

St Mary's School

St. Marys School, Maynards Green, HEATHFIELD, East Sussex, TN21 0BT

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| Inspection dates | 12/06/2013 to 14/06/2013 |
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| Overall effectiveness | Outstanding | 1 |
| Outcomes for residential pupils | Outstanding | 1 |
| Quality of residential provision and care | Outstanding | 1 |
| Residential pupils' safety | Outstanding | 1 |
| Leadership and management of the residential provision | Outstanding | 1 |

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Pupils thrive in an environment where staff recognise their individual strengths and vulnerabilities. They make significant personal development and progress in their social skills, confidence and self-esteem.
- Positive, sensitive and nurturing relationships with experienced and committed staff enable pupils to trust adults who care for them and benefit from their support and guidance.
- Pupils are extremely positive about their residential experience. The 24 hour curriculum provides stimulating and challenging activities which extend and enrich their social experiences and provide opportunities for them to develop new skills and interests.
- Robust safeguarding procedures ensure pupils are safe. Pupils' health and welfare are extremely well supported by staff ensuring all their health needs addressed.
- Strong, effective management ensure high standards of care and a continuous focus on improving the residential provision to provide opportunities for pupils to develop and make progress. The residential provision is an integral part of the school and central in advancing pupils' academic, personal, social and emotional development.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

Information about this inspection

The school had three hours' notice of this inspection. Pupils showed the inspector around the residential facilities and the school. The inspector had supper twice with residential pupils and lunch with school pupils. The inspector interviewed key staff including the executive head, deputy head, head of care, business manager, lead staff for child protection and safeguarding, senior residential staff and residential staff. The inspector attended a meeting of residential pupils and accompanied residential pupils on a fishing activity in the community. The inspector examined key policies and records.

Inspection team

Janet Hunnam

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

St Mary's School is a specialist residential special school that is part of a federation maintained by East Sussex County Council. St Mary's School offers a 24 hour curriculum for boys between the ages of 9 and 16 who have an educational statement for behavioural, emotional and social difficulties.

The school and residential accommodation are on one site situated in grounds between Heathfield and Horam in East Sussex. Residential accommodation is situated within the main school building. The residential provision in the main building was redesigned and refurbished in 2007. The school is a weekly boarding establishment, with flexible boarding provision for 12 places. At the time of the inspection there were 66 pupils on roll. The residential provision was last inspected on 14 November 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Provide details of the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures in the policy for pupils who leave school without permission.
- Consider the direct involvement of care staff in pupil reviews.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding. Pupils choose to reside at the school and speak very positively about their residential experience. They thoroughly enjoy their time in the residential setting and make significant personal development and progress. This includes improving their social skills, their interaction with their peers and their confidence and self-esteem.

Pupils have extremely strong relationships with staff who clearly put the needs of the pupils and their welfare at the centre of their practice. Staff ensure pupils receive consistent routines and boundaries alongside sensitive and nurturing care. Consequently, pupils develop trust in the adults who guide and support them. A parent commented that this trust enables her son 'to try even harder, to go the extra mile and make even further progress.' The ethos of the residential provision includes acceptance and respect for each other. Pupils are tolerant and supportive of each other. A parent remarked that staff 'encourage responsibility, acceptance and respect for others.' As a result of this approach, behaviour is of a high standard.

Numerous opportunities exist for pupils to put forward their views and contribute to community life within the school. The school council is a formal forum for putting forward pupils' views. Formal residential meetings enable pupils to comment and put forward suggestions for activities, menus and resources. Pupils actively engage in these meetings making positive suggestions and constructive comments to improve their residential experience. Surveys and questionnaires add to the consultation process. Informally, staff consult pupils on an on-going basis. Pupils are confident that their views are taken seriously and are considered by staff.

Pupils benefit from having their physical and emotional health promoted to an excellent standard. They have their medical needs met and receive support from specialist health professionals where needed such as speech and language therapy, input from a psychologist and community health professionals. Pupils are aware of keeping themselves fit and healthy. A pupil commented 'I need to get outside and run around so that I am calmer later in the evening.'

There is a strong focus on preparing pupils for their next stage. Sensitive planning well in advance of them leaving the school, taking into account their specific abilities and vulnerabilities, enable pupils to develop the skills and capabilities to cope with their transition. Programmes are in place to build confidence in their own skills and become more independent.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Excellent support by an experienced and committed staff team provides nurturing, sensitive and highly individualised care. Pupils have opportunities to experience the extended day and participate in activities as part of their induction to the residential provision before choosing to stay the night and accessing the 24-hour curriculum. This ensures that pupils have established relationships with staff, are happy accessing the service and are keen to participate and benefit from all it offers.

During the initial residential period, staff are particularly sensitive to the needs of pupils who may be anxious staying away from their family. They provide perceptive support and close liaison with the family to help the pupil settle in to residential life. A parent commented that communication is excellent with staff, who telephone when they have concerns but also when a pupil has made a significant achievement. There is 'a real sense of working together to help my son make progress.' Pastoral and academic staff work closely together to ensure a continuity and consistency of approach. Care staff have an important input into the school curriculum further

strengthening the links between school and care staff to effectively support pupils in achieving positive outcomes. More involvement by residential staff in pupils' reviews would further develop close working relationships and benefit pupils through direct reporting of their progress.

Health plans are detailed and comprehensive and contain clear and relevant information to ensure pupils' health and welfare needs are met. Pupils contribute to their care plan by setting themselves targets to work towards in the residential setting. These targets are simple, associated with their individual needs and linked to the incentive scheme to reward them for their achievements. Staff regularly review these plans with pupils and record their progress toward their goals. This ensures pupils are fully involved and aware of areas where they can focus on improvements and progress.

Pupils are enthusiastic about the activities offered and positively engage in a wide range of leisure pursuits both on site and in the wider community. They choose what activities they participate in according to their personal interests and develop new skills and constructive hobbies and pastimes, which enrich their social experiences. Furthermore, there are opportunities within the school's structure to develop their leadership and inter-personal skills, for example, taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and residential trips away to Dartmoor and Snowdonia.

Arrangements to promote and maintain pupils' health and well-being are rigorous. A qualified nurse attends the school for one day a week and is available to see individual pupils in relation to their health requirements. She also delivers health education to small groups and individuals across a range of pertinent subjects. Additionally she leads health education projects across the whole school such as raising awareness of testicular cancer and promoting high standards of personal hygiene. She supports residential staff in meeting pupils' specific health needs and ensures they have specific training to respond to individual health needs. Additionally, a member of staff is responsible for overseeing health plans and the administration of medication. This is done effectively and robustly ensuring that individual needs are met thoroughly and conscientiously. Clear arrangements are in place if a pupil is unwell. Specialist health services are available at the school such as speech and language therapy and a psychologist to support pupils with specific needs in such areas. Staff and the school nurse are proactive in making referrals to external health professionals to meet specific health needs and benefit pupils.

Pupils enjoy the food on offer, which is healthy and varied. The school sources good quality meat locally and pupils enjoy wholesome, nourishing meals. Special dietary requirements are catered for. Meal times are sociable, well-ordered occasions with staff interacting with pupils and gently prompting them to eat appropriately.

Accommodation for pupils is spacious, well maintained and furnished to a high standard. Colourful and vibrant displays of pupils' activities record their achievements and give them a sense of belonging and promote their self-esteem. Pupils report they are very happy with their bedrooms. Feedback in relation to their physical environment is positive with no negative comments. Pupils are able to contact their families by telephone and speak to them in private.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

The arrangements in place to ensure pupils are safe and protected from harm are outstanding. Pupils report they feel safe and parents confirm their safety when staying at the school. A parent stated 'I don't give a second thought or worry when he is staying at the school. I know he is completely safe.'

Safeguarding pupils is a priority. Recruitment processes are robust ensuring that only adults who have been checked as being appropriate to work with children are employed. Clear policies and

procedures reflect the vulnerabilities of pupils and these, together with up-to-date training fully support staff to provide excellent safeguarding measures. All staff receive appropriate child protection training. The head of care is the lead child protection officer and she is supported by an experienced and able safeguarding officer. Staff are confident in their safeguarding role and alert in recognising causes for concern and taking appropriate action to protect pupils.

Staff take bullying seriously and pupils report that it is not a problem. One pupil reported that staff 'are always around to sort things out'. Pupils have access to forms in their bedrooms to report any form of bullying but no pupil has reported any incident. Anti-bullying posters are clearly on display to raise pupils' awareness. Pupils do not leave the site without permission but procedures are in place for staff to take prompt action to protect pupils should this occur. The school has effective relationships with the local police but the policy and procedure does not refer to the local Runaway and Missing from Home and Care protocols and procedures.

Promoting positive behaviour is a clear strength of the school. The behaviour of pupils towards each other and staff is excellent. High expectations of pupils to respect others, their environment and take responsibility for their actions are key themes. Physical intervention within the residential provision is extremely rare and there have been no recorded incidents of restraint since the last inspection. Pupils have individual personal handling plans with detailed identification of intervention and de-escalation strategies, which are frequently updated. Within an ethos of positive reinforcement, pupils respond to the credit system for appropriate behaviour. Staff use sanctions suitably but infrequently to underline the notion to pupils of taking responsibility for their actions. The low incidence of restraints and sanctions demonstrate that pupils are benefiting from positive relationships with staff, having clear targets and goals and an effective incentive system through the social credits scheme. They are learning to self-regulate their behaviour in a very positive manner.

Safety of the school and residential provision is monitored effectively. A range of health and safety checks and fire safety checks are carried out regularly including regular fire drills for residential pupils. Risk assessments are rigorous and regularly reviewed and updated but do not limit pupils from engaging fully in activities and pursuits. This highlights a positive risk-aware approach rather than risk-averse. The school has comprehensive systems in place to ensure that the safety of pupils is maintained to an excellent standard.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

The leadership and management of the residential provision is outstanding. The head of school is supported by a committed and experienced management team. Senior academic managers and the manager of the residential provision work closely together to ensure the residential provision is fully integrated into the school and is central in advancing pupils' academic, personal, social and emotional development.

Experienced, well-trained staff continually strive to enhance the care and welfare of pupils. Pupils benefit from clear, well-known structures, routines and boundaries, which contribute to them feeling safe when they stay. Staff know the pupils and their families very well enabling them to provide highly individualised care, support and guidance. High staffing levels allow for individual and group needs to be fully met. Staff are fully supported by an enthusiastic head of care who is continually striving to improve the residential provision for pupils.

Staff receive regular supervision and annual appraisals. Communication and information sharing amongst all staff is frequent, resulting in prompt interventions to support pupils and ensuring a consistently high quality service for pupils. Staff receive regular training to ensure they have the skills and competencies to deliver excellent standards of care.

The head of care regularly monitors residential provision, which ensures the service continues to evolve to provide opportunities for pupils to develop and make progress. Visits by a governor further underpin monitoring and evaluation of the provision to maintain high standards of care. Development of the residential provision has a high priority within the school's development plan with detailed strategies to ensure national minimum standards are fully met and the school continues to drive forward improvements.

There have been no complaints since the last inspection. Pupils are aware of how they can make a complaint but because of their trusting relationships with staff and their confidence in approaching staff, any concerns are dealt with promptly without resort to formal procedures.

Pupils have a wide range of highly diverse and complex needs, which the staff team address fully. Staff are acutely aware of the specific vulnerabilities of pupils and work to ensure that all pupils feel valued and respected. Parents report excellent communication with the school.

What inspection judgements mean

| Grade | Judgement | Description |
|---------|-------------|--|
| Grade 1 | Outstanding | A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements. |
| Grade 2 | Good | A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements. |
| Grade 3 | Adequate | A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides. |
| Grade 4 | Inadequate | A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses. |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 114681 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC050392 |
| DfE registration number | 845/7011 |

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.

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| Type of school | Maintained |
| Number of boarders on roll | 12 |
| Gender of boarders | Boys |
| Age range of boarders | 11 to 16 |
| Headteacher | Mr Frank Stanford |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 14/11/2012 |
| Telephone number | 01435 812278 |
| Email address | office@stmarys-horam.e-sussex.sch.uk |

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