

St Mary's School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

Unique reference number	SC050392
Inspection date	28/03/2011
Inspector	Sophie Wood
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	St. Marys School, Maynards Green, HEATHFIELD, East Sussex, TN21 0BT
Telephone number	01435 812278
Email	office@st-marys-horam.e-sussex.sch.uk
Registered person	St Mary's School
Head/ Principal	Simon Thorpe
Nominated person	Annabel Hodge
Date of last inspection	03/02/2010

© Crown copyright 2011

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 specialist 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 situated within the main school building. The residential provision in the main building was redesigned and refurbished in 2007. The school is a weekly boarding establishment, with flexible boarding provision for up to 12 places. The pupils are provided with a range of sports and activities during the school day, after school, and during the school holidays.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This short notice inspection looked at all of the key standards and also explored the three recommendations made from the previous visit. The findings with regards to the latter are positive and further explained within the main body of this report.

Pupils actively participated with this process, as did a number of parents. Pupils thrive in this school. They are valued as unique individuals and they benefit from the dynamic approaches of a committed and motivated senior leadership team, which is effectively supported by an innovative governing body.

Outcomes across all key areas are outstanding; multi-agency working is effectively promoted and achieved, in the best interests of the pupils. Two recommendations are made with regards to health information and monitoring processes. Both are explained within the main body of this report and were already anticipated by the school.

Improvements since the last inspection

Three recommendations were made from the previous inspection visit of 3 February 2010. These were concerned with health plans, monitoring records and staff training; specifically, National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) for the residential team.

The school has worked hard to address these shortfalls. Health care plans hold better details and only a small number remain with omissions. Monitoring processes are

clearer; however, some aspects continue to be more robustly monitored than others and residential staff members have either completed, or are on course to complete the required NVQ training.

Pupils receive an improved service as a direct result. The senior leadership team and governing body responds very positively to external critiques and demonstrates a clear desire to improve services for the benefit of the pupils.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils enjoy excellent outcomes with regards to their general and specific health needs. The school effectively liaises with external agencies, in a combined effort to secure appropriate input from a variety of health professionals.

Pupils swiftly receive direct input from nursing, psychology and counselling services, because such referrals are quickly made and the school enjoys very positive relationships with these providers. There is a very real and tangible sense of multi-agency working, which serves to provide the pupils with a needs-led service. Regular visitors include the county school nurse and substance misuse case worker; both provide an invaluable, educative service for the staff team, as well as the pupils.

Health care plans are usually detailed and informative; however, a small number contain omissions with regards to specific and individual interventions. In the main, care staff know the immediate and important issues, they are also provided with relevant and appropriate training; hence, the vast majority of pupils receive the support they need. Health records are secure; details are only shared with those who need to know and medication administration records show no current errors. The individual responsible for the maintenance of such records and information continues to implement secure monitoring safeguards in a continued attempt to secure that pupils receive an optimum service.

A separate room within the boarding provision is dedicated to holding first aid, medical equipment and health care records. Security and confidentiality is assured. Care staff, and other staff members throughout the school are reliably informed about specific health concerns, including the emotional and mental health needs of those in their care. This is a school which is very concerned with meeting the very holistic health needs of its pupils.

Training needs for staff members encompasses core subjects, including medication administration, first aid, epilepsy awareness and food hygiene. Specific and individual health needs of pupils are swiftly highlighted, with appropriate training and guidance provided, in the best interests of those concerned. Staff members say, 'whenever I have highlighted a training need, it has been met'. Pupils say, 'I am always looked after when I'm ill' and 'the staff here give me the help I need'.

Surveys and individual interviews with regards to food provision receives

exceptionally positive feedback from pupils, including, 'it's great' and 'I love the food'. Mealtimes are observed to be pleasant and sociable. Special dietary requirements are well known and effectively catered for. The school strikes an excellent balance in terms of providing healthy and nutritious options, alongside appropriate treats and favourites.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Policy guidance with regards to privacy and confidentiality is implemented in practice by the staff team. Pupils appreciate this. Records are securely stored and sensitive information is only shared with those needing to know. Pupils confirm the very good practice of staff in terms of knocking on their bedroom doors and respecting their needs to sometimes be alone. The physical premises provides good privacy, in terms of single bedrooms, lockable storage space and excellent washing and bathing facilities.

Pupils are very familiar with internal and external complaints procedures. These are effectively promoted and explained on a regular basis. Pupils say they do not need to utilise formal measures because informal resolution works. This view is further corroborated by parents. Comments from pupils include, 'you just say if there's a problem and it is sorted out'. Parents say, 'the school is very quick to respond to any concern or issue I may have. I have complete faith in all of the staff'. Although the school has not received a formal complaint for some time, it continues to remind all stakeholders of the processes; demonstrative of excellent pro-active practice.

Pupils are effectively safeguarded and protected. Clear lines of accountability and responsibility sit with key school personnel and designated governors. Policy guidance is explicitly clear; it is effectively implemented in practice and staff across all disciplines demonstrate an excellent understanding. The school enjoys open and positive relationships with placing social workers and the local authority. Child protection concerns and referrals are swiftly made, in the very best interests of protecting pupils. Appropriate training is delivered and refreshed at regular intervals; this becomes appropriately more detailed and intensive dependent upon the role and responsibility of the staff member concerned.

Staff remain acutely aware of the potential for bullying occurrences to materialise without notice or pattern. To this end, staff are vigilant in looking for signs and symptoms. Pupils confirm that incidents do sometimes occur; however, they also report that such incidents are swiftly and expediently dealt with. Pupils know that the school does not condone such behaviour and this message is effectively delivered through an educative approach, using assemblies, clear policies and project work. Key personnel are able to readily identify potential and current perpetrators and victims; hence, excellent management systems are being implemented.

The school works openly and transparently with external professional agencies, seeking appropriate advice, guidance and where appropriate, intervention in the best

interests of the pupils. Referrals to the local authority are prompt, as are notifications to Ofsted, when these are necessary. Examples of pupil absence is rare, although well managed when it does occur.

The whole school approach with regards to behaviour management is effective. Policies and guidance are more concerned with rewarding positive conduct and pupils eagerly respond to this. Policies accurately describe the rules and systems within the school, because these are concise and clear. Pupils understand what is expected of them; hence, the chances of success are increased. Excellent lines of communication across the teaching and residential provision ensures staff are aware of daily concerns and issues; pupils benefit from a consistent approach as a result. Whole school training includes the use of physical restraint techniques and every pupil has their own clear behaviour management plan. Clear recording mechanisms with regards to the use of physical interventions and sanctions are scrutinised on a daily basis by senior staff. The governing body also effectively monitors behaviour management.

The conduct of the pupils during this inspection was observed to be outstanding. They were very eager to contribute throughout and they are very proud of their school. Staff across all disciplines are described by pupils as 'supportive, sometimes strict and caring'. The school's own 'Turnaround Centre' is referred to very positively by the pupils. This area is staffed throughout the day and individuals can go here during particular times of stress and difficulty. The school is very good at helping pupils to recognise their own difficulties and to adopt positive coping skills. Staff practice is pro-active.

Robust health and safety practice serves to provide a safe and secure physical environment. Risk assessments concerning the whole site are in excellent order; these are clear and subject to regular review. Routine checks and the servicing of equipment is all up to date. Pupils are fully conversant with the fire evacuation procedure. This is regularly practised at different times of the day and evening.

Pupils are looked after by a safe and stable staff group. Recruitment checks are thorough and the school is appropriately challenging and checking the advice it receives from its human resources department, based on historical recruitment guidance. This aspect receives less monitoring, when compared to other areas; hence, there is a risk of minor omissions going unnoticed. A very clear policy with regards to visitors is implemented in practice. Pupils are protected. Visitors do not have unsupervised access to buildings or pupils; their time on the site is effectively monitored.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils are effectively enabled to achieve at school because of the seamless approach delivered by teaching and residential teams. Excellent lines of communication promotes consistent working and pupils receive a holistic approach. The residential

provision offers a nurturing and safe environment, in line with good parenting. Pupils receive clear and consistent boundaries, wholesome food, an abundance of activities and an appropriate bed time. They are given every possible opportunity to start their school day on a positive note.

Excellent care planning processes add further value. The residential team is fully aware of each pupil's educational plans and targets. Homework is suitably assisted and the life skills practised by the pupils during residential time reflect, wherever possible, the subjects and areas they are learning about in school. Mutual respect between colleagues ensures that all staff roles are equally valued and the team, as a whole, is focused and dedicated to providing the best possible outcomes for the pupils.

The provision of meaningful and appropriate activities receives enthusiastic feedback from the pupils. Access to the whole school site is provided during residential time; hence, pupils can use the grounds, equipment and school resources. The Duke of Edinburgh Award is very popular and staff are commended for their efforts to ensure the smooth running of this scheme. The school is very concerned with establishing positive links with its local community. Pupils join local clubs and utilise community resources, such as the cinema and swimming baths.

The residential provision provides televisions, a games room, music systems, DVD's, books and computers. Pupils actively contribute to the activity programme. This term, horse riding and kick boxing are proving to be popular choices. Pupils say, 'the activities are the best bit' and 'I get to do things I wouldn't usually be able to'. The school embraces challenge and appropriate risk taking, in the interests of giving pupils opportunities to engage in new experiences, such as rock climbing and adventure sports. Mistakes and issues sometimes occur but the school takes appropriate steps to minimise risks and hazards, thus enabling pupils to effectively learn valuable life lessons from such experiences.

The individual support provided for pupils is a particular strength of the provision. Every pupil has an allocated group of staff, representative of teaching and residential teams. Hence, individual support needs are very well known and provided for. Such staff are given plenty of time to meet and communicate with each other; again, this leads to consistent working practices. Excellent liaison with external agencies, including health and social care colleagues, ensures that individual pupils receive the support and guidance they need. They are thriving as a direct result.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Consultation processes are meaningful and engaging. Pupils wax lyrical about their forums, including the student council and regular residential meetings. They say, 'we are really listened to' and 'when we ask for sensible things, it usually happens'. Representatives frequently ask to be re-elected because they believe such forums

achieve positive results. A number of members say they would like such meetings to occur more often because they really value them.

Parents offer similar views. Quotes include, 'the school regularly asks for our feedback' and 'we recently had a survey asking for our views about the boarding provision'. Clear evidence from records and feedback demonstrates how the residential provision continues to adapt and change as a direct result of such consultation processes. Hence, all stakeholders are important and empowered.

Thorough assessment processes ensure that the needs of prospective pupils are well known and researched. Effective care planning occurs as a direct consequence. Ongoing reviews of progress happen on a daily and weekly basis; hence, issues and concerns are swiftly identified and remedied, as are areas of achievement, leading to appropriate celebration.

Pupils confirm that they can readily contact their family members when staying overnight. The majority have their own mobiles, all have school email accounts and a direct line within the quiet room is readily accessible. The latter has been introduced following feedback from the pupils, who stated that a payphone was not what they wanted.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils are observed to immediately change into their own clothing as soon as the school day ends. They are ready and excited to commence with their afternoon and evening. Personal possessions, including pocket money is suitably safeguarded and no negative reports are made. Pupils are enabled to obtain the personal requisites they need during their overnight stays; no difficulties are encountered due to their economic or social backgrounds.

The life skills programme continues to be developed and improved. Pupils receive many opportunities to grow and develop, in terms of their chronological age and their particular personal circumstances. Vocational courses are highly valued by the pupils and the skills they need are clearly reflected by the opportunities provided within the residential provision. Positive outcomes are achieved but staff remain frustrated that pupils leave the school at age 16; they believe much more positive progress could be made by the pupils remaining within a 16+ provision. This view is further endorsed by parents and carers.

The school provides an outstanding residential provision. Every room is furnished and decorated to an exceptionally high standard which is fully appreciated by the pupils. Furniture and fittings are of outstanding quality. Pupils are respectful of their environment, which is cleaned and maintained to a very high standard. Pupils feel valued because of the quality of their surroundings, including single bedrooms and modern facilities.

Bedrooms are personalised and art work completed by the pupils is proudly displayed throughout all communal areas. Pupils confirm that they were consulted about these changes and they have a very real sense of ownership, as a direct result of such consultation. The entire provision is comfortable and homely. Pupils enjoy, and benefit from, the quality, security and privacy that their accommodation provides.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school provides clear and explicit literature about the services it provides to all of its stakeholders. An abundance of information includes an up-to-date website, colourful brochures, regular newsletters and an excellent televised site, which plays all day long for the pupils.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school's equality scheme action plan is engaging and enabling. Diversity is warmly welcomed and celebrated. Individual pupils benefit from a sensitive and informed approach to understanding their backgrounds, based upon culture, ethnicity and racial origin. The school works extremely hard to carefully research such aspects and positively engages pupils and parents to contribute to its practice.

Staff members receive excellent training and supervision opportunities in an attempt to ensure that they provide pupils with the very best possible standards of care. Mandatory training courses include, first aid, child protection, food hygiene, medication administration, health and safety, fire awareness and Team Teach restraint training. Such training remains up to date and is suitably refreshed at regular intervals. All residential staff members have completed, or are on course to commence or complete the required NVQ training, in accordance with their current roles and responsibilities.

Staff members say, 'I feel confident that I can always ask for the training I need' and 'the opportunities for my continued professional development includes NVQ training, as well as individual specific courses associated with my role'.

Very recent and current needs within the county have led to key personnel being seconded to other schools and projects within the local area. Hence, acting up opportunities have been created within this current school. Individuals have seized this opportunity as a positive career opportunity, because they are receiving appropriate support, supervision and guidance to grow and develop themselves. The school actively seeks to promote career opportunities from within; hence pupils benefit from an excellent long standing record of the length of service of key staff members.

Every residential staff team member possesses clear individual responsibilities, as well as the generic ones associated with their roles. Lead responsibilities include transport, health, medication and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Hence, such individuals retain clear and accountable responsibilities, which are routinely

monitored throughout supervision, training and appraisal processes.

The governing body is creative, active and visionary. The welfare and positive development of the pupils is of paramount importance to this group. Relevant sub-committees explore relevant areas in a robust manner, albeit, some areas currently receive better monitoring than others. The chair is mindful of this deficit and seeks to explore additional resources to address this shortfall. Additional county monitoring systems, in terms of health and safety representatives and the school improvement partner also bring added value with regards to external and unbiased monitoring findings.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- ensure health care records contain all of the information required, with particular regards to individual health care needs (NMS 17)
- ensure that all of the areas outlined under NMS 32 and NMS 33 are robustly monitored. (NMS 32 and NMS 33)