

St Francis Community Special School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Joanne Vyas
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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 Francis Residential Special School provides planned residential care within a 24-hour curriculum for young people up to the age of 19 years with medical and/or physical disabilities. The school provides a full curriculum for nursery, primary, secondary and post-16 pupils.

Boarding is available from Monday afternoon to Friday morning during school term time. Accommodation for up to 18 young people can be provided each night. Five young people access the residential wing as part of their statement of educational need. The remaining residential places are open to young people on a rotational basis to enable them to experience living away from home.

All accommodation is on one level and there are three separate living areas. Each of these areas has a lounge with adjoining bedrooms and bathrooms. Young people can access school facilities throughout the evening. This includes the large post-16 area with computer and food preparation facilities, the school hall, swimming pool, outside areas and design and technology classrooms.

The school is situated on a residential estate in Lincoln and transport is available for boarders in the evenings to enable access to the community.

Summary

The inspector visited this school to complete an announced full inspection where all the key standards were inspected.

The staff team are qualified, caring, competent and well supported by each other and the senior management team. They are passionate and committed to the work that they do. A parent said: 'The staff at St. Francis school do an amazing job and are totally committed to the school and the students. They are an extremely dedicated team who always bring out the very best in each pupil.' Staff are able to provide a high level of care and support for students and meet their individual needs with the knowledge and understanding they have of them. Individual achievements are recognised and celebrated. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding throughout the standards inspected. The staff working in the post-16 provision and residential staff work closely together to ensure that the students' needs are fully met. There are excellent relationships between the students and staff. Students are kept active with a good range of sports and activities. There is a child-centred approach to care and education where the students' views are paramount. The students are protected by robust health and safety procedures. There are some minor shortfalls with regard to consent for the administration of first aid, verification of references received for new staff and improved collaborative work between education (for ages 14 to 16 years) and residence.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations were made at the previous inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Staff are focused and committed to ensuring a high quality provision of health care for all students. The school has 24-hour access to qualified nurses. They also have a close working relationship with other healthcare professionals including occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists. Each student has a health plan that comprehensively addresses their needs. Plans for specific health conditions are written and reviewed by the school nurses. The nurses also retain these plans but said they will copy them to the residential staff to ensure all staff are knowledgeable about the health needs of each student and how these should be addressed. The nurses play an active role in supporting the care team with day to day activities such as medication administration, health related tasks and meeting staff training needs. All accidents are recorded and first aid is given as appropriate. There is a high level of staff who are qualified in first aid and so there is always a member of staff on duty who is trained to give first aid as well as a qualified nurse. However, the school does not currently seek consent from parents or carers for the administration of first aid.

The safe handling of medication is well managed in this school. Only the school nurses administer medication but residential staff are trained in a variety of healthcare tasks such as gastronomy feeds. The school have very few home remedies, and these have been agreed within a protocol. Medication is accurately recorded, received and disposed of appropriately. The medication cupboards are secure.

Mealtimes are sociable occasions, where a variety of healthy food is served in ample quantities. Students all agree the food is lovely. A student added: 'If I don't like something I tell the kitchen and they'll do you something else.' A parent said: 'The school meals are excellent and always healthy, my daughter loves them.' Students are given the opportunity to discuss and change menus as well as cook their own meals. The cooks devise menus on a weekly basis to ensure they are appropriate to the weather and are not repetitive. Staff are aware of different dietary needs and preferences and these are catered for. Theme nights are held throughout the year to celebrate events from different cultures and beliefs. Staff and students dress accordingly and sample the cultural foods appropriate to the particular theme of the night. The school has been awarded the healthy school award and has a five star rating from the local environmental health department.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Students said they feel safe and secure when boarding at this school. The safety and rights of staff and students are protected. There are no current safeguarding issues. Staff are familiar with the school's own safeguarding procedures and are competent in their knowledge. A parent said: 'Safety is highest on the school priority list.' Students said they have not experienced incidents of bullying at the school. Their comments included: 'It's a friendly environment;' 'We're all nice to each other;' 'Everybody respects you;' 'It's like we're all a big family;' 'They always make you feel at home;' and 'I feel secure.' The school has a written procedure for action when students are absent without authority but there were no such incidents.

The privacy of students is respected by staff. Students said: 'Staff are very protective of your privacy... they always make sure the doors are shut;' 'They always put the screen round;' and 'They always knock on the door.' The living arrangements provide space where students can relax and easily find privacy away from others if they wish. Sensitive information is held securely. Students' issues are not discussed openly.

Students have confidence in approaching staff if they have complaints or concerns. They fully understand the complaints procedure and said that they have never had to make a complaint. However, they strongly agreed that they are always listened to and taken seriously. It is clear from observation and discussion that the school's management team is responsive to issues raised by the students and their parents and ensures measures put in place to resolve issues are effectively communicated. All complaints are appropriately, fairly and sensitively responded to within appropriate timescales.

The behaviour of students is commendable. They are courteous and considerate towards each other and staff as well as maintaining an excellent sense of humour. Staff view the students positively and there is a happy and relaxed atmosphere in residence. The school do not use physical intervention or sanctions. Staff said that they know the students really well and if a student is getting upset about something they will either talk through their problems or distract them. They also said: 'You have to give students time to communicate so they don't get frustrated.' Students comments included: 'We all have a laugh' and 'Everyone's always happy.' Students know the rules and said they are fair. Boundaries between staff and students are clear and relationships are excellent.

Recruitment procedures protect students. Safety checks are completed and staff only commence employment when they have a satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau disclosure and two satisfactory references. However, references are not verified which would ensure they have been written by the person stated as the referee.

The school has comprehensive risk assessments for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds including fire. All staff are given fire safety training. Fire drills are carried out on a regular basis and at different times of the day. Fire safety equipment is checked regularly and a detailed record kept. All visitors sign into the school and must show identification. Health and safety procedures are robust.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Students have excellent relationships with staff. There are lots of activities organised both in the school and in the community. Students enjoy the many and varied activities, including various clubs that they attend. The students' own individual interests are supported and they are fully involved in planning activities and outings. Activities are appropriately adapted to ensure no-one misses out and students can participate as independently as possible.

Staff are positive in their approach to education and its value for students. Time is set aside for homework after school and staff help and support students with this. Appropriate educational documentation is held on individual case files. Communication between teaching and residential staff is generally very good and staff work closely together, particularly in the post-16 provision. The close links that have been forged between residential staff and post-16 teaching staff are not mirrored within the school prior to this provision, i.e. students aged 14 to 16 years, who use the residential facility. Although the impact of this is currently minimal, this may lead to an inconsistent approach and the inability to have an holistic view of the student. However, the school is child-centred and the individual needs and aspirations of students are well documented.

Individual support is comprehensively detailed in each student's file and observations and discussions with staff show that staff ensure each student's individual needs are met. This includes individualised support in terms of their communication, health needs and personal care needs as well as identifying any religious and cultural needs a student may have. Individual achievements are recognised and celebrated.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Seeking the views of students, listening to them and taking them seriously is a strength of this school. It is the driver for all decisions and activities. Staff continually consult with students and ensure their views are paramount. Numerous changes have been made as a result of listening to students and students are aware of and consulted about plans for the school. Comments from students included: 'They ask us about trips and activities;' 'You can cook your own meals;' and 'We talk to staff about our care plan and targets.'

Staff are passionate about providing a high standard of care for students and meeting their individual needs with the knowledge and understanding they have of them. Students and their parents provide information for initial care planning which is then built up into a comprehensive document that is regularly reviewed and ensures staff can meet the individual needs of students on a day to day basis.

Students board for one or two nights a week. A student said: 'I absolutely love boarding because it gives me an opportunity to be with all of my friends.' The senior management team work closely with parents to provide a strong foundation in which to build fundamental life skills for students. Parents are welcomed into the school and provided with regular information via letters, email and the home school diary. A parent said: 'We have regular letters home about all sorts of things, so we are kept up to date with all aspects of the school.'

Admission to residence and leaving is sensitively and comprehensively planned. The post-16 provision and residential staff work closely together to enhance a student's ability to move onto further education and live independently. A parent said: 'His independent skills are being helped with his opportunity to board.' Staff are committed to support students with their transition to further education and provide activities which develop their life skills and help them to achieve accredited courses in personal and social skills.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Students board in a homely environment, with high quality furnishings. There are large communal areas in which students can meet, relax and take part in a variety of activities. The students have good facilities. Their bedrooms can be personalised and shared rooms have facilities to ensure privacy. Students can also personalise communal areas if they wish. Examples of art work completed by students is apparent throughout the school. The school is clean, tidy and well maintained. Corridors and doors within the school are wide and rooms are not cluttered ensuring easy access for students in wheelchairs. It is evident that students value their school and their surroundings.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The statement of purpose is a comprehensive document and is reviewed on an annual basis. The commitment to promoting equality and diversity is explicit in this information. There are good staffing levels with senior staff and nursing staff available at all times. The residential area is staffed at night by a nurse and a member of the care team as well as staff who sleep over night and are on call.

Staff have access to an excellent training programme. The staff team are qualified, caring, competent and well supported by each other and the senior management team. They are passionate and committed to the work that they do. All staff receive training in equality and diversity.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Evidence supports a strong commitment to improving equality and diversity in practice. The quality and detail of students' plans also supports this commitment. Students receive an individual service in the school which is designed to meet their personal needs. All staff have an in-depth knowledge of the students they are working with ensuring their needs are consistently met. Staff work in partnership with parents and carers to ensure a high quality service where the ethos is centred around meeting the individual needs and aspirations of students.

The school ensures the quality of care through continuous monitoring and evaluation of the service. The school is visited regularly by an independent visitor and the governor responsible for residence. All records are signed by the headteacher every half term. The headteacher and head of care meet daily to ensure the quality of care for students. The annual development plan sets out the way in which the school wants to develop and how this will be achieved. A parent said: 'My daughter loves this school and everything about it. I cannot praise it enough.'

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):

- obtain and retain on file for each child, prior written permission from a person or body with parental responsibility for that child, for the administration of first aid (NMS 14.10)
- ensure the school's system for recruiting staff who will work with children in the school includes direct contact by the school with each referee to verify the reference which is verifiable in recruitment records held at the school (NMS 27.2)
- ensure residential and teaching staff work together to identify means of encouraging each child's personal, social and educational development in their work with the child. (NMS 12.6)