

# St Mary's School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	114681
<b>Local Authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	378905
<b>Inspection dates</b>	18–19 October 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Scott HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

The inspection of social care 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.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Boys
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	56
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Margaret Southworth
<b>Executive headteacher</b>	Frank Stanford
<b>Head of school</b>	Simon Thorpe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	13–14 January 2009
<b>School address</b>	Horam Heathfield TN21 0BT
<b>Telephone number</b>	01435 812278
<b>Fax number</b>	01435 813019
<b>Email address</b>	Office@stmarysschoolhoram.com

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<b>Boarding provision</b>	St Mary's School
<b>Social care Unique Reference Number</b>	SC050392
<b>Social care inspector</b>	Lucy Martin HMI

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<b>Age group</b>	9–16
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	18–19 October 2011
<b>Inspection number</b>	378905

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## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors and one additional inspector. Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 18 lessons and the school's work. They looked at a range of documentation including policies, records to show how senior leaders monitor aspects of the school, and tracking information about pupils' progress. Meetings were held with pupils, staff, parents and carers, a local authority representative and members of the governing body. The 16 questionnaires returned by parents and carers were also considered, as well as staff and pupil questionnaires.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How effective is teaching at targeting individuals' learning needs?
- How much has the leadership and management of teaching and learning improved pupils' experiences and developed assessment for learning?
- To what extent has the use of technologies had an impact on outcomes for pupils?

## Information about the school

St Mary's school is a small special school for boys with special educational needs and particularly behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Some pupils have additional needs including autistic spectrum conditions. The school has specialist status in behaviour and cognitive learning. The school is part of a federation with Cuckmere House School and has formal links with a range of other provision in the local authority that is led by the executive headteacher. The school has flexible boarding provision for up to 12 pupils. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Around two out of five pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals. The vast majority of pupils are of White British heritage and the proportion of pupils from minority ethnic heritages is lower than found nationally. There are no pupils whose first language is believed not to be English.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**1**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

## Main findings

St Mary's is an outstanding school that has undergone a rapid period of improvement under the guidance of the executive headteacher, the head of school and an enthusiastic and committed school team. There is a very positive ethos in the school, with pupils feeling very safe and enjoying the wide range of opportunities on offer. Pupils' individual needs drive the development of the outstanding curriculum and so pupils re-engage in learning and make good progress in their time at the school. Some pupils make outstanding progress in their studies.

The school team is eager to develop wider opportunities for pupils' success, and ensure that their care needs are met extremely well. The administration, support and care staff work very well with teachers and leaders. Pupils' attainment has risen and they have access to a range of awards and examinations including GCSEs, entry level certificates and vocational qualifications. The focus on courses of study that enhance their options in life motivates pupils further. Although attainment is low relative to the national average, it is rising well.

The teaching at its best challenges pupils and engages them in interesting and diverse experiences. The teachers know the pupils very well and so are able to plan effective lessons. There are clear assessment systems and the information is used with increasing impact to ensure the lessons' learning objectives are more accurately targeted to individual pupils. Teaching does not consistently challenge all pupils and at times teachers do not grasp opportunities to develop pupils' independent work. When the teaching is directed at the whole class progress slows. The teaching is being refined, however, and teachers use their exceptional knowledge of individuals to bring humour and good questioning to increase the pace of learning, especially when this is focused on individuals.

Pupils' behaviour is good overall and inspectors were impressed by the pupils' willingness to express their thoughts about the school, the residential care and how their learning has been enhanced. The school's specialism in behaviour and cognitive learning is contributing well to the overall outcomes across the school. Pupils say that their confidence has increased, developing their aspirations and a more positive outlook for the future. There is an active school council. Pupils contribute well to the school community adding to the positive atmosphere. They understand how to stay healthy and usually make positive choices about their behaviour so that they are more able to do the right thing and show respect for others.

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Leaders are well aware of the areas for further improvement and have a highly appropriate strategy for improvement. The governing body contributes very well and members are highly committed to ensuring that the school is not complacent. They make good decisions to refine provision further. School staff have a questioning approach to their practice, although their analysis does not always detail the impact initiatives and actions have. The strong improvements in the quality of teaching and positive outcomes for pupils demonstrate the outstanding capacity the school has for further improvement.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Sharpen further the focus on consistency of teaching and learning so that pupils make increased progress by:
  - increasing the challenge for individuals
  - ensuring pupils work with increasing independence.
- Refine the analysis that is undertaken by leaders at all levels to allow greater understanding of the impact of initiatives.
- Involve the residential pupils in the development and review of their care plans.
- Develop written information for new residential pupils.

## **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**2**

Pupils settle into life at the school very well. With the high level of support provided, they build confidence and are able to engage in the opportunities and so make good progress towards their challenging targets. The carefully planned care and support and the positive, friendly atmosphere mean that pupils quickly feel safe in the school and start to become positive learners with an increasingly positive outlook and view of the wider world. There is a balanced approach to achieving academically and developing personal skills to promote longer-term success. Pupils explained their ambitions for the future and the range of college opportunities that they were looking forward to. Opportunities to learn life skills are available, with pupils enjoying lessons in cooking. On-going assessments provide a clear picture about progress of pupils in the classroom. Pupils have a very good understanding of how to live safe and healthy lifestyles and are increasingly willing to contribute in classrooms, but at times lack confidence. The behaviour demonstrated in some lessons by pupils was very positive and inspectors were able to have interesting discussions about the lessons and future ambitions. During one science lesson pupils made good progress because the teacher was able to skilfully include all pupils in activities despite the very wide range of levels they were working at. Careful questioning and clear expectations of participation ensured that pupils' individual communication needs were fully considered. At times, however, pupils' progress slowed as work was not always challenging and pupils were given too much support to complete tasks.

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The school works very hard on improving the attendance of pupils. Even so, some do not attend enough and so are missing out on the exceptional opportunities available. Pupils who do attend show increasing levels of progress as they settle and embrace the positive, supportive experience in the school community.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	4
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	4
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>2</b>

**How effective is the provision?**

The in-depth understanding the staff have of individual pupils means that curricular opportunities are highly personalised. A wide range of courses are on offer and pupils access GCSEs with increasing success. The school has developed a range of interesting aspects to the curriculum that enhance the pupils' experiences. This includes links with the Royal Horticultural Society, life skills and an Explorer programme. These courses help pupils to be successful and gain confidence to try new things and value learning more.

Lessons are typified by careful planning and excellent relationships between pupils and the school staff. Teaching assistants make a significant contribution, and an intuitive understanding with the teacher ensures that classrooms are generally calm and effective learning environments. Some outstanding teaching was observed but this is not consistent across the school. When working with individuals, pupils' progress was at least good, but whole-class teaching did not always challenge all pupils and at times this led to frustration from pupils. Teachers use interactive

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

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whiteboards and a range of software well to engage pupils and vary their teaching. Pupils are provided with a high level of support, particularly when they are getting to know the school. The support is not always pared away when it is no longer needed, and so opportunities to encourage pupils to work more independently are sometimes missed.

There are a wide range of partnerships with external professionals and highly-trained staff to ensure that care, guidance and support are exceptional throughout the school and residential provision. Effective communication within the school supports the well-being of pupils and assists progress regardless of the challenges faced by individuals.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The executive headteacher, head of school and the school team are highly effective in ensuring the school moves forward with a clear vision for the future. Staff enjoy working in the school and are proud to be part of the team. Morale is high and they work hard in lessons and beyond to move things forward. The school is refining further the way it analyses its own performance and this is enhanced by the many partnerships it has established, especially across the federation and partner schools. It is not complacent about its success so far and is increasingly systematic about the development of teaching and learning.

The residential element in the school is an integral part of the school's supportive ethos. This outstanding provision is enjoyed by pupils and demonstrates outwardly to all pupils that the school is concerned about their wider care and development as well as their academic success. The leadership of this provision links well to the school's daily routines.

The governing body contributes a great deal to the school, challenging and supporting leaders so that pupils have access to learning opportunities to support their development. It monitors the school's work effectively and understands that some refining of monitoring will ensure even greater impact of its work. Safeguarding arrangements are good with careful leadership and clear practice. Communications are very positive through regular contact with all parents and carers, and the school promotes equality of opportunity very well. The school is developing the way it promotes community cohesion and has some sound local work

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and is increasing plans for wider national and international development.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school's engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Overall effectiveness of the residential experience

The overall effectiveness of the residential provision at St Mary's School is outstanding. There are substantial strengths in the quality of provision and care for residential pupils. The residential provision known as the NEST (nurturing, education and social training) enables pupils to make excellent progress in their personal and social development. The last inspection of the residential provision took place in March 2011 and the two recommendations made concerning the health care records and the monitoring of records have been fully met.

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy the experience of staying overnight and feel safe and relaxed in the residential environment. They take every opportunity to participate in the excellent range of activities on offer, whether it is rock climbing, swimming, cookery, artwork or the Duke of Edinburgh award. Relationships are excellent and residential pupils enjoy the time they spend with the care staff on duty. Residential pupils feel safe. They say that their views are listened to and that changes are made as a result.

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Residential pupils receive excellent levels of guidance and support from all staff at the school. There are very effective systems for ensuring that information is shared between the residential unit and the school. Care staff support the school day and this enables high levels of consistency as well as good working relationships with education colleagues. All pupils are clear that they can go to anyone in the school for help. In addition to members of the school staff, there are a number of external agencies who visit the



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school on a regular basis whom pupils can talk to.

Residential pupils' physical, emotional and social development needs are well promoted. They are encouraged to participate in a range of positive activities that contribute to their physical and emotional health. There are secure arrangements for the safe storage and administration of medication and detailed health care plans for pupils with additional medical needs.

Residential pupils are provided with a nutritious, balanced and varied diet. Food is in plentiful supply and of good quality. Breakfast and tea are eaten in the residential unit and are sociable occasions. The residential pupils enjoy the food and the evening meals which are cooked by the care staff on duty.

The residential accommodation is of a high standard. The furnishings, decoration and equipment in all the rooms are excellent and bedrooms are of a good size. The residential pupils take a real pride in the NEST and feel relaxed and comfortable in their surroundings.

The care plans are detailed with objectives which are reviewed on a termly basis. At the moment the residential pupils are not involved in the setting and reviewing of the care objectives and this is an area for development.

The school makes outstanding provision to safeguard residential pupils' welfare. There are robust and thorough procedures for staff recruitment. Files are well maintained and evidence that all the required checks have been completed. Robust health and safety checks are made which include gas and electrical safety. Regular fire drills take place in residential time which have included scenarios with some fire exits blocked. Risk assessments for the building and the activities are regularly reviewed. Protecting children has high priority within the school. All staff have received training in child protection within the last year and there are good links with the local authority. As a result of these measures boarders are well protected.

The school has positive and proactive behaviour management strategies which are consistently applied. Residential pupils understand what is expected of them and the behaviour in the residential unit is generally very good. There is a real emphasis on rewarding positive behaviour with the earning of points during the evening. Achievements are celebrated and rewarded, for example a recent trip to a theme park took place. Incidents are well recorded and monitored. Bullying is taken seriously and addressed promptly if incidents occur. Residential pupils say that they generally get on well together, that few punishments in the boarding houses are given and that poor behaviour is discussed with them.

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. There is a real commitment to drive improvement forward in pursuit of excellence for the residential pupils. The NEST improvement plan is comprehensive and sets challenging targets for the year. The residential unit is well staffed by a small team of dedicated and experienced care staff. Staff feel well supported in their role and

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there are opportunities for professional development. There are thorough monitoring arrangements.

The care staff speak regularly to parents and carers and have organised 'Care Days' to promote the residential provision to parents and carers and to day pupils at the school. Parents and carers are extremely positive about the care provided overnight at the school. Written information is provided for parents and carers about the NEST and is on the school's website but is not specifically aimed at new residential pupils. This is an area for further development.

### **National Minimum Standards**

All the national minimum standards are met.

*These are the grades for the residential provision*

<b>Overall effectiveness of the residential experience</b>	<b>1</b>
Outcomes for residential pupils	1
Quality of residential provision and care	1
Residential pupils' safety	1
Leadership and management of the residential provision	1

### **Views of parents and carers**

The parents and carers that responded to the questionnaire are generally very happy with the school. Comments praised the leadership and expressed the positive impact the school had on pupils. Some concerns were expressed about wanting more homework, and inspectors agree that some pupil could undertake more homework. Concerns were also expressed about the flexibility of the teachers, but inspectors found that teachers do adapt lessons well to meet the needs of individuals.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at St Mary's School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 16 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 56 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	6	38	7	44	2	13	0	0
The school keeps my child safe	11	69	3	19	2	13	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	12	75	3	19	1	6	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	7	44	7	44	2	13	0	0
The teaching is good at this school	10	63	6	38	0	0	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	9	56	6	38	1	6	0	0
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	7	44	9	56	0	0	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	9	56	7	44	0	0	0	0
The school meets my child’s particular needs	10	63	6	38	0	0	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	10	63	4	25	2	13	0	0
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	8	50	7	44	1	6	0	0
The school is led and managed effectively	10	63	5	31	0	0	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	11	69	4	25	1	6	0	0

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 8 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**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.**



20 October 2011

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of St Mary's School, Horam, TN21 0BT**

I would like to thank you all for the help you gave us when we visited your outstanding school. It was particularly good to talk to the school council and pupils in lessons, as you were willing to tell us how the school has helped you to be successful.

The care and support you get in the school and in the NEST are outstanding and this is helping you to feel safe, build confidence and learn effectively. The school is very well led and is enhanced by the executive headteacher and the links with other schools. The school staff are a very strong team who know you well and want you to do well. They work with a wide range of partners and bring an extensive understanding and skills to help you all grow and be successful whatever the challenges you face individually. They are still working to improve things even though the school has undergone impressive improvements already. They will analyse the work they do and assess its impact further as well as looking for opportunities to develop teaching and the courses available to you. We think you should be more involved with your care plans and that you could get involved in providing written information for new residential pupils.

You have a wide range of opportunities in the school and are taking an increasing number of courses, including GCSEs. Those of you who attend well recognise how successful you can be and understand that you miss out on so much if you are not in school. Teachers plan lessons well and care for you a great deal. Teaching assistants and teachers work well together. At times you rely on them too much and could sometimes make even greater progress without help from the staff. You are not always confident enough, however, to try things on your own. We have asked teachers to challenge you even more and develop the opportunities for you to work more independently. I am sure that if you take these opportunities you will make even greater progress.

It was a real privilege to see your school in action and I wish you the very best for the future.

Paul Scott  
Her Majesty's Inspector

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