

St Bernard's School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Elaine Cray

School address St. Bernards House, Wood Lane, LOUTH, Lincolnshire,
LN11 8RS
Telephone number 01507 603 776
Email enquires@st-bernards.lincs.sch.uk
Headteacher Leanda Mason

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

St Bernard's School is a maintained residential special school for 50 pupils aged 2-19 years. Three pupils currently reside at the school during the week. The residential accommodation is located on the school site within one of 3 buildings and on a single level. The school is located in Louth, a small country town in the rural county of Lincolnshire. The school serves a population of primarily white British young people. The school caters for pupils with complex and severe learning disabilities. The last residential inspection was carried out in March 2011.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boardingschools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	good
Residential pupils' safety	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- This service is judged good overall with an outstanding judgement for outcomes for young people. Two of the four recommendations from the last inspection are met. The remaining two recommendations are partially met. Plans to improve the bathroom and make the telephone noise less intrusive have been approved by the management of the service. The head teacher currently awaits budgetary consent in order for the work to go ahead.
- The school meets the majority of the national minimum standards for residential special schools. There are a number of significant strengths in the provision, not least the effective links between the education and residential staff, the energetic and proactive management team and behaviour management. Two national minimum standards are not fully met but do not directly impact on outcomes for residential pupils.
- The quality of provision and care for residential students is good and residential pupils enjoy outstanding outcomes as a result of using the service. Residential pupils have improved mobility, are able to use a combination of communication processes and are therefore able to access opportunities, extend their friendships and build confidence
- The residential service enables pupils to develop new skills both educationally and socially. The communication processes encompass all aspects of the school and residential service. Residential pupils are enabled to participate, contribute and enjoy school/family life, a variety of activities and opportunities in their local communities.
- Residential pupils enjoy their stays in the residential unit because they value and

benefit from positive and trusting relationships with staff in a supported and nurturing environment. Residential pupils clearly enjoy and value their friendships with each other and their behaviour is a credit to the pupils and staff of the service.

- The safety of residential students is given high priority. Residential pupils are protected with good working relationships with key agencies to promote safety and manage behaviour. Behaviour management is a key strength throughout this service. Staff are proactive and creative in managing behaviour and making sure all young people are safe.
- The boarding facilities, while institutionalised in appearance, have been improved. Every effort is made by staff to make the purpose-built school annex homely and welcoming with vibrant décor, personalised photos, pictures and domestic-type furnishings.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Residential pupils' outcomes are outstanding. They benefit from a service provision which recognises and values them as young people with diverse individual needs. Residential students stay in a vibrant, nurturing and enabling environment. Their individuality is celebrated and explored, with proactive and creative strategies to ensure all pupils of all abilities develop and progress.

Residential pupils develop good self-esteem because they enjoy positive, interactive and meaningful relationships with staff. They stay in an inclusive and nurturing community where they are well cared for and they care for each other. They show concern for others as close friendships develop with meaningful interactions. The residential pupils can interact and enjoy the company of others because communication processes are inclusive and meet the varied needs of the young people using the service.

Residential pupils take pride in contributing to and helping each other with day-to-day living arrangements in the house, including helping to prepare meals, choosing activities and putting the shopping away. They enjoy interactive and fun activities which help them develop educationally, socially and in terms of self-worth. They learn to take responsibility for chores and play significant roles in organising and supporting each other in a variety of activities. Residential pupils grow in confidence and develop increasing independence. They are supported to be more independently mobile, develop communication and language skills and try many new experiences.

Residential pupils benefit from significant improvements in their physical, emotional and psychological health. Their complex medical needs are excellently and effectively met with clear procedures for medication, appropriate medical protocols and excellent staff training. They receive excellent medical and health support because staff liaise with relevant health agencies and professionals and fully involve parents in

health care planning. Residential pupils are healthier because they are provided with healthy eating choices and exercise routines. They are encouraged to develop their knowledge and understanding of their own health. For example about brushing teeth, knowing about healthy vegetables, learning about growing-up and having medication procedures explained to them.

Residential pupils and their families value the service because they are effectively supported in the transition to the school and integration into the residential service. Information about the service is available in symbol form and therefore accessible to the majority of young people using the service. All pupils are treated as individuals. They are treated with respect and sensitivity. Staff have a clear understanding of the socio-economic and diverse backgrounds of the families and local communities using this service. Young people are encouraged to develop confidence in their personal identities and social relationships as they grow towards young adulthood.

Parents and pupils are involved, consulted and their views are valued. For example pupils choose words and symbols for the daily home-to-school diary. They make informed choices about the food they would like to eat at each meal and they attend and contribute to review meetings to discuss their progress. Pupils have a school council, with a residential pupil representative and minutes are sent to the management team of the school. The pupils are currently promoting their ideas for improvements, including a sensory garden and more outside play equipment. Residential pupils thrive on the strong and proactive emphasis on positive behaviour and a clear focus on enabling them to communicate their views and wishes.

Parents and professionals identify significant progress and positive experiences for young people using the residential service. They identify progress in children's mobility, behaviour, communication abilities and confidence so they can participate in a variety of opportunities. Comments about the service include, 'it's like an extended family – a loving caring family community', 'the service has got a buzz about it' and 'young people are central to what they do'. Pupils using the residential service consistently use symbols and sign language to express they are 'happy' when they stay at the service.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision and care is good. There are clear induction procedures to facilitate a needs-led transition to the residential service for each pupil. The process responds to the diverse and complex needs of pupils and focuses on the integral involvement of parents. Residential pupils are looked after and their families reassured because of close liaison between care and educational staff.

Communication processes, including verbal, written, symbol and signing systems provide an opportunity for residential pupils to contribute their ideas and views to the running and improvement of the service. Residential pupils use the home-school diary with enthusiasm. This framework for communication encourages the pupils to

write and choose symbols to explain to their families and staff what they have enjoyed, what is not so popular and how they are feeling.

Residential pupils benefit from a selection of activities. The activities plan is arranged with an onus on developing and extending pupils' education, physical and social development. Activities include cooking, helping with shopping, sensory activities and a variety of trips out. Activities are evaluated to look at how they impact on residential pupils and support them to make progress. Progress is consistently celebrated, reinforced and communicated. Residential pupils are consistently congratulated for 'good pointing', 'good choosing' and staff take great pleasure in the smiling, physical gestures, positive eye contact and verbal comments consistently made by the pupils during their activities.

Staff make clear efforts to provide a sensitive, nurturing, fun and interactive environment for residential pupils resulting in high levels of self-esteem and a sense of achievement.

Care planning is comprehensive. This part of the care framework provides effective strategies to care for the residential pupils. Plans focus on clear targets both in terms of safe care, encouraging independence and managing complex medical and disability needs. Routines and expectations are clear, practical and regularly reviewed. Plans are effectively implemented with input from residential pupils, parents, education staff and other support agencies.

The arrangements to promote and monitor health and medical needs are very good, with extensive staff training and effective monitoring systems. There is effective assessment of individual needs resulting in detailed and practical health care plans and required protocols. Residential staff are proactive and very positive in promoting good health, including consistent implementation of medical protocols. There is excellent liaison with a variety of agencies to support pupils with medical, physical, mental and emotional health needs. Residential pupils are protected with safe and effective medication procedures, including staff training and awareness of how some medication impacts on behaviour.

Catering arrangements in the home are excellently managed. Food is of good quality. Residential pupils are helped to make choices at each meal; small taster bowls are used so they can touch, smell and taste the food on offer in order to make informed choices. Special diets are well catered for and there is a good multicultural and vegetarian perspective throughout the menus.

The residential accommodation is secure, safe and well-maintained. While the accommodation is part of the school and institutionalised in appearance, staff endeavour to make sure the environment is homely, warm and comfortable. While plans to improve the bathroom have been drawn up by the management team to ensure the safe transfer, movement and privacy of pupils with physical disabilities, these are not yet implemented.

Staff have a good understanding of residential pupils' individual needs and promote a much individualised approach to their care. Staff have long-term knowledge of the residential pupils. Staff are very proactive and positive at identifying what residential pupils have achieved compared to when they first accessed the school and the residential service. Staff awareness of equality and diversity issues positively impacts on the residential pupils, their families, future plans and expectations.

Parents' and professional comments about the service and staff include, 'care is second to none', and 'the ethos of the place is positive', 'fabulous' and 'significantly impacts' on the residential pupils.

Residential pupils' safety

The safety of residential pupils is good. There are clear elements of outstanding practice in terms of behaviour management at this service. Residential pupils are safe. Parents and professionals express a high level of confidence in the service's ability to promote safety, manage and significantly improve behaviour. There is a strong emphasis on understanding behaviour in terms of learning disability, communication, understanding and sensory challenges.

Staff are well trained and seek guidance from supporting agencies to ensure interventions are timely, well informed and in partnership with specialists and families. Residential pupils are supported with comprehensive behaviour management plans and positive handling plans. While individual plans are detailed and consistently implemented, there are some inconsistencies in how some sections of the central record for physical restraint has been completed.

Welfare is promoted and protected by a range of policies and procedures for child protection. Residential pupils are protected by good procedures for safe recruitment and the monitoring of staff and volunteers. Residential pupils are safe because they are looked after by well-trained staff who consistently implement safeguarding arrangements. Staff are aware of safeguarding procedures and managers value inter-agency working. Residential pupils are protected with an effective staff awareness of the countering bullying policy. Staff know what to do should a pupil go missing from the service with a clear written procedure and good liaison with local safeguarding agencies, including the police.

Risk assessment and management is effective. All activities, environmental features and behaviour are routinely and robustly assessed to ensure safety. Risk management strategies are proactive, well resourced and effectively monitored. Residential pupils have every opportunity to try new and challenging opportunities in a safe and structured way. There are regular checks on the security and safety of the residential unit, school building and grounds. Records are detailed and accountable.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The management and organisation of the residential provision is good. Parents, residential pupils and other interested parties are informed about the aims and facilities of the school's residential service. There is a prospectus for parents and a residential pupils' handbook, with both available in symbol form. Parents value the induction process at the school and say the high standards of communication have continued throughout their children's placements at the service.

The service is effectively staffed with well-trained, experienced staff who value each other and the leadership of the management team. Staff comments include 'cohesive' and 'proactive'. There is strong leadership with a strong and purposeful drive to place the views and needs of the residential pupils at the centre of the service. The residential service provides a child-centred culture of respect, individuality and achievement.

Routines and procedures are clear, well established and operate consistently to provide a safe, sensitive and motivating environment for the residential pupils. There is consistent focus on reward and a strong emphasis on maintaining meaningful and respectful relationships between staff, residential pupils and families.

There is a strong ethos for improvement of the residential service and most significantly for the outcomes for the pupils. The newly appointed head of care is a valued asset to the management team and has attracted positive comments from parents. The head teacher implements clear strategies to track trends of behaviour, achievement, develop staff practice and clarify criteria to measure success and progress. The head teacher has adapted the robust and regular monitoring systems in line with the new national minimum standards and inspection framework. Reports are routinely submitted to the board of governors. The development plan for the residential service is clear, practical and already embedded into the school's overall improvement plan.

The management team promotes close scrutiny of the outcomes, safety of welfare of the residential pupils. However the monitoring visits by the designated governor have not been adequately carried out. While reports for the most recent visit shows thorough monitoring and evaluation of the service, three of the six half term visits have not been completed.

All required policies, documents and records are in place and support effective staff practice and management of the service.

National minimum standards

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who does not work at, or directly manage, the school, to visit the school once every half term and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. Where the school has an individual proprietor, that person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the Headteacher (or school equivalent). (NMS 20.1)
- Accommodation for children complies with any requirements set out in regulations relating to school premises (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'), is appropriately lit, heated and ventilated, cleaned and maintained, and reasonable adjustments are made to provide adequate accessible accommodation for any children with restricted mobility. Toilet and washing facilities provide appropriate privacy for children. The accommodation contains suitable specialist facilities to support children whose disabilities require them. (NMS 5.1)

What should the school do to improve further?

- Improve the consistency of recording in the physical restraint book.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



05/03/2012

To all the residential pupils at St Bernard's School

Inspection of St Bernard's School

The residential provision at St Bernard's School has been judged to be good overall.

There are outstanding outcomes for young people, a good quality of care, good systems for safeguarding and good leadership and management.

I could see you really enjoy your stay at the school. You learn well, improve behaviour and learn new skills. Your parents told Ofsted the school has a number of strengths and continues to improve.

Some of the key strengths I identified were the great friendships you make with the other pupils and the range of activities available to you. You very much value your relationships with staff. Your views are very important to the staff and they make sure you have good communication systems so you can have your say.

The school has been asked to make sure the plans for the new bathroom are finished, for one of the governors to visit more often to check you are being looked after well and to improve records of restraint.

Yours sincerely,

Elaine Cray