

St Mary's School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Angela Gunning / Liz Daniels
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Address	St. Marys School Maynards Green HEATHFIELD East Sussex TN21 0BT
Telephone number	01435 812278
Email	office@stmarys-horam.e-sussex.sch.uk
Registered person	St Mary's School
Head of care	Frank Stanford
Head / Principal	Simone Hopkins
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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 Mary's School is a residential special school that is part of a federation with another residential special school, both of which are maintained by East Sussex County Council. St Mary's School offers a 24 hour curriculum for boys between the ages of nine and 16 who have a educational statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The school and residential accommodation are on one site situated in grounds between Heathfield and Horam in East Sussex. Residential accommodation is now situated within the main school building. The residential provision in the main building was redesigned and refurbished in 2007 to an excellent standard. The school is a weekly boarding establishment, with flexible boarding provision for up to 20 places.

The care team consists of 10 staff who have clear roles and responsibilities within a successful disseminated leadership structure. The team are led by a highly effective senior leadership team. The young people are provided with an extensive range of sports and activities during the school day, after school, and over the school holidays.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection and included a two day visit to the school in February 2010.

The inspection looked at outcomes for the key national minimum standards for children and young people who are educated in residential special schools. The visit provided the opportunity to meet with a wide range of people, such as the senior leadership team, care staff, the school improvement partner, governors and parents.

The inspectors met with some of the boys to hear their views, who spoke positively and enthusiastically about the school. In addition, 15 young people's surveys were completed and 15 surveys were returned from parents and adults. The feedback was extremely positive and praised the school for the progress made in improving and also the dedication and commitment shown to the education and care of the young people.

St Mary's has made significant changes and improvements and much has been achieved. This inspection found that the school is providing exceptional high quality care provision for the young people. There is an excellent standard of residential accommodation and the boys respect and are proud of the residential accommodation.

The school is fully embracing a 24 hour curriculum whereby the care staff support each young person's individual learning needs and encourage their personal, social and educational development. There is a dedicated and committed staff team, who know the young people very well and are extremely proactive in supporting them on an individual basis. There are many opportunities in place for the young people to share their views and these are valued by staff.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

St Mary's School has been extremely proactive in addressing all the shortfalls that were identified during the previous inspection. The school was asked to update its Statement of Purpose. St Mary's has developed and implemented a comprehensive and up-to-date Statement of Purpose that clearly outlines the function of the school, the range of pupil needs it caters for and how these needs will be met. The school was asked to improve health and medication arrangements. Health care plans have now been implemented for all the young people. The management of medication has greatly improved to ensure the young people's medication needs are managed well.

The school was asked to make improvements to keep the young people and staff safe from fire. There is now effective management of fire safety so that the safety and welfare of the young people and staff are protected. It was also asked that some aspects of monitoring be improved. The senior leadership team ensure daily that the record of physical interventions is signed by a senior staff member to demonstrate that each incident is being monitored. There is now a named governor for the residential aspect of the school, who carries out monitoring visits, writes reports and gives feedback to the governing body.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The boys' physical, psychological and emotional health needs are met very well at St Mary's School. The school has recently been awarded the healthy schools silver award status, which is proudly displayed in the school entrance. There is a multi-professional approach to ensure the boys' health needs are met. Staff liaise effectively with a range of people such as an educational psychologist, a child and adolescent mental health service nurse, an education welfare officer, the school nurse, the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder team and the speech and language team. One healthcare professional reported that, 'the emotional health of all the young people is of paramount importance to the staff'.

St Mary's School is committed to health education and the promotion of the boys' good health. There is a well coordinated personal, social and health education programme (PSHE). PSHE is part of the curriculum and is well supported by the school nurse and care staff. The school nurse reported that, 'the boys are encouraged to explore their experiences and views in PSHE; the lessons are focused around their needs and promote discussion'. The young people are positively encouraged to seek advice on health matters and the school nurse offers a drop-in session each week. The school actively promotes the importance of physical health and fitness by offering an extensive range of sports and activities during the day, after school and over the school holidays.

Health care plans have been implemented for all the young people. The physical, emotional, and mental health needs of each young person are clearly identified. These documents are being developed to detail the specific care for some needs identified. Care staff are being extremely proactive in seeking the necessary information. The management of medication has greatly improved to ensure the young people's medication needs are managed well. The school now has a lead person who is responsible for all medication, first aid and healthcare plans. There are clear guidelines for the safe storage, administration and handling of medication, including controlled drugs. Staff receive training in healthcare planning, and medication policy and procedures.

The boys continue to receive good quality catering provision at St Mary's School, with healthy and varied meals that meet their dietary needs and choices. There are nutritious meals and varied menus provided at lunch and dinner time. Special diets are catered for well, such as religious needs, allergies or food intolerance such as celiac. The young people confirm the school provides a balanced diet. They say, 'the meals are very healthy', 'we have a hot meal with seconds, then we have healthy yoghurt or fruit', 'fruit we can have whenever', 'they give us a choice of dinner and every day a different dinner', and 'they are always nice and you get a choice'. The school actively promotes cultural diversity awareness. The residential facility regularly has nights specialising in culturally different food and the school dining room holds themed days. The catering team are proactive in seeking the views of the boys and listen to and implement their wishes where possible. Mealtimes are happy, well organised and sociable occasions. The boys confirm they enjoy the food and the mealtimes at St Mary's.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

St Mary's School has very effective health and safety policies and procedures to ensure the young people's safety and welfare are fully protected. The school recently underwent a health and safety audit by the county council and was perceived to be an example of very good practice across the county. Comprehensive risk assessments have been developed for various aspects of health and safety. Detailed risk assessments are undertaken for all trips and approved by a member of the senior management team. All premises and the general site have risk assessments. All safety checks, such as electricity, gas and water are carried out as required.

There is effective management of fire safety so that the safety and welfare of the young people are protected. Fire evacuation drills are carried out from the residential facilities and the boys confirm they know the fire evacuation procedures. Records show that most of the boys who stay over night have been involved in a fire drill recently. The school has good arrangements to ensure any unauthorised absence is well managed. There are good procedures in place for each young person should they go missing from school.

The school has good measures in place to respect the boys' confidentiality and privacy. All staff are made aware of the school's policy on respecting confidentiality and privacy and are sensitive to gender, religious and cultural needs. Records kept about each young person are stored securely and in line with the procedures adopted by the school. The bedrooms in the residential facility have lockable doors and all bathrooms have locks. The boys confirm their privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled.

There is an extremely effective whole school approach to behaviour management that ensures the school is effective in helping the boys with their emotional and behavioural development. Each young person has detailed behaviour management strategies in place and they are actively involved in setting their behaviour targets. Progress made on each young person's behaviour targets is monitored and analysed to ensure the school is effective in helping the boys with their emotional and behavioural development. Staff are appropriately trained in behaviour management, including physical intervention. Staff know the young people very well and behaviour is very well managed. One governor reported that, 'behaviour is managed exceptionally well, the staff have been trained appropriately and they implement this well'. There is effective communication about the boys' behaviour during the day and evening. The senior leadership team ensure daily that the record of physical interventions is signed by a senior staff member

to demonstrate that each incident is being monitored. This is now standard procedure and part of the senior leadership team daily briefing. Staff are very good at helping the boys to develop their self-knowledge, their self-esteem and self-confidence. Mutual respect and consideration of others is promoted very well.

There is a clear and robust complaints policy and procedure that is made available to the young people and their relatives or representatives. The school have produced a young person's booklet to guide the boys in seeking help if they are worried or upset about life at school or want to make a complaint. A complaint form is available on the intranet or from staff, who will help fill it in with the young person. The boys confirm they feel able to raise their concerns and are confident that they will be listened to. One young person said, 'when you have a problem with someone, we can talk to staff and they help sort it out'. Staff also feel that, 'the boys are listened to and all are aware of who to talk to about issues or concerns they may have'.

St Mary's School has very good measures in place to ensure the young people are safeguarded. There is an effective child protection policy and a designated child protection officer who liaises effectively with external agencies. Child protection guidance and training is provided to all staff. Bullying is rare at St Mary's School and there are good systems to counter bullying and deal with it effectively if it does occur. The school's policy on anti-bullying was developed from feedback from the student council. The policy is in an accessible format for the young people and they are fully aware of the school's anti-bullying policy and framework. Where it does occur they feel that staff step in and help to resolve the situation.

Records indicate that there are robust recruitment procedures in place to fully safeguard the young people. The young people are monitored in a safe and secure setting. All visitors to the school are required to sign the visitors' book and display a badge.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The young people's education is promoted extremely well. There is a very effective whole school approach to learning. The school is fully embracing a 24 hour curriculum whereby the care staff support each young person's individual learning needs and encourage their personal, social and educational development. The residential provision clearly supports the young people in their learning, it enables and encourages attendance at school and supports their educational achievement. There are excellent communication arrangements between academic and care staff. Each morning all staff are informed of any information which will assist in supporting the young people during school time.

The school has recently implemented a social and emotional aspects of learning programme across the school. There is a designated coordinator who has developed a whole school approach to working with the young people on a range of issues, such as empathy and consequences. Care staff are familiar with the educational needs and progress of the boys. They contribute to the annual review of their statement of educational need and participate where necessary in the implementation of the boys' individual education plan. The young people are fully involved in setting their academic targets, with help from teaching and care staff. Progress made on each young person's academic targets is monitored and analysed to ensure the school is effective in supporting the boys to achieve to the best of their ability.

The arrangements that have been implemented to provide the boys with a wide range of activities are excellent and are a strength of the school. There is an extensive range of sports and activities during the school day, after school and over the school holidays. The extended day provision enables the boys to take part in a range of activities such as football, basketball, swimming, fishing, rock climbing, trampolining, art and golf. The boys spoken with said they 'really like the activities', 'they're brilliant'. During the school holidays the boys are given the opportunity to experience other sports, such as surfing. The school has recently implemented out of school holiday activities, which are being operated across the federation.

The school recently organised a group holiday abroad and this was the first time many of the boys have been abroad. Care staff were also involved in planning a successful sailing trip for the young people on a 'Tall Ship' to Holland. The school is also now running a Duke of Edinburgh (D of E) scheme and is a recognised and approved centre. Staff are working in partnership with the local youth club on the scheme and have very close links with the D of E external assessor. There are currently nine boys who are registered for the bronze D of E award and four others who are doing the D of E at the local youth centre.

There are excellent arrangements in place to support the young people on an individual basis. Staff know the boys very well and they are given excellent individual support. One boy said, 'I think this school is brilliant and it's the best school I have ever been to, I think the staff are helpful and support us when we need help'. The staff are proactive in enabling the young people to access an extensive range of specialist external services when required, for example, the child and adolescent mental health services, the attention deficit hyperactivity disorder team, educational psychologist, speech and language specialist and a substance misuse advisor. Advocacy services are also made readily available to the young people should they need it. One parent said, 'our son loves staying over night at the school, the people really care about him and this puts our mind at rest'. Another boy said, 'I am very grateful for having been given a second chance and I can get on with some people better at St Mary's School and I'm grateful to staff and everyone else'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

St Mary's School has effective systems in place for the boys to communicate their views and make suggestions, choices and decisions. The residential provision was moved to the main body of the school following a specific request from the young people. The D of E scheme is operational in the school due to requests from the student voice. There are many opportunities in place for the young people to share their views and these are valued by staff. The boys confirm they feel listened to. Residents' meetings are held regularly with agenda items and feedback of previously discussed actions. The school council is an effective voice for the young people. The school council asked if water dispensers could be placed around the school and this request has been implemented. The school council has also influenced what goods are for sale in the weekly tuck shop. It is clear that the young people's views are listened to and considered as a contribution to the development of the school.

There are excellent procedures in place to ensure that the young people join and leave St Mary's in a planned and sensitive manner. An up-to-date admissions policy and procedure is in place and a very clear admissions framework has been implemented. There is very good partnership working with parents, the special educational coordinator, inclusion officer, special educational

needs case worker for East Sussex County Council, teachers and care staff. Each young person's admission plan is individualised based on needs and circumstances. The school has a transition programme for Year 6 children moving into Year 7 at St Mary's School. There are also pathway plans produced for Year 10 and 11 who will move into post-16 provision. The school also tracks and monitors the status of the young people for a few years after they have left St Mary's. In some cases the school support the boys in their post-16 provision.

There is appropriate support given to the young people to have contact with their family and friends. All of the young people are flexi-boarders and only stay at the school for part of the week. The young people have their own mobile phones and the residential facility has telephones the boys can use.

The school is making positive efforts to implement an effective care planning system. It is a credit to staff that all the young people in the school have a care plan. However, it is not clear that all assessed needs feed into the care planning process. There are some links and broad objectives, although not all the young people's care/health plans outline the specific care for all identified needs. It is acknowledged that a positive plan is in place to develop and improve the care planning system.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

St Mary's School provides an excellent standard of residential accommodation. Following discussion with the young people, care staff, senior leadership team and governors it was decided that all the residential provision would be in the main body of the school. The residential provision in the main building was redesigned and refurbished in 2007. The refurbishment of the residential provision is excellent. The young people were actively consulted during this process.

The residential facilities are decorated, furnished and maintained to a very high standard. There are pleasant and comfortable good communal areas, including a living room, an entertainment room and a dining room. All bedrooms are either single or double occupancy. The bedrooms have the required furniture and fittings, including lockable facilities for safe storage of personal possessions. The boys respect and are proud of the residential accommodation. They are encouraged to make their bedroom personal to them, for example by choosing a picture to go on the wall. There are sufficient numbers of showers, toilets and wash-hand basins for the young people.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

St Mary's School has developed and implemented a comprehensive and up-to-date Statement of Purpose that clearly outlines the function of the school, the range of pupil needs it caters for and how these needs will be met. The Statement of Purpose also describes the ethos, philosophy and practice of the school. This ensures that young people, their parents and representatives are fully informed of the school's care principles and practice.

The school has many good systems in place to monitor various aspects of care. There is now a named governor for the residential aspect of the school, who carries out monitoring visits (some of which will be unannounced), writes reports and gives feedback to the governing body. The

senior leadership team hold a meeting each morning to monitor various aspects of care. The head of care and deputy head of care also monitor various records, such as accidents, child protection, complaints and use of physical interventions. However, all records that are required to be monitored as stipulated by the national minimum standards are not currently signed to confirm that they are included in the school's monitoring systems.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. St Mary's has an equality scheme action plan to ensure that all aspects of race equality, disability and gender equality are addressed effectively throughout the school. Equality and diversity was audited by East Sussex County Council in November 2008, who were 'reassured to see how seriously St Mary's takes the issues of equality and inclusion'. Equality and diversity is implicit within the ethos, culture and practice of the school and prominent in the school's policies and procedures. There are good numbers of staff available for the supervision of the young people and the activities they are involved in. Staff ratio has increased now that all the residential provision is in the main body of the school. The boys confirm there are satisfactory numbers of staff to provide the activities they want to be involved in. The school has a dedicated and committed staff team and staff morale is high. There have been some long-term absences recently which has impacted on the care team but this has been well managed.

The school has a competent care staff team who are skilled in caring appropriately for the young people. There are good training opportunities made available for care staff. There are still less than 80% of staff who are trained to the National Vocational Qualification at level 3. However, the efforts the school has made is acknowledged and it is recognised that the issue with the training providers has meant a delay in meeting this shortfall. Staff are supported very well. Formalised supervision arrangements have been implemented, although it is acknowledged that not all staff have received this as regularly as they should due to some staff absence. However, informal supervision and support is ongoing.

All staff have clear roles and responsibilities within a successful disseminated leadership structure. The school has implemented an annual performance management system and there are good training opportunities available to staff. People spoken with during the inspection were full of praise for the staff team and the leadership of the school. One person spoken with said, 'I have never seen a group of people work so well and care so much about the young people'. Another person said, 'the dedication and commitment from the staff is amazing, they genuinely want to help the boys; they take away problems and turn them into a positive'. Another person said, 'I am totally and utterly impressed with the senior leadership team leadership and their capacity to empower and lead people'.

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):

- ensure each young person's care/health plan outlines the specific care for all identified needs (breach of national minimum standard 17.1)
- sign all records that are required to be monitored as stipulated in national minimum standard 32.2 to confirm that they are included in the school's monitoring systems (breach of national minimum standard 32.2)
- ensure 80% of care staff are trained in the National Vocational Qualification at level 3. (breach of national minimum standard 31.4)