational progress, enabling them to gain social and independent living skills and experience living in a small group setting. Young people receive individualised support from a well-trained and supported staff group. Young people have learning disabilities and communication difficulties and staff use a variety of techniques to enable young people to communicate effectively. Young people are protected by good procedures for child protection and the prevention of bullying but they would benefit from the complaints procedure being in accessible formats. Young people are helped to gain skills in preparation for adult life. They have a good relationship with staff who promote a warm and friendly atmosphere. Staff set reasonable boundaries and expectations of behaviour. There are good arrangements to meet young people's health needs. Staff have made the best use of the accommodation in the residential wing to ensure that a homely style atmosphere is created. However, improvements are recommended to the accommodation to ensure that there is privacy and freedom of movement for young people. Although there are good arrangements with external companies to maintain and service fire, moving and handling, and electrical equipment, there is a lack of clarity in the school relating to health and safety responsibilities. This has led to some routine checks not being carried out as frequently as recommended.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

The Head was asked to ensure that improvements were made to medication administration recording, staff supervision and the monitoring of the residential area. The Head was also asked to improve the information in the behaviour management policy and school brochure and to ensure that regular fire alarm checks were conducted. Action has been taken to resolve these issues but fire alarm checks are still not occurring at the intervals recommended by the fire authority.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people stay in a healthy environment and their health and care needs are identified and promoted. Parents retain responsibility for healthcare arrangements although there are arrangements with a local surgery to provide emergency cover. Staff receive first aid training and deal effectively with minor ailments and issues, such as epilepsy. However, young people will return home if they become unwell. A healthy and active lifestyle is encouraged and any health needs are clearly identified in care plans. A range of healthcare professionals visit the school including monthly visits from a Consultant Paediatrician. However, input from some therapy services is not as frequent as in previous years and staff say that this is having a negative impact on young people's welfare. Health promotion is covered as part of the school curriculum and St Bernard's participates in the Healthy Schools Initiative. Medication administration procedures have improved to ensure that administration is recorded correctly. Staff receive training in the safe handling of medication and training is also provided by specialist nurses for more complex administration. Parents provide all medication which is not administered without appropriate consent forms. Medication is securely stored in a locked metal cabinet. Young people are provided with healthy and nutritious meals that meet their dietary requirements. Meals are treated as a social occasion. Midday meals are provided by the school kitchen with a choice of meals including a vegetarian option. Breakfast and evening meals are prepared in the residential area. Staff have a good knowledge of individual likes and dislikes and ensure that young people are offered choices using methods appropriate to the young person's level of communication and understanding. Staff monitor fluid and dietary intake through good daily records and healthy snacks are always available. Cooking is a regular part of the activity programme. Appropriate aids are used to enable young people to eat independently.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled. Young people have single bedrooms and staff ensure privacy when assisting young people with personal care. Staff are fully aware of their responsibility for maintaining privacy and confidentiality. No surveillance is used in the residential area but monitors are used to alert night staff of any problems. Parents have good information about how to complain, outlined in the school brochure. Young people have difficulty understanding the concept of making a formal complaint but staff monitor young people's behaviour which indicates whether they are unhappy. However, an accessible and simplified version of the complaints procedure would benefit young people. There have been no complaints since the last inspection. Young people complete an annual satisfaction survey which helps identify any issues. The welfare of young people is promoted and there are good procedures to protect young people from bullying. This is not identified as a problem but staff monitor relationships closely and intervene promptly if there are any disagreements. Staff receive good safeguarding training and have a good knowledge of procedures to follow. Information regarding safeguarding is available in the office as well as the local authority confidential reporting code. The Head is responsible for child protection and both he and the Head of Care attend detailed safeguarding training. Young people have little knowledge of community dangers or road safety so external doors are locked and there are high levels of supervision to ensure that young people do not go missing. There are systems in place to ensure that significant events are notified to the appropriate authorities. Acceptable behaviour is effectively promoted by the use of praise and rewards. Unacceptable behaviour is quickly challenged by staff in a calm and sensitive manner. The behaviour management policy has been amended to clarify when physical interventions can be used.

Sanctions are not used although some activities may be used as incentives for good behaviour. Staff receive behaviour management training and ensure that rules and boundaries are consistently applied. Young people stay in an environment that provides physical safety and security. However, there is a lack of clarity about health and safety responsibilities which has led to some routine checks not being carried out as frequently as recommended. Staff also do not have clear guidance about the purchase, use and risk assessment of cleaning materials. However, hazardous substances which were found to be inadequately stored at the last inspection are now securely stored. There are good arrangements with external companies for the servicing and checking of fire, moving and handling and electrical equipment. There are good procedures for vetting staff and visitors to ensure that young people are protected.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The school's residential provision actively supports young people's educational progress. The residential area enhances the opportunities available to young people. Young people's Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN) identifies the need for a residential placement for educational reasons. There is a philosophy of a 24-hour curriculum with young people gaining social and independent living skills and experiencing living in a small group setting. Staff praised the good relationships and co-operative working between staff across the whole school. Support staff meetings are held every three weeks for residential and education staff. The Ofsted education inspection in March 2007 stated, 'St Bernard's is a good school. Pupils' progress is good and their personal development is outstanding'. Young people benefit from a wide ranging and enjoyable activity programme outside school hours. Activities are co-ordinated on a weekly basis and there is a good balance of free and structured time. Young people clearly enjoy the activities arranged and staff ensure that all young people are involved as far as they wish. There are a good range of toys, games and art materials together with televisions, audio and computer equipment. Young people have use of two mini-busses for outings, one of which has wheelchair access. Young people receive good levels of individual support through good staffing levels. The residential area is fully equipped to meet the needs of young people with mobility difficulties. Although the needs of young people using the service are diverse, staff ensure that all young people are fully involved and that none are socially isolated. Care plans comprehensively cover religious and cultural needs.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people are well supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run. The use of communication aids and signing ensures that all young people are able to contribute. The School Council meets regularly with pupil members encouraged to air their views. A representative from the residential area is included in meetings. Staff have a good knowledge of young people's individual communication methods and use appropriate aid to facilitate communication, such as signing, objects of reference and the Picture Exchange Communication System. Staff understand the need to respond to positive body language, facial expressions, vocalising, pointing and speech so that communication is not ignored. Young people have a good relationship with staff who promote a warm and friendly atmosphere. They set reasonable boundaries and expectations of behaviour. Young people are praised for their achievements and deployment of staff ensures continuity of care. There is now a dedicated staff team working in the residential area whereas before, staff worked in both residential and

education settings. The criteria for admissions to the residential area are explained in the school brochure. The SEN sets out objectives which are intended to be achieved from the placement. However, it is not envisaged that there will be any new admissions to the residential area in the foreseeable future. The school also offers respite care for up to five young people at weekends. Young people have their needs fully assessed with good written plans in place to address those needs. Parents are fully involved in the process and sign care plans to indicate their agreement. Good information enables staff to provide young people with care in a way that they prefer and also identifies areas of independence. There is excellent moving and handling information including pictures of equipment to be used for individual young people. Daily records are of a good standard and facilitate communication between residential and education staff. Although care plans were updated in September, one contained incorrect information about the young person's medication regime. Young people are supported to maintain contact with parents, carers and friends if they wish whilst staying in the residential area. Diaries travel with young people between home and school to enable effective communication with parents. Although the residential area has an open door policy for parents, there is often little contact during the week unless there is a problem. There are suitable telephone facilities available to young people if they wish.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people bring their own clothing and personal requisites with them when staying in the residential area. An optional school uniform consisting of a sweatshirt and polo shirt with the school logo is available. A supply of clothes is kept on the residential area for emergencies. A budget for activities is available to pay for incidental expenses and outings. Young people are well prepared for their transition into adulthood. They receive good support to explore further education or employment opportunities and there are good links with local further education colleges. All young people from year seven onwards follow a careers guidance programme. If appropriate they have access to work experience and work related activities. The school uses the EQUALS Access Curriculum, primarily for the 16-19 age range. This is a comprehensive approach that aims to give young people confidence, self-esteem and positive attitudes and values through experience and knowledge. ASDAN (Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network) is also used to prepare young people for more independent living. Staff in the residential area support young people to gain life skills and independence in a safe and supervised environment. Young people stay in accommodation which is well maintained and decorated. Despite the institutional layout of the building, especially the first floor bedroom accommodation, staff have been creative in ensuring that the accommodation is comfortable and homely. Two bedrooms on the ground floor, which are currently not used are unsuitable for accommodating young people. One has an internal gate which could prevent a young person from leaving the room. The other has a window in the door which would compromise privacy. Action should be taken to resolve these problems before the rooms are used as bedroom accommodation again. Bathing and toilet facilities are suitable for the needs of young people and one bathroom contains a hi-lo bath and tracking hoists. However, some bathrooms are not fitted with locks to ensure privacy. The residential area provides physical security against access by unauthorised persons by means of keypad operated external doors.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people's cultural and religious needs are clearly identified in care plans. The school is able to meet the dietary needs of different cultural and religious groups. Staff provide young people with good support and ensure that their disabilities do not preclude them from activities, independent living and community opportunities. Parents or carers and placing authorities have access to good information about the residential area which describes the facilities available. The school brochure now contains better information about the residential area and what it sets out to achieve. Young people's needs, development and progress is well recorded. The school keeps clear and accurate records of both the staff group and young people in an electronic format. Staffing has been reorganised since the last inspection. Previously, staff worked both in classrooms and in the residential area. With the exception of staff providing one to one support for a young person, staff now work solely in the residential area. They described the new arrangements as 'working really well'. The smaller staff team provides better continuity and consistency for young people and better communication between the staff group. Staffing levels are suitable to meet the needs of young people. There are designated relief staff to cover absences and staff also work flexibly to cover gaps in the rota. Young people are looked after by staff who are well supported and trained to meet their needs. The previous inspection identified that staff supervision was not occurring as frequently as recommended. A programme of staff supervision has now been put into place. The school offers good training opportunities for staff with five inset days each year. Staff describe training as 'excellent'. The school is committed to ensuring that residential staff have access to National Vocational Qualifications and most have attained a qualification at Level 3. Weekly staff meetings are held and there is adequate handover time to ensure that there is effective communication between shifts. The previous inspection identified that the residential area was not adequately monitored. There are now procedures to monitor the accommodation and the welfare of young people, although these have only been put in place this term.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- provide the complaints procedure in an accessible format for young people (NMS 4)
- ensure that routine health and safety checks are carried out as recommended and that staff have clear guidance about the purchase and use of cleaning materials (NMS 26)
- ensure that care plans contain accurate information (NMS 17)
- ensure that accommodation offers privacy and freedom of movement to young people (NMS 23 & 25).