

# St Mary's school and sixth form college (part of the Talking Trust)

Wrestwood Road, BEXHILL-ON-SEA, East Sussex, TN40 2LU

**Inspection dates** 15/10/2013 to 17/10/2013

|  |                   |          |
|--|-------------------|----------|
| <b>Overall effectiveness</b>                           | <b>Inadequate</b> | <b>4</b> |
| Outcomes for residential pupils                        | Adequate          | 3        |
| Quality of residential provision and care              | Adequate          | 3        |
| Residential pupils' safety                             | Inadequate        | 4        |
| Leadership and management of the residential provision | Inadequate        | 4        |

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision is inadequate because

- The residential provision provides residential pupils with adequate outcomes and an adequate quality of care. There are a number of minimum standards for residential special schools which are not met. Safety arrangements for residential pupils are inadequate.
- Previously good leadership and management of the residential provision have not been sustained. Staff vacancies, interim senior leadership arrangements and higher than expected pupil numbers for September 2013 have impacted negatively on the organisation of the residential service. Leadership and management arrangements are inadequate. The senior leadership team acknowledges the need for improvement within the residential provision and have development plans in place. However, these plans are yet to be fully tested for their effectiveness.
- Opportunities for residential pupils to develop personally and socially are reasonable; although current staff shortages are impacting on consistency of access to community-based activities.
- Residential pupils' feedback demonstrates that the majority enjoy their boarding experience and are very positive about the residential staff team. Positive feedback about the residential provision has been received from parents. Relationships between residential pupils and care staff are extremely positive.
- Diversity is well-celebrated across all the residential provision, and throughout the school as a whole. However, there are some areas of inequality for residential pupils. These relate to the standard of accommodation, weekend care arrangements and the quality of individual pupils' records. The school is aware of these specific areas. There are both immediate and longer term plans in place to address these shortfalls.

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school does not meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The details are listed in the full report.

## Information about this inspection

This inspection was announced in the morning, and the three social care inspectors arrived at the school during the afternoon of the same day. Seven out of the eight residential houses were inspected. Residential pupils' feedback was obtained via Ofsted surveys completed during the inspection, through evening activities and three shared mealtimes and in general discussions (including observations of a house meeting). Staff, senior residential staff, school multi-disciplinary staff, and parents' feedback was sought either in person, through surveys or over the telephone. Records and policies relating to the safety and welfare of residential pupils were sampled and scrutinised.

## Inspection team

|               |                            |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| Anna Williams | Lead social care inspector |
| Mary Candlin  | Social care inspector      |
| Sean Tarpey   | Social care inspector      |

# Full report

## Information about this school

St Mary's school and college is a non-maintained mixed residential special school for 126 children aged between 7 – 19 years. Pupils attend the college from 16 years onwards, into adulthood. There are currently 103 residential pupils. The residential accommodation is provided in eight houses, five of which are on the main school site and three are located within the nearby local community. The school is situated in Bexhill-On-Sea and caters for children with severe and complex speech, language and communication disabilities. Pupils may also have additional physical and medical difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, autism, epilepsy, acquired brain injury and hearing impairments. The residential provision had its last full inspection on 30 May 2012 and had a subsequent monitoring visit on 6 February 2013.

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

- Ensure that residential pupils who move accommodation for weekend care undertake fire evacuation drills in both settings at reasonable intervals to ensure they are aware of emergency procedures.
- Ensure that all residential pupils' house meetings are recorded, that minutes are produced in suitable communication formats, and these minutes are accessible to children.
- Ensure that children's complaints are recorded, any actions taken are detailed and the outcome clearly stated.
- **The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.**
  - A suitable statement of the school's principles and practice is available to parents and staff, is made known to children through an appropriate method of communication and is seen to work in practice. The statement describes the overall purpose of the school and describes any theoretical or therapeutic model underpinning the practice of the school. It also explains the ethos and philosophy of the school, and provides an outline of provision for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. (NMS 1)
  - Where necessary, a child has a clear individual health and welfare plan or similar record, containing relevant health and welfare information provided by parents/carers and recording significant health and welfare needs and issues. This record should be agreed by parents/carers and include: records of developmental checks; health monitoring required by staff; intimate care or bodily functions requiring staff help; and the involvement of a child's parents/carers or significant others in health and welfare issues. (NMS 3.12)
  - Suitable sleeping accommodation is provided for children. Where children are aged 8 years or over, sleeping accommodation for boys is separate from sleeping accommodation for girls. (NMS 5.1)
  - The school has a written policy on compliance with relevant health and safety laws which is effectively implemented. (NMS 6.1)
  - 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)
  - Schools operate safe recruitment procedures and vet staff in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of

State (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 14.1)

- There is a sufficient number of competent staff deployed appropriately, both as a staff group and on individual shifts, to fulfil the school's Statement of Purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the school. (NMS 15.1)
- Records of staff working in the school demonstrate sufficient competent staff are deployed and that contingency plans are in place in the event of a shortfall in staffing levels. (NMS 15.2)
- All existing care staff have attained a relevant minimum level 3 qualification or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies. All new staff engaged from the commencement of these Standards hold these qualifications or begin working towards them within 3 months of confirmation of employment. (NMS 19.2)
- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)
- The school keeps a register showing: For each child resident at the school - the dates of admission and departure of each child, who was responsible for their placement in the school, where they were living/accommodated prior to arriving at the school, where they are living/accommodated on leaving the school, and the placing authority and legal status (if applicable); duty rosters recording the identities of the staff and other persons who actually worked at the school or with children from the school, by day and night. The above records are retained for at least 5 years from the date of the last entry. (NMS 22.4)

## Inspection judgements

### Outcomes for residential pupils

### Adequate

Outcomes for residential pupils are adequate.

The majority of residential pupils are positive about their boarding experience. Comments from residential pupils include, 'it's like home from home', and 'I am happy here at [this school]'. The atmosphere within the residential houses is positive across all areas. Friendship suppers and joint activities allow for pupils to build positive peer attachments. Behaviour within the residential houses is good.

Individual residential pupils' interests and talents are promoted through after-school club attendance. Residential pupils maintain a healthy lifestyle through regular physical activity such as swimming, walking and other sports. Diversity is well celebrated through recognition of different religious festivals and customs. This supports learning about different cultures.

Residential pupils' house meetings take place on a weekly basis. These provide opportunities for residential pupils to be involved in the running and decision making around their house. However, the records of these meetings are inconsistent across the accommodation bases. In some houses, minutes of these meetings are taken, translated into suitable communication formats and these are shared with children. However, in some houses only some meetings are recorded, minutes are only typed and these are kept in the staff office. This means not all residential pupils with complex communication needs are fully supported to be part of current consultation systems.

Residential pupils make good progress with steps towards independence. Residential pupils share daily tasks around the houses, like cooking, cleaning and laundry. The focus of individual goals is around promoting independence, dependent on pupils' age and understanding. One pupil said since boarding, 'I am a lot more independent now.' Pupils make consistent progress with independent travel goals around the local community, either on foot and via public transport. This assists pupils now and into adulthood.

### Quality of residential provision and care

### Adequate

The quality of the residential provision is adequate.

The arrangements for healthcare, including both physical and emotional health needs, are strong. Systems in place for the administration and monitoring of medication and health needs are effective. The quality of the catering is good. Residential pupils said 'we all get well fed here', and 'I like the food, because we get to choose and it's healthy'. Pastoral care and support for residential pupils is adequate. Residential pupils confirm that they maintain contact with family and friends who are important to them.

Individual safeguarding and individual care plans adequately detail the individual and unique needs of each residential pupil. However, individual risk assessments do not detail adequately the action staff must take in order to reduce known risks.

There is a reasonable range of activities in which residential pupils can take part. Residential pupils commented 'I never get bored' and 'I have made lots of friends here.' Activities in which pupils have taken part include visits to gym club, community drama group, cadets, trips to local towns, bowling and youth clubs. This provides them with opportunities to try new experiences, socialise and be actively involved in the local community.

Since the last inspection, a new residential house has opened within the local community. This

offers 17 residential pupils spacious and modern living areas and bedrooms. This well-designed house has excellent facilities such as a large computer room, and large food preparation room. Other residential houses have benefited from refurbishment and redecoration. This also enhances the residential experience for pupils who stay within these houses. However, other accommodation areas do not offer the same standard of decoration and communal space. This means there is some inequality of experience for residential pupils within the school. The school is aware of the differences. It has a longer term plan to modernise the accommodation areas which require it.

At weekends, some residential houses close and some residential pupils move to spend the weekend at other residential houses. Three of the current residential pupils who move, have to sleep on temporary fold-out beds at the weekend. This is not a suitable sleeping arrangement. This also highlights another inequality of experience for some residential pupils.

### **Residential pupils' safety**

### **Inadequate**

Safeguarding arrangements within the residential provision are inadequate.

Residential pupils say they feel safe in the houses. Of surveys returned to Ofsted, a small number said that the school did not stop bullies. This was not substantiated during the inspection. There have been no residential pupils reported missing since the last full inspection. The school liaises with the local police appropriately to share information relating to the welfare of pupils. Allegations or suspicions of harm are dealt with promptly and appropriately to ensure the safety and welfare of residential pupils.

Safeguarding and vetting procedures for permanent residential staff are adequate. The school has recently increased its use of agency staff due to staff vacancies. However, the same safe recruitment rigour is not applied to the appointment and vetting of agency staff. This compromises residential pupils' safety.

Positive behaviour management strategies are used effectively. A new recording system has been implemented since the last full inspection. This assists the multi-disciplinary teams within the school to monitor patterns and trends and take action as appropriate. Consequently, the use of sanctions and physical interventions is low.

The school site and residential accommodation present as well-maintained environments. A recent external audit of health and safety produced an 'average' rating with action points. The school is preparing an action plan to address these shortfalls. Observations within residential pupils bedrooms showed that a small number of electrical appliances, such as bedside lamps, had not been tested or are overdue a test. The school took immediate action to confirm these items are safe. However, internal health and safety checks had not identified these items as untested or overdue.

Fire drills take place at least termly within 'residential time'. However, the school does not complete weekend fire drills. Weekend boarders who move houses have personal emergency evacuation plans that detail both accommodation settings. However, the school cannot demonstrate that residential pupils who stay at weekends have practised leaving a building they will be less familiar with, either during the day or night.

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

### **Inadequate**

The leadership and management of the residential provision is inadequate.

The school has a prospectus which includes a section on the 'residential experience'. This gives parents and placing authorities some information about the aims and objectives of the residential provision. However, it does not clearly describe the weekend arrangements for care. For example, it does not inform parents that their child may have to move accommodation blocks during a weekend stay. Similarly, guides given to children about their stays at individual residential provisions also do not reflect this current weekend practice. This does not ensure that all parties are clear about the aims and organisation of the residential provision.

Currently, the residential staff team has vacancies. There is active recruitment to these vacancies. Agency staff on short-term contracts have been appointed as an interim contingency strategy. However, agency staff on shifts are not able to undertake key caring areas such as personal care and medication. This direction balances some risks resulting from unfamiliar staff working with children with complex needs. However, it also impacts on permanent staff who work hard to ensure all basic tasks are carried out. Due to current staff vacancies, some sickness cover is facilitated through swaps of staff across residential houses. This means that some planned shifts are altered. One residential pupil reported that some off-site activities are effected by the availability of staff. Staff reflect that activity plans or key working sessions are often disrupted due to staff moves or staff shortage. This also compromises consistency of care for residential pupils. The school is unable to demonstrate if sufficient staffing levels are maintained as there are no records of rotas actually worked. Therefore, it cannot be confirmed if safe and adequate staffing levels are maintained at all times, both day and night.

Approximately 76% of residential staff hold level 3 qualifications, although not all of these are in childcare. Of the remaining residential staff, some have been in post a number of years and have not completed relevant level 3 or Diploma training. A small number of residential staff are currently undertaking a relevant course. However, this does not ensure that all children are cared for by staff day and night who hold a professionally recognised childcare qualification.

Supervision and appraisal for residential staff, including senior appointments, is not consistent. Records demonstrate that some residential staff have not had an annual appraisal for a number of years. Supervision sessions happen inconsistently and not in line with the termly aim stated within school residential self-evaluation documents. Supervision records contain limited information on staff performance and are sometimes unsigned. One staff reflected on the current supervision and appraisal system and said 'this does not make me feel valued.' The school's group of qualified nurses do not have individual records of supervision kept, although group supervision is documented. This means residential pupils are being cared for by staff who do not have regular individual feedback on performance, support and adequate guidance. A new performance management system has been implemented this term. However, its effectiveness cannot yet be evaluated.

Residential pupils who make comments or complaints about their boarding experience are listened to. Appropriate action is taken to address issues raised. However, there is no formal record of complaints by residential pupils. This compromises the head of care's ability to look for any patterns, or share learning across the whole residential provision.

Overall, the standard of record keeping across the residential houses is inconsistent. Some files provide detail and individualisation about the progress and achievements that residential pupils make. While, other residential pupil records do not capture this detail and lack involvement from the pupils themselves to add personal statements and views about their residential experience. Monitoring systems around the quality of records across the accommodation bases are not apparent.

Monitoring visits take place in line with minimum standards. Residential pupils' views are sought and records scrutinised. These visits feed into the residential self-evaluation systems. However,



these self-evaluation systems are neither strong nor effective. Consequently, previously good leadership and management has not been sustained. Through this inspection, a significant number of shortfalls have been identified, particularly around the leadership and safe organisation of the boarding provision.

Previous minimum standard shortfalls around the training of residential staff in behaviour management techniques and around the record keeping of major sanctions have been met. This ensures that staff hold relevant skills in de-escalation and physical intervention and linked records show some improvement in quality. However, a minimum standard breach relating to the quality and detail of risk assessments has been repeated. Progress in revising and developing these essential documents has not been sufficient. A previous recommendation to strengthen links across school, college and residential care has been met. The senior leadership team across the whole school meets on a regular basis and handover systems are effective in passing on key information.

Since the last full inspection, the permanent head of care has left. Interim management arrangements are in place while the school actively recruits a new permanent head of care. Monitoring systems are in development, but not yet in place, for key documents such as recruitment, children's care plans and risk assessments, duty rotas and other key areas. Senior managers acknowledge and recognise the need for clear improvement plans within the residential provision.

## 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

|  |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Unique reference number</b>             | 133653   |
| <b>Social care unique reference number</b> | SC050390 |
| <b>DfE registration number</b>             | 845/7000 |

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.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Type of school</b>                       | Non-maintained residential special school |
| <b>Number of boarders on roll</b>           | 103                                       |
| <b>Gender of boarders</b>                   | Mixed                                     |
| <b>Age range of boarders</b>                | 7 to 19                                   |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                          | Mrs Jo Whiteman                           |
| <b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b> | 28/05/2012                                |
| <b>Telephone number</b>                     | 01424 730740                              |
| <b>Email address</b>                        | admin@stmarysbexhill.org                  |

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