

# St John's School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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**Inspector** Kevin Whatley

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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.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

St John's is a maintained special school and college catering for young people, learners, between the ages of 7 and 19 years who have a learning disability. The school and college is co-educational and provides a service to both day and boarding pupils. The school and college are based at two locations, the school at Seaford and the college in Brighton. There are two boarding houses, one being situated in a residential area and one at the college campus in Brighton. Learners who are aged over 19 and who stay at the college have their own accommodation.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Inspection judgements

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

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of care provided to young people, Learners, is satisfactory. Outcomes for learners are good and in a number of cases outstanding. Many learners make significant progress in their education and social and emotional development, most telling given their starting points. The quality of care is good with residential provision a core aspect of the life of the school and college. The school and college have worked hard to implement a more holistic programme of care which involves the care, therapy, health and education teams working collaboratively to meet the individual needs of learners.
- Learners who verbalised their opinions spoke positively about life at the school and feel it is, 'great' to stay there. Learners were seen to be comfortable in their environment with staff clearly aware of their specific needs. Parents and carers feel positive about the care provided to Learners, and praised the efforts of staff and the extremely good levels of communication.
- In general the school and college ensure learners are successfully kept safe. The school and college take a risk aware, rather than risk overt approach, with learners encouraged to participate fully in activities and life skills programmes in the local community. However inconsistencies in addressing fire safety resulted in fire drills not being carried out as required.
- Residential care is organised in an effective manner and for the benefit of learners. The school and college aspire to improve on standards of care wherever possible, with the needs of learners at the centre of planning and implementation. In general all aspects of care are suitably monitored and reviewed. However short falls regarding fire drills and the signing off of some

incident reports result in an inconsistent approach.

- Learners are looked after by a committed, knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff team. Staff receive extremely good guidance and support and understand the individual needs of learners in their care. Learners share positive and meaningful relationships with staff with many of them making considerable progress as a result.
- A number of improvements have been made since the last inspection. These include the appointment of a behaviour support manager to oversee and implement comprehensive and holistic programmes of intervention and support for learners. Staffing structures have also improved to ensure senior cover is consistently available.
- Six recommendations were made at the last inspection; these have now been met. The school meets the majority of the national minimum standards on this occasion; however two standards are not met.

## **Outcomes for residential pupils**

Outcomes for young people and Learners are good. The ethos of the school and college is one of supporting each learner to reach their potential and to develop in a holistic sense in all aspects of their lives. This results in very positive outcomes for learners who in many cases make significant progress in their educational, social, emotional and personal development.

Learners benefit from positive and meaningful relationships with staff who clearly understand their individual needs. Consistent levels of care and support assist learners to improve their levels of self-confidence and independence. Learners say they, are happy and have clearly developed trusting relationships with the staff who care for them, often over the course of many years.

Learners live in an environment that is warm and relaxed, with staff working hard to create a nurturing and calm atmosphere. Learners clearly enjoy staying at the school and college and are enabled to learn new and exciting skills.

Learners are supported to play an active role in the school and college and wider community. The idea of integration is fundamental with Learners routinely experiencing life away from the school and college in their local community. For instance a number of learners travel to and from school using public transport and have gained valuable life skills as a result. The school and college fully supports the notion of meeting the needs of the whole person and support learners to achieve to the best of their abilities. It is clear that learners develop their skills and talents to an extent that bodes well for their future.

Learners have their views and opinions fully taken into account. Clear and open communication with Learners is a cornerstone of practice with staff being skilled at

understanding the manner in which learners communicate their needs, views and wishes. Formalised processes include the holding of house meetings, with the chief executive and head of care attending meetings to take a first-hand account of learners' views. The school openly displays the contact details for other advocacy services including childline.

Learners have their health care needs met extremely well. The school and college implement a holistic approach to meeting the needs of each learner and employs a number of experts to ensure this is achieved. Emotional well-being is central to meeting such needs with therapeutic interventions readily available to those who need them. Improvements have been made in collaborative working with the care, therapy, education and health teams liaising more closely to ensure a consistent and focused approach.

Learners are provided with very good opportunities to learn independent skills and receive comprehensive support and guidance during periods of transition. Independence programmes provide opportunities to improve skills in mobility, communication, keeping safe and social awareness. Many learners stay on following their statutory schooling and make the transition to undertake programmes of further education in the college. Strong relationships and clear communication across the school and college ensures the process is sensitively addressed with learners able to experience 'taster days' in the college itself. This subsequently reduces levels of fear or anxiety, sensitively enforces ideas of moving toward adulthood and ultimately leads to more successful transitions.

## **Quality of residential provision and care**

Learners are provided with a good quality of boarding. Learners receive excellent levels of pastoral support which enables them to make extremely good, and often, significant progress in many aspects of their lives. The school and college implement a holistic approach to care which clearly focuses on meeting the individual needs of each learner. A multi-disciplinary team includes the education, care, health and therapy teams working toward shared goals. Improvements in communication throughout the school and college have seen a more consistent approach being embedded in practice.

Care staff clearly understand plans of care and intervention and implement them in the day-to-day care of learners. Since the last inspection the school and college's counsellor and, the recently appointed, behaviour support manager, undertake regular observations of interactions between Learners and staff within the residential environment. Such an approach has increased the ability of experts to review first-hand how approaches to care work in practice and indeed their effectiveness. As a result progress is made in building self-esteem, confidence and educational achievement. This is most telling given the extremely low starting points some learners have in this area when they arrive.

Admission to the school and college is carefully considered to ensure the individual needs of the learners can be met. The knowledge of the therapy team, which include experts in occupational therapy and psychology are crucial in assessing suitability. A majority of learners who enter the school and college remain there for many years. Along with learners parents and carers are able to visit the school and college as part of the moving in process. Parents and carers feel they receive very good support during this period and say they are kept informed throughout.

A good standard of care planning is in place which provides an effective process where the needs of learners are identified and assessed in full. Care plans give an accurate picture of learners which guide staff in how to care for their specific needs. Reviews of care take place routinely with learners supported to express their views or opinions. Weekly reports are compiled which provide a useful summary of the learners progress and allow parents/carers and others to be kept fully up to date.

Learners benefit from having regular opportunities to engage in a wide range of activities. Each learner has a programme which matches their needs with activities as a key feature of every evening and weekend. Daily routines include regular activities outside of the school and college site with learners enjoying trips out including bowling, swimming and laser quest. Staff meet the needs of learners by engaging them in indoor games and participate wholeheartedly in engaging them in play which learners clearly enjoy.

The health care needs of young people are well met. The approach in addressing the emotional needs of learners ensures they receive expert and joined up support. The school and college have their own counsellor who can provide one-to-one support, while close links with external health care agencies ensures learners and their parents and carers receive all the professional support they may require. Such an approach is most important given the complex needs many learners have.

Good facilities are available for learners who may fall ill with the on-site qualified health care team providing a very good level of health care. Health care planning ensure plans are put in place for all learners which take account of any physical or medical issues and current treatments. A safe and effective medicine storage and administration process is in place which ensures all medication needs are well met. Since the last inspection the school and college nurses are now allocated to a particular residential house. This has improved the monitoring of medicine administration by care staff and further enhanced relationships with Learners themselves. Learners are encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and receive age appropriate advice and guidance.

Good quality meal provision is in place which provides learners with a nutritious and varied choice of diet. Individual needs are well catered for. During the week learners eat lunch in school and breakfast and dinner in their houses. Learners have input into menu planning within their own houses and seem to enjoy the food on offer.

Learners live in a good standard of accommodation which matches their needs and wishes. Accommodation is located in one of two areas; one being a large detached house situated in the local community and the other a purpose built facility on the college campus. All areas were found to be clean and hygienic with many learners personalising their own bedroom spaces. Some learners have been provided with additional rooms which allows them opportunities to find peace and quiet away from their peers should they wish; such as when the environment is noisy.

Learners are enabled to keep in close contact with family and friends. A number of telephones are available within the residential houses which learners can use in the evenings and at weekends. For some learners contact with their parents/carers is a daily and important aspect of their daily routines. The ease of contact has allowed them to settle into school life and not to feel isolated.

### **Residential pupils' safety**

The outcomes for keeping learners safe are satisfactory. Although there are clear systems in place to monitor fire safety and incidents these have not been consistently implemented; this undermines their effectiveness in practice.

The school and college take safeguarding seriously with all staff receiving training in child protection on a regular basis; new staff undertake this as part of their induction. Senior staff from key positions make up the safeguarding team to ensure all aspects of the school and college are represented, including the care, health and education departments. Such an approach culminates in a consistent response being implemented when child protection concerns, significant incidents or increases in risky behaviours occur. When necessary prompt actions are taken for ensuring that the well-being of learners is in line with the Local Safeguarding Children Board guidance and protocols. A robust recruitment process ensures learners are only cared for by staff who are appropriate to do so. All required checks are completed prior to staff working with learners.

Learners are provided with clear guidance as to how to behave appropriately. The culture of the school and college expects a suitable level of behaviour and attitude, while simultaneously taking into account the often complex needs and comprehension of learners. Such an approach has been further supported with improvements in the area of behaviour management which provides an extremely focused programme of support and intervention. Care staff implement programmes consistently and work hard to establish and consolidate appropriate boundaries. Behaviour management programmes link well with the day-to-day plans of care and reflect a comprehensive overview. As a result learners make significant progress in reducing their most challenging behaviours, including aggression and propensity to leave the residential environment without permission. The frequency of incidents when learners leave without permission is low.

Staff are fully trained to meet the challenging behaviours of learners. All staff receive



restraint training before they are allowed to work with learners. The principles of de-escalation form a core aspect of the approach undertaken. This idea coupled with staff understanding the specific needs of learners, results in a reasonably low level of restraints needing to be used. In some cases the approach taken by staff has led to a significant reduction in the numbers of occasions when learners require physical intervention to manage their behaviour.

Records are completed which generally provide a clear account of events including their outcome. After staff complete the newly introduced reporting format it is forwarded to the behaviour support manager for review and analysis. However a number of incident reports had not been reviewed or signed off by senior members of staff or managers as required by the school and college's own protocols.

High staffing levels ensure behaviours such as bullying are rare. Most learners are supported by one-to-one staffing; some learners require more than one-to-one support and have this provided. Such numbers of staff ensure that interactions between learners and their peers are appropriately supervised with inappropriate behaviours or attitudes being promptly addressed. No learners raised concerns that bullying was a problem and no issues were identified.

The school take a suitably robust approach in assessing the risks learners are to themselves and others. Individual assessments are comprehensive and take account of all known issues such as violence, self harm and vulnerability. Risk assessments are regularly reviewed, updated and endorsed after auditing by senior members of staff. These risk assessments include environmental checks as well as on-site and off-site activities. Risk management is taken seriously, but does not detract from allowing learners to participate fully in activities and their interests.

The approach toward health and safety is inconsistent and must therefore be considered as posing some risks to learners. The maintenance and servicing of equipment is carried out, including the routine checking and testing of electrical and gas appliances. Fire fighting equipment is serviced along with the regular testing of alarms and emergency lighting. However fire drills are not always carried out as required. One residential area had completed regular fire drills, while the second had not had an evacuation drill since February. During the period since the last drill several new members of staff and a new learner had begun working and living there respectively.

## **Leadership and management of the residential provision**

The leadership and management of the residential provision is satisfactory. Management is clear and effective with residential care integral to school and college life. The aims of the residential provision are clearly identified and acted upon in practice. Policies and procedures are comprehensive and cover all aspects of care, support and intervention, being updated and reviewed annually. All records are stored securely and are generally accurate and up to date.

The school and college place the individual needs of learners at the forefront of the provision of care and education. The culture is one of inclusion with learners encouraged and supported to experience and participate in the local community as part of everyday life. A holistic approach further supports the notion of learners being able to develop as a whole person. The strong emphasis on integration and equality ensures learners are continually provided with care and guidance which enables them to achieve to the very best of their abilities.

The school and college strive to be the best it can be and have appropriately high aspirations for learners. A number of improvements have been made which confirms the commitment to develop further. These have included increases in the number of full-time care staff, amended staffing structures which ensures a senior member of staff on duty on every shift and better support for staff. The employment of a behaviour support manager has seen the importance of intervention planning and strategies initiated with learners become more focused and professionalised. This has already resulted in significant improvements in behaviour for some learners.

Very good numbers of staff are deployed day and night to meet the needs of learners. All existing staff are qualified to the required level 3 standard. Since the last inspection the school and college have restructured the manner in which they provide staff with such training although have yet to finalise how this will operate in practice for new staff. A suitable balance of experienced and newer staff work hard to support the provision of residential care. Since the last inspection the staffing structure has been amended leading to all shifts now having a senior member of staff on duty. A number of new full-time staff have also been recruited which has seen the need to use agency staffing all but cease. This ensures learners are cared for by a consistent staff team who understand the specific care needs of each of them. The gender balance of care staff has improved slightly although the team remains predominately female. The school and college are doing all they can to improve this imbalance and continue to address the situation in future development planning. Care staff confirmed they receive, 'great support' and, 'love working in the school and college'.

Complaints are dealt with swiftly and appropriately, while the views of learners are sought in matters which affect them. Few formal complaints have been made since the last inspection. Ideas and opinions from learners are routinely sought and considered through such mediums as house meetings and key-work sessions. No additional process is currently in place to gain and evaluate the views of learners or those of stakeholders.

The monitoring of the care provision is inconsistent. Monitoring visits are completed by a suitably qualified independent person as required. The subsequent reports provide an appropriate critique of care standards and practice and take account of the views of learners. All records and care practices are reviewed internally by managers. These include the monitoring of records and care plans. However

shortfalls identified in fire safety and the signing off of incident reports, indicate a lack of robustness regarding in-house monitoring.

The school and college establish and maintain positive and effective contact with parents, carers and placing authorities. The school and college ensure that extremely good communication is maintained with parents and carers.

The majority of national minimum standards are met, but two are not met. Three areas were identified that the school and college should consider so as to improve further.

## **National minimum standards**

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

- In addition, fire drills are regularly (at least once per term) carried out in 'residential time'. (NMS 7.2)
- The records specified in Appendix 2 (Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards) are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate. (NMS 13.3)

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

- ensure incident forms are reviewed and signed off by senior staff or managers before being forwarded to the behaviour support manager as required by the school and colleges own protocols
- ensure new staff begin working toward obtaining a relevant minimum of level 3 qualification within 3 months of confirmation of employment
- consider introducing a formalised quality assurance process to evidence how learners and stakeholders feel about the standard of care provided.

**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.**



10/12/2012

Dear Learners

### **Inspection of St John's School**

I am an inspector from Ofsted. You may remember that a little while ago I came and inspected the school and college to see what it was like living there.

I really enjoyed meeting and talking with you and being able to look around Framfield and College View and having meals with some of you. I also liked talking with staff and finding out how they look after you. I had to look at huge amounts of paperwork and talked a lot with Mr Hughes and Miss Harman.

I think your school and college provides a very good caring and supportive place for you to live. You said there are different members of staff who you can talk with and that they listen to you. I was impressed with how well staff knew you and it looked like you have very good relationships with them. I was really impressed with how well some of you had learned to stay calm and talk to staff when you are feeling sad or angry.

I thought you enjoy lots of activities, especially the ones where you can try new and exciting experiences. I noticed that a lot of you were having fun with staff in the evenings and were able to run around and play loads. I think your health is looked after well, especially when you need extra help with your feelings or thoughts. I saw that you receive a variety of meals with plenty of food to eat which most of you seemed to like.

I really feel that staff do their jobs well and work very hard to help you through your time at school and college and support you to learn and develop in many ways.

You live in houses that are in a good condition and are looked after by staff who really care about you. It was really nice to see how some of you have personalised your own bedrooms.

At the end of the inspection I asked the school and college to keep improving a few things. Like making sure fire drills happen regularly and improve how records are written.

Yours sincerely,

Kevin Whatley