

St Vincents School for the Blind

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Julia Toller
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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 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 Vincent's school for blind and partially sighted children is a registered charity governed by the Board of Trustees of the Catholic Blind Institute. St Vincent's has specialist school status and offers a curriculum for children with all levels of visual impairment, as well as additional needs, from many parts of England.

The school is located in a residential area with the accommodation being split into two separate groups. It is near to bus stops, leisure centres, shops and other schools.

During this visit a number of pupils were spoken with and all those staying at the school participated with the inspection process.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

At this unannounced full inspection, all key standards were inspected. This is an outstanding service overall.

Young people benefit from positive relationships with staff, they are afforded an excellent range of facilities and opportunities to encourage and support a healthy lifestyle, to develop their life skills and to reach good outcomes from education. Great emphasis is placed on the 24 hour curriculum at the school and this is used to achieve excellent outcomes for young people.

Staff at the school are highly motivated and professional, they benefit from an excellent range of training and support. They work well with other professionals to meet the complex and holistic needs of young people in areas such as education, and emotional and physical well-being.

Improvements since the last inspection

One recommendation was raised at the last inspection regarding emergency lighting checks. These are now fully recorded and show that appropriate checks are being completed to keep young people safe.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school promotes healthy living through the promotion of healthy eating, the 'be healthy' club, exercise, education, nutrition and discussion. The school employs a

health coordinator who has a responsibility for over seeing the individual health needs of all pupils, and making sure that all identified needs are met.

Health plans fully identify the physical and emotional health needs of young people. Records of medical appointments and key working sessions show that particular health needs are addressed by accessing other services. These include speech and language therapy, mobility training and educational psychologists. This means young people are receiving expert support helping them lead a healthy lifestyle, and to educate them and inform them of ways to stay healthy both now and for their future.

Young people are aware of the choices they make with regard to health, diet and exercise, and the impact this will have on their health. Many young people attend the 'be healthy' club each week where issues such as healthy eating, care of teeth and exercise are discussed. This means young people have opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge around identifying appropriate foods and maintaining a healthy diet.

Staff have varied and imaginative ways of supporting young people to become independent and learn new skills, such as cooking, shopping and budgeting. Young people say they enjoy preparing for independent life and look forward to their next lesson.

Staff have attended medication training and their skills and knowledge are assessed by the health care coordinator. The school also has an appropriate medication policy, which staff are aware of and understand. The school's health care records provide excellent details regarding the management of medicines taken by young people, stating how and when they are to be given, noting any side effects that staff must be mindful of. Improvements have been to the transportation of medication. Therefore, staff are fully aware of the impact that medicines may have and how best to support young people and monitor their welfare.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff ensure that young people feel valued and that their privacy and dignity is maintained at all times. Individualised, descriptive care plans clearly outline the assistance young people require to maximise their independence and the level of staff support required.

Recording in care plans have improved further since the last inspection with increased uniformity across houses to ensure a more consistent approach to the care of young people.

There is a fully accessible complaints procedure. Young people are able to make complaints. Issues raised are given the highest regard and acted upon without delay. Young people also feel more than able to raise informal issues with staff and one

said, 'Staff are more than fair.' Young people are confident that appropriate action is taken, but are encouraged to find solutions to concerns themselves where appropriate. In addition, the head of care and safeguarding coordinator monitor records of complaints and issues raised in the 'comments box'; analysing the information to improve standards within the school.

Young people say they feel safe and secure living at the school. They are fully involved in the development of all care records, such as health plans, placement plans and risk assessments. Staff have a clear and comprehensive understanding of individual needs and risks. Staff utilise their skills well to ascertain opinions and feelings with regard to the way in which support is provided to keep them safe. Although records are extensive and explain in detail how the school keeps young people safe in line with their assessed needs in areas such as mobility, risk assessments do not always identify potential bullying issues when first identified.

The school has excellent procedures for safeguarding children, including a safeguarding officer who is responsible for coordinating staff training, updating policies and procedures and dealing with any concerns if they arise. All staff attend appropriate safeguarding training and they are able to demonstrate that they understand the importance of their role in making sure that young people are safe.

The school's procedures for promoting positive behaviours show a clear and professional commitment to developing individual and supportive strategies. For example, records fully demonstrate that staff have an excellent understanding of the diverse needs of young people and are consistent in their approach. Staff support young people to address behaviours and enjoy positive relationships with others. This is also achieved by employing systems and proactive practices which value and include young people, while improving their self confidence and allowing them to flourish within the school setting.

The overall standard of behaviour of the boarders at the school is excellent. The procedures for promoting positive behaviours show a clear and professional commitment to developing individual, specific and supportive strategies for managing behaviour. Records demonstrate that staff have an excellent understanding of each individual and are consistent and respectful in their approach.

The school is safe and effectively monitored and managed. Fire safety checks are carried out at the required intervals in line with guidance from the fire officer. The senior management team at the school ensure that regular and ongoing evaluations of the service take place. This means that young people are afforded the best possible care and support, in an environment that is assessed as safe and meets their needs fully. The school also has detailed environmental and fire risk assessments and all necessary checks, such as gas and electric certificates are in place.

The vetting of staff and visitors is robust and thorough to make sure young people are protected. The school carries out recruitment checks, including the verification of written references before staff start work. This helps to safeguard young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school has attained and maintained specialist school status for blind and partially sighted children. This is an outstanding achievement for the staff and pupils of the school, and shows that they provide a high standard of education and care.

Young people are afforded a comprehensive and highly organised education provision that supports them well and meets their educational, physical and sensory needs fully. Young people are provided with excellent opportunities to complete homework and course work. They have access to a wide range of resources to help with their studies, such as computers, specialised equipment and trained staff.

The school provides excellent support to young people. Key workers do well to identify the individual needs of children. Staff work consistently with young people, teaching staff and their families to make sure that young people enjoy their stay. They also make sure that their individual needs are met and that they reach their potential in life.

Some young people have additional needs, such as physical disabilities, learning disabilities and medical needs. The school is able to meet such needs through rigorous systems such as health assessments, risk assessment, specialist training and care planning. This ensures that staff monitor and review individual needs and seek relevant training and professional support to provide individualised care and effective support.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are encouraged and supported to have a say in the planning of their care and what happens in the groups during their stay. This is achieved by regular group meetings and key working sessions. Young people are very well supported. This enables them to communicate their wishes and feelings effectively, and to influence decisions made with regard to their day-to-day living and their future. A representative on the school council puts forward the views of young people living in the residential provision. This helps to ensure that the residential aspect of the school is promoted and that the views of these young people are heard.

Placement plans provide accurate, up to date and comprehensive information about the education, care and support provided to each child. Young people are encouraged and supported to attain positive outcomes and achieve personal goals through good care planning processes. Staff are consistent in their approach and young people feel valued and well supported by the school.

Systems are in place to make sure that children are encouraged and able to maintain

contact with friends and family while staying at the school, this includes email, letters and access to a private telephone. Most young people say they like to use their mobiles or that their family 'ring in' to speak to them.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people who attend the school have independent living plans, which are considered to be an important part of the school curriculum. They aim to encourage and develop independence skills and mobility. Young people are supported to move on from the school in a planned and positive manner. This is achieved by careful planning and forging links with other agencies such as Connexions and further education colleges.

There are currently two residential groups, which are maintained to a very good standard. Young people have ample space to socialise and the groups are homely and welcoming. Each unit is well equipped with specialist resources to help young people participate in the day-to-day running of the groups, including Braille instructions and aids to help young people access television and radio. Staff show an excellent understanding of the needs of young people who are blind and partially sighted, and each group is set out in a way that allows young people to feel safe, through familiarity of their surroundings.

Young people have their own rooms, which they are encouraged to decorate and personalise during their stays. Rooms are all decorated, maintained and furnished to a high standard. Young people are encouraged to keep their rooms tidy and free from clutter.

The exterior of the school is also in good order. Gardens have flowerbeds and established borders. Young people have ample space to play including a football pitch and a range of play and climbing frames.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Individuals' rights are respected and promoted. Young people benefit from a service that is able to meet their holistic and diverse needs. Staff demonstrate a professional approach to ensuring that young people feel valued and listened to.

Formal consultation processes with staff followed by an evaluation of the information provided has improved ways of working, providing a happier working environment for both staff and pupils.

Staff are provided with a high level of training, support and supervision to maintain professional practice and review their performance. They are fully motivated and

demonstrate a commitment to meeting the diverse needs of individuals. The skills of the team compliment and contribute to the outstanding care provided.

Residential staff are extremely positive and proactive in their approach to supporting the education of boarders. Excellent resources are available to enhance and assist with education and tasks, such as, independence, mobility, communication and social skills. The school provides a seamless service which promotes attainment and personal achievement.

The school is staffed to meet the individual needs of young people. Risk assessments and care plans clearly outline the staffing levels needed to meet the needs of young people. All staff have attended an extensive induction and training programme. This encompasses all aspects of safeguarding vulnerable young people, including delivering and maintaining safe practices around bullying, dealing with complaints and reporting concerns.

The school is able to cater for and meet the individual needs of young people at the school exceptionally well. The staff team are highly trained and skilled in delivering care and support to those with additional needs.

The school is safe and effectively monitored and managed. All parts of the building to which boarders have access are adapted, and facilities within the school are designed and positioned to ensure that all young people enjoy the full benefits of an inclusive service.

Young people have accessible care records that are dynamic, clear and reflect the standard of care and support delivered to each young person. Systems within the school ensure that all records are well maintained and regularly monitored and reviewed.

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 that risk assessments are completed, updated and monitored where issues of potential bullying are identified. (NMS 6.5)