

St Mary's Wrestwood Children's Trust

Inspection report

Unique reference number	133653
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	381526
Inspection dates	29–30 May 2012
Lead inspector	Anne Duffy HMI

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	131
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	69
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Tessa Sambrook
Headteacher	Joanna Whiteman
Date of previous school inspection	13 November 2008
School address	Wrestwood Road Bexhill-on-Sea East Sussex TN40 2LU
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Boarding/Residential provision	St Mary's Wrestwood Children's Trust
Social care unique reference number	SC050390
Social care inspector	Lucy Martin HMI

Age group	7–19
Inspection date(s)	29–30 May 2012
Inspection number	381526



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Introduction

Inspection team

Anne Duffy

Her Majesty's Inspector

Christopher Christophedes

Additional inspector

Lucy Martin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Gaynor Moorey

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. Inspectors observed 13 teachers teaching 15 lessons; six of these were joint observations with members of the school's senior team. In addition, inspectors joined other activities, before and after school and at lunchtimes, and heard a small group of students read in class. Discussions were held with students, a parent, members of the governing body, and with staff, including senior and middle managers. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line Parent View survey, observed the school's work, and looked at and considered a number of documents. These included the school and care development plans, arrangements for safeguarding and promoting equality, and details of the curriculum. They also analysed 33 parental and carers' questionnaires and others completed by pupils and staff.

Information about the school

St Mary's Wrestwood is a charitable trust which provides a larger than average special school for pupils and students with speech, language and communication needs and associated learning difficulties. There are equal numbers of students in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4 (known as the school) and the sixth form (known as the college). The school and college operate in distinctive ways while forming parts of the same organisation. Almost all those attending have a statement of special educational needs. The proportion known to be eligible for free school meals is lower than average. The large majority of students are residential and boys outnumber girls at a ratio of three to two.

There have been some changes to the organisation of the Trust since the previous inspection, when the chief executive was also the principal of the school. Following his retirement, a new chief executive was appointed, along with heads of school, college, care, and clinical services. All but the head of school were new to St Mary's and these four now form the senior leadership team of the school.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good school. All sections – the 'school', 'college' (sixth form) and 'care' (residential provision) - are good. Overall, it is not yet outstanding because the different departments have yet to complete all they need to do in order to strengthen teaching and care, and establish a consistency of approach.
- Students make good progress in their learning as well as in their social skills and achieve well. All groups of students make similar progress overall, although there are some differences between individuals; some students make outstanding progress. The school's focus on improving skills in reading, communication, mathematics and other life skills is very effective.
- Teaching is mainly good and some is outstanding. The school provides high-quality support for students who have social or emotional needs so that they are motivated to participate in all lessons. Lesson objectives are clear and shared well with the students but sometimes there is too much emphasis on the tasks that are to be completed rather than what the students need to learn. Teachers sometimes miss opportunities to involve students in assessing for themselves how much they have learnt.
- Students respond extremely well to the safe and orderly atmosphere which pervades all parts of St Mary's. As a result, behaviour is outstanding. Students are very considerate and respectful to one another in and out of lessons and welcome opportunities to celebrate each other's successes. Those who experienced difficulties in the past learn to manage their behaviour very well over time. Students clearly enjoy school and the excellent relationships that exist.
- The relatively new senior leadership group know the school's strengths and weaknesses well. The restructured governing body has had limited opportunity to have great impact so far but is very ambitious for the school's future. Staff are meeting the challenges presented to them well and appreciate the increased

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information that is now available to help them support students' progress. Curricular and extra-curricular provision are good in the school, college and residential care provision but there are limited opportunities for students to gain accreditation for skills gained across all three.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Support students in achieving as well as they can throughout their school and college career by:
 - further strengthening links across school, college and residential care to ensure that systems and approaches are consistent and collectively effective
 - ensuring that the learning objectives of lessons are consistently focused on developing the skills, knowledge and understanding of the students rather than on the completion of tasks
 - ensuring that the best use is made of plenary sessions to involve students in assessing for themselves how well they have done
 - extending opportunities for accreditation that span the 14–19 age range
 - ensuring that it meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools that have not been met.

Main report

Achievement of students

'I am a happy boy...work is hard but my teachers help me – my friends help me too.' This statement from one student was typical of the views of many. Students take their learning very seriously and, by the end of their time in the college, are very clear about what they hope to achieve. As a result, the vast majority transfer successfully to further education. In school, students make good progress overall, and some make outstanding progress, through the P levels and the early levels of the National Curriculum. As they move through the school, their good achievement is supported well by the development of work-related skills and an appropriate focus on the key areas of literacy, numeracy and communication. By the end of Key Stage 2, students show a real interest in books and stories; by the time they reach the end of the next key stage, many are able to tackle new vocabulary with confidence. In college, students are actively involved in building up portfolios of work that demonstrate good, and often outstanding, progress.

In lessons, students generally make good progress and, when challenged to try different tasks independently, make outstanding progress. When given the opportunity, they are increasingly able to evaluate how well they have done in lessons and identify what the next steps might be. For example, students studying the difference between acids and alkalis recalled very clearly what they had learnt in a previous lesson when they had carried out experiments on different liquids. As a result, they were confident in offering predictions on what might happen in the next

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investigation.

Progress against long-term targets is now tracked in careful detail by the senior leadership group. As a result of this evaluation, initiatives to accelerate the progress for any individuals, seen to be falling behind, show good impact. For example, students with the most marked social communication needs, previously identified as making less progress than others, now make noticeable progress as a result of successful intervention from both the teaching and the therapy teams. The school's careful analysis shows that there is no significant difference between the progress made by boys and girls or between those with different backgrounds or needs. Many parents and carers expressed their pleasure at how well their children were doing: 'It's changed her world,' said one.

Quality of teaching

Students benefit from the excellent relationships that they have with the teaching and support staff. As a result, they demonstrate increasing resilience and confidence when tackling new activities. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly appreciative of the good teaching that their children receive. Teaching consistently enhances students' development of a range of skills, including communication, reading, writing and mathematics, across the curriculum.

Teachers use their subject knowledge well to plan effectively and set challenging tasks. They know their students very well and this helps them to match tasks and activities to the needs and interests of the class. There is a strong focus on encouraging independence. Sometimes, however, there is too much emphasis on the tasks that need to be completed by the end of a lesson, rather than on the skills that need to be learnt. When this happens, students focus on doing the next thing and those who lack confidence wait for an adult to help them before moving on.

Teachers and therapists are involved in setting realistic and aspirational targets for their students. Teachers and teaching assistants assess students' progress thoroughly and regularly, and provide feedback for students at the end of every lesson. Plenary sessions are generally used effectively to help students know how well they have done, and opportunities to reflect on their own and others' behaviour enhance their spiritual, moral and social development. However, sometimes these sessions go on for too long and the high level of adult input deprives students of opportunities to think for themselves about how much they have learnt and how they could improve their work. Where they are encouraged to make their own assessment, they show themselves able to do so, even at the younger end of the school. For example, one student analysed her art work saying, 'If I did it again, I would...'

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students are rightly very proud of their achievements and of each other. Many

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students make marked improvements in their behaviour over time. With very few exceptions, parents and carers agree that there is a high standard of behaviour in the school. The school's emphasis on building self-esteem and creating strong relationships based upon 'Olympic Values' is very effective. As a result, an extremely harmonious atmosphere exists both in and out of lessons. Students are ambitious for themselves, mix very well together and are highly supportive of each other. For example, one student, disappointed at not gaining the highest number of points in assembly, was cheered by another saying spontaneously, 'Never mind, better luck next time'. Older students develop a strong sense of responsibility, and clearly benefit from opportunities to make choices and determine for themselves what they would like to do in their free time and in the future.

Very good contact is made with external agencies, as well as parents and carers, to provide effective support for students both in and out of school. Students have evident trust in the adults working with them so that they feel very safe. Those students who have particular social, emotional or medical needs are supported extremely well and make excellent progress in developing their independence skills. Helped by personal, social and health education as well as input from care and medical staff, students develop a very mature approach to all aspects of healthy living. Instances of bullying, including any racist or gender-based comments, are rare and are taken very seriously in all areas of the school. Nevertheless, students have an excellent awareness of different types of bullying and older students speak extremely sensibly of how they can help younger ones if they need support.

Leadership and management

The Trust is in the process of changing its vision statement from 'a very special place' to 'achieving potential'. This sums up the shift in focus which is strongly led by the governing body and the chief executive. While not losing sight of the high quality of care and support which it offers, all concerned are determined that students should be given every opportunity to do as well as they can in every area of their learning and development. Increasingly detailed analysis of the progress made by groups and individuals means that the school's evaluation of the good progress made by students is secure. Well-focused professional development is strengthening the quality of teaching and support, and the leadership group has correctly identified areas for further development.

The school works very effectively with local services and a range of other external partners to provide students with a rich mix of in-school and out-of school opportunities. Very well-tailored individual, travel and care plans develop independence skills very well so that school leavers are able to approach the next stage of their lives with increased confidence. Older students in particular benefit from well-planned, work-related placements and visits so that, on leaving, retention in further education college placements is high. The curriculum provides students in all key stages with a range of learning experiences that are well suited to their needs and aspirations, and promotes their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development

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extremely well. Students experience a clear sense of transition between school and college. However, due to the separate curriculum planning that has taken place to date, they are not yet able to gain accreditation for the aspects of their learning which span school, college and care.

Arrangements for safeguarding are secure. The residential provision makes a significant contribution to the students' progress and well-being. Physical intervention, although rarely used, is not as consistently employed or recorded as it could be. Partnerships with parents and carers are very strong and a number of parents and carers praised the contact that they have with the different staff teams.

The consistent commitment to equality of opportunity is evident in the way in which the school supports and challenges its students so that all are given the chance to shine. Staff and members of the senior leadership group are rightly proud of the school and all share a determination for its continuing development. The governing body, following its restructuring, is well placed to add a further level of rigour and accountability. As a result, the school has strong capacity for further improvement.

Residential provision

Residential students make outstanding progress socially in terms of their self-esteem and confidence. Most residential students thoroughly enjoy their residential experience and feel safe and relaxed in the residential community. They encourage and support one another and have excellent relationships with the residential care staff. Individual achievements are celebrated and students are supported to develop new interests and skills. A wide range of activities are on offer including street dancing, horse riding and swimming. A number of activities take place in the local community; for example some students are members of a local judo club. There are excellent opportunities for all residential students to develop independence skills such as budgeting, cooking and independent travel to help them to achieve their full potential. These activities are well organised and are planned in meticulous detail for the benefit of students.

Students receive high levels of support from a range of staff at the school and there are strong, effective links with all areas within the school including the education and therapy teams. The multi-professional approach to meeting each young person's specific health and welfare needs is embedded within the ethos of the school. The care staff communicate well with the students and this is facilitated by all the care staff having weekly training sessions in Sign Supported English. Residents' health needs are promoted to a particularly high standard. All medication is safely administered and students are provided with a wide range of information and guidance regarding health and social issues. For example, nurses visit the residential houses and discuss subjects such as alcohol and smoking awareness, and the physical changes around adolescence.

The accommodation comprises eight houses on the school site and two houses a few

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miles away that accommodate the older, more independent students. All houses are in a good state of decoration and are well maintained. The food provided is of the highest quality and is much appreciated by students. Meticulous care is taken to ensure that individual diets are well catered for and residential students are able to influence the choice of menus. Mealtimes are well ordered and sociable, with staff sitting and eating with students and supporting them in a sensitive, unobtrusive manner.

The residential students' files contain all the appropriate information regarding their care. Targets are clearly identified on individual education plans and there are regular multi-disciplinary meetings, which rightly include the student, to assess progress. The behaviour of students is generally excellent but there are a small number of incidents which require a physical intervention by staff. At present, only a small number (approximately 10%) of care staff have received training in positive handling which includes the use of physical intervention. The records of the physical interventions that have taken place are not sufficiently detailed and records indicate that there may be more physical interventions taking place than are currently being recorded as such.

National minimum standards

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

- Staff receive appropriate training and support to recognise and deal with incidences of challenging behaviour or bullying, including to manage their own responses and feelings arising from working with children who have difficult emotional issues. Staff training is regularly refreshed. (NMS 12.3)
- A written record is kept of major sanction instances and the use of any physical intervention. The record is made within 24 hours and is legible. Children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records. The school regularly reviews any incidents of the use of physical intervention restraint, examines trends or issues emerging from this, to enable staff to reflect and learn to inform future practice. (NMS 12.6)

These are the grades for the residential provision

Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	2
Outcomes for residential pupils	1
Quality of residential provision and care	1
Residential pupils' safety	2
Leadership and management of the residential provision	2

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

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

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
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.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons, and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



31 May 2012

Dear Pupils and Students

Inspection of St Mary's Wrestwood Children's Trust TN40 2LU

Thank you for helping us to learn about the school and the college. We really enjoyed our visit. It was good to meet so many of you and to see how well you are doing. I am writing this letter to tell you what we found.

Both the school and college are good and this helps you to make good progress in your learning. You told us how much you enjoy living and learning at St Mary's; you are safe and very well supported, and this helps you to grow into mature young people. There are many interesting things for you to do and those of you who are boarders clearly benefit from the times you have in your houses.

Many of you told us that you think behaviour is very good. We agree with you and think that those of you who have worked hard to improve your work, your communication skills and your behaviour have a right to feel very proud. Sometimes the staff need to hold on to you to stop you hurting yourselves or others. We have asked them to be sure that they are always doing this correctly and keeping a record of when it happens.

Teachers work hard to plan lessons that will help you to make as much progress as you can in many different ways. We have asked them to check with you very regularly how much progress you think you have made in lessons. You can help your teachers by working with them to decide how much you have learnt so that they can know if there is anything that is worrying you that they need to go over again. We have also asked them to plan carefully what they want you to learn so that they can make sure you are gaining the knowledge and understanding that you need.

Everyone who works with you wants to make St Mary's school and college as good as they can be. Some new systems have been introduced to help them to do this and we have suggested that they should be used across all departments. That way, you can all know how well you, and the staff, are doing. You could also gain certificates for some of the work that you do across school, college and care, and we have asked the staff to look at this. I am sure that you will all continue to try your best and do well in the future.

Yours sincerely

Anne Duffy
Her Majesty's Inspector

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