

St Francis Community Special School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Robert Curr

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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 Francis Residential Special School is a maintained school that provides residential care within a 24-hour curriculum for young people up to the age of 19 years with medical and/or physical disabilities. The school provides a full curriculum for nursery, primary, secondary and post-16 pupils.

Boarding is available from Monday afternoon to Friday morning during school term time. There is accommodation for up to 18 residential pupils each night. Pupils choose to stay over and different pupils stay each night; currently 15 are in residence.

The school is situated on a residential estate in Lincoln. All accommodation is on one level and there are three separate living areas. Each of these areas has a lounge with adjoining bedrooms and bathrooms.

The residential provision was last inspected in June 2011.

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

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

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

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The outstanding quality of care in the residential provision significantly affects the quality of the lives of residential pupils. They participate in many new opportunities, building confidence, independence and realising their potential.
- The extremely high quality care is inclusive and responsive, flexibly meeting the needs of each residential pupil.
- The school manages residential pupils' individual health requirements extremely well, including the provision of fresh healthy food and the proactive promotion of healthy lifestyle choices.
- The safety and well-being of residential pupils is key. Safeguarding practices are excellent and staff work cohesively with external professionals and outside agencies.
- The leadership and management of the residential provision promote a highly organised, safe environment. Time in residence is planned with meticulous care to meet the individual needs of the residential pupils.
- Parents and professionals are consistent in their high praise of the residential school and the staff.
- There is a continued focus on development, resulting in significant improvements since the last inspection.
- All national minimum standards are met.

Outcomes for residential pupils

The outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Pupils benefit greatly from their residential experience and highly individualised care. The atmosphere is relaxed and fun. They make significant progress with their social skills, independence skills, confidence and self-esteem. Teachers report that the pupils' readiness to learn has a positive impact on their achievements during the school day. Quotes from parents include: 'My daughters self-esteem has increased and has improved her reading and writing. She has learned to share with others and herself expression has grown', and, 'my son has really progressed with his independence skills and first class relationships have been fostered with the residential team.' One parent is particularly proud that their child is among pupils who have attained the Duke of Edinburgh Award.

Relationships between residential pupils are extremely positive. Regular meetings provide a forum to reflect on the day's events. This helps them develop an understanding and acceptance of each other. Pupils also develop a comprehensive understanding of friendships and relationships. Aspects such as trust, responsibility, honesty, respect and effort are strongly encouraged through activities and discussions. These promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity and understanding of other cultures and religions. Pupils say that they enjoy spending time in residence and say: 'we like doing fun activities, like information and communication technology, sports, crafts and arts; we go on trips and have parties for the Olympic Games and the Queen's Jubilee.'

Residential pupils increase in confidence, self-awareness and emotional resilience. They are extremely positive about relationships with the staff and identify all care staff as easy to talk to. Residential pupils know to approach any of the care staff if they are anxious, worried or upset. One residential pupil said, 'we can talk to any of the staff and they help us.' Emotional well-being is high and pupils report that staff help them to feel good about themselves in the way that they show care. For example: staff washing pupils' hair, in line with intimate care plans; breakfast for those arriving early and enough individual staff time to discuss any worries.

Care staff support residential pupils to name and achieve individual targets and areas they would like to work on in future. They tailor support individually, monitor and review all targets, and evaluate them with pupils and parents. Parents and carers say this has a positive impact at home as children become more self-reliant. Pupils make successful transitions. They have hopes, aspirations, and a direction for the future. A parent summarised: 'There has been a lot of thought and input into transition into adult life and it has been very well managed, our son has achieved goals beyond our expectations'.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision and care is outstanding. Highly effective and cohesive links between pastoral and academic staff result in exceptional residential care for pupils. Consequently, pupils thrive and progress socially and academically. Teachers reflect that reading is greatly improved as a direct result of the residential provision. Pupils describe confidently how staff address issues, talking to their teachers to resolve problems that have arisen during the day. Consequently, pupils feel secure and benefit greatly from a consistent approach. Parents and carers are extremely positive about the care provided. One said: 'I am so impressed with the residential provision, it is fantastic', and another, 'the whole school is excellent'.

Detailed, effective care plans are compiled with parents prior to admission to the residential provision in the 'All About Me' booklet. Good records, to which pupils have contributed fully, ensure constructive contribution to reviews and provide clear evidence for parents and professionals of progress. An external professional said: 'Communication with the staff team is excellent and the staff are always well informed about each pupil in their care.'

Residential pupils enjoy a wide range of stimulating experiences and opportunities. They make choices on a daily basis regarding the evening activities. Pupils exercise individual preference and choose from options such as art and craft, cookery, swimming. Current seasonal favourites are singing carols at local churches and visiting the local Christmas market in town. These activities help them develop a wide range of skills, including: teamwork; turn-taking; fitness; social skills; and creativity. Pupils talk fondly of the activities they do, for example, they proudly showed photos and displays depicting their experience of a day with the fire rescue service.

The school promotes all aspects of pupils' emotional wellbeing and physical health through the comprehensive knowledge of the staff team, good communication with parents and carers and effective links with external agencies. Pupils say that staff discreetly ask individuals if they would like to talk about why they may be upset or angry. They are looked after well when they feel ill and they make good progress in taking responsibility for their health. Consequently, the diet and physical well-being of a number of residential pupils has improved' they feel valued and well cared for.

Catering arrangements within the school are excellent. Residential pupils benefit from high quality meals made from fresh ingredients. No convenience foods are used and quality meat and dairy produce is locally sourced. Food is plentiful and fresh fruit and vegetables are always available. The well trained catering team communicate effectively with residential staff about individual dietary requirements and preferences. They pay exceptional attention to detail, including unobtrusive adaptation of menus to suit individual choices. They bake each residential pupil a birthday cake and celebrate special events with themed meals. Pupils eat meals with enthusiasm and say they enjoy all of the meals.

The residential accommodation is warm, inviting and well furnished. There is extensive personalisation; displays represent pupils' achievements and activities. Pupils personalise their bed spaces and have secure storage space for possessions. Pupils also have access to a wide number of activity and educational resources and outdoor areas, for games and sports; this provides fresh air and physical activity to promote healthy lifestyles. The innovative creation and use of resources have promoted a warm, colourful environment that is clean, tidy and safe.

Pupils can contact their parents and any safeguarding agency with ease and privacy. Staff make regular contact with parents and carers to discuss progress and any concerns. Parents are very positive about how this works, one said: 'I could not wish for anything more from the residence. We have no anxieties about his care.'

Residential pupils' safety

The safety of the residential pupils is outstanding. The school gives the highest priority to the safety of pupils while allowing them to participate in a full and varied curriculum. There is thorough assessment of children's needs, vulnerabilities and risks prior to admission to the school and early intervention and identification of concerns. This ensures well planned and tailored care that meets individual needs and enables pupils to take reasonable risks and enjoy challenging, exciting activities. Pupils thoroughly enjoyed a visit to the Paralympic Games in London. Staff managed this trip extremely well; they balanced risk assessment and shared safety rules with pupils enabling excitement and safe and full participation.

Clear safeguarding procedures fully support residential pupils' welfare and safety and are comprehensively understood by trained, confident staff. There is strong partnership working with external agencies to safeguard children. The local authority describes the school safeguarding practice as very proactive. Stringent systems for the recruitment of and checks on staff ensure that pupils are only in contact with safe and suitable adults and are protected from potential harm. Parents emphasised: 'The school are outstanding in their communication with myself and with social workers. They inform us immediately of anything that might concern my child.'

Behaviour during residential time is very good. Pupils respond well to consistent, positive reinforcement, firm boundaries and the highly nurturing ethos. Staff promote behavioural expectations exceptionally well. Pupils are central to sharing and developing these. They say that they are regularly reminded about being kind to one another and their personal safety. Staff are skilled and adept in bringing out the best in pupils with a strong focus on positive encouragement. Consequently, pupils strive to do well and take pride in treating one another with respect and adhering to agreed rules. Residential pupils report that they feel safe and secure and quote: 'Staff always make us all happy. If something worries us we can talk to them about it.'

The environment is physically safe and secure. Regular safety checks are carried out to ensure that appliances are safely maintained, fire prevention equipment is in place and hazards are minimised. This protects pupils from the dangers of fire and accidents. All pupils strongly agree that they feel safe in the residential provision. The innovative creation and use of resources have promoted a warm, colourful environment that is clean, tidy and safe.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. High quality care and provision have resulted significant progress in social and personal development for pupils. They are comfortable and feel at home in the residential provision. They confidently contribute their views about the provision to inform the inspection. Staff are proud to work at the school and fully understood and translate the aims of the residential provision into extremely good practice.

The well-organised residential provision is managed with energy, efficiency and drive by the head of care and residential staff team. The school management team fully supports residential staff and clear roles and lines of accountability ensure that well-organised systems, staff and records benefit pupils. The team works extremely well together to run an exceptional service that is highly responsive to the diverse and changing needs of the residential pupils. Different areas of expertise and skill are utilised well to enhance the residential experience for pupils, who subsequently relish their residential time. Established systems work very well and the staff team strive to ensure all pupils feel equally valued and included. Staff deployment is a key strength. They support pupils closely and fairly, providing fun, guidance and emotional security at all times. Residential pupils have formed strong attachments to key staff and this supports them emotionally while spending time away from home.

Staff receive regular supervision from line managers. This reflective process identifies training needs and supports staff in their professional development. Consequently, residential pupils benefit from high calibre, insightful staff team who are knowledgeable and professional in their practice. They support each other and feel confident enough to challenge each other too. This has resulted in a team who constantly improve, including areas of practice relating to behavioural support. This has provided an extra element to safeguarding pupils and providing support that is carefully tailored to the changing life events of the residential pupils.

The school is monitored both internally and externally, and the findings considered carefully, ensuring that the systems work to drive improvements. There have been no complaints about the provision. In contrast, compliments are abundant. The views of the pupils are sought daily and used to make changes. Overall, outstanding practice has been sustained and the school has evidenced areas of improvement and plans for further development since the last inspection. This has promoted better outcomes for residential pupils and demonstrates how the school values the pupils and strives to continually improve.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

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 Pupils

Inspection of St Francis Community Special School

Can I start by thanking you for all your help during the recent inspection of the residential area in St Francis School. Thank you for filling in the questionnaires and contributing to the inspection. Your parents and carers also spoke with me. I found them very helpful.

I was very impressed by the way that you care for one another.

The staff do their very best to care for you and keep you safe. You told me that there are some rules in residence but you all understand that they are there to keep you safe. I was really impressed that you had the confidence to show me around the residence and school.

Thank you for letting me share tea and breakfast with you. People work really hard to make sure you get the food that you like and that it is good for you. It is your confidence that helps you give ideas to the student council and make things change for the better.

I think that the school offers you a fantastic stay in the residence.

All of you said that you love your sports and music activities, and I enjoyed doing arts and crafts with you the day I came. The displays and photographs show the wide and exciting range of activities you take part in. You are quite rightly proud of your involvement in the Paralympic Games.

Your school achieved an outstanding judgment from Ofsted.

I really enjoyed meeting you and spending time in your residence.

Yours sincerely,

Robert Curr

