

St Vincents School for the Blind

St. Vincents School for the Blind & Partially Sighted, Yew Tree Lane, LIVERPOOL, L12 9HN

Inspection dates	20/11/2013 to 20/11/2013	
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

- The strong focus on enabling residential pupils to become independent and the extensive range of innovative enrichment opportunities means they are achieving excellent personal outcomes across all areas of their development.
- Residential pupils' safety and well-being is of paramount importance. Residential pupils are safe and say that they feel safe because of the exceptionally well-implemented safeguarding procedures.
- Residential pupils and parents are extremely complimentary about the service. They say the school has changed the lives of their children. Parents are confident to approach staff with any concerns. They know that they will be listened to and that action will be taken to support them and their children.
- The residential provision is exceptionally well managed by a highly committed and dedicated staff team. It is highly valued by senior managers and governors and is an integral part of the school. Monitoring of the service is robust and helps drive forward development.
- Equality and diversity is threaded through all aspects of practice, including ensuring that residential pupils have a strong voice in their school community.

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 was contacted on the morning of day one by the lead inspector to announce the inspection.

The inspection took place over three days with feedback provided on the afternoon of day three.

During the inspection records and documentation were examined.

Interviews took place with the residential pupils, head of care, principal, staff and health care coordinator to secure their views upon the quality of care provided.

A tour of the premises and grounds was undertaken.

Evening activities were also observed over two nights.

Inspection team

Chris Scully

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

St Vincent's school for blind and partially sighted children is a registered charity governed by the Board of Trustees of the Catholic Blind Institute. St Vincent's has specialist school status and offers a curriculum for children with all levels of visual impairment, as well as additional needs.

The school is located in a residential area with the accommodation being split into two separate groups. The school caters for pupils between the ages of 5 and 18 years. There are currently 44 pupils on roll. The school provides residential places for up to 18 pupils on weekdays in term time, with a maximum of 28 staying per night.

There is a large range of residential options available, depending upon the individual needs of the child. The residential provision was last inspected on the 21 June 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Enhance the opportunities for young people to comment upon records made about them and ensure all records are clearly signed and dated.
- Further enhance the refurbishment programme for the residential units, with regards to soft furnishings including window dressings.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Residential pupils are thriving, because they have exceptionally high quality relationships with staff which are built upon friendship, honesty and trust. They are able to succeed as they live in a highly inclusive setting where their individuality is recognised, supported and celebrated. As a result, residential pupils are making excellent progress across all areas of their personal, social and emotional development. They relish the opportunities to spend time with their friends and comment upon how they want to stay longer in residence to be with their friends. Residential pupils truly value the friendships they have made in residence and the various clubs they attend while here. Parents say, 'this is not just a school, it is an environment where children feel part of a family'.

Residential pupils flourish in an environment which is enriched by an extensive range of extra-curricular activities which truly engage their interests. Residential pupils are actively encouraged by staff and are exceptionally well supported to try new activities, such as rock climbing, art workshops, horse-riding. These activities effectively enable them to develop social, interpersonal and team-building skills. In addition, young people are able to actively pursue their interests develop skills for life and consider future employment opportunities. This includes working with large companies to showcase their ideas and developments, such as gaming platforms, pizza sauces, wooden figures and art work. As a result, residential pupils are continually improving in confidence and self-esteem. The introduction of guide dogs for some pupils has had a profound effect upon their confidence and self-esteem. Similarly residential pupils talk enthusiastically about when the dogs stay over and how they enjoy playing with them, as they are off duty, and taking them for walks.

Residential pupils are being very well prepared for adulthood. This is because of the strong focus of helping them to gain independence. This includes life skills, such as personal care and shopping, along with taking part in external social activities to develop social skills and citizenship. Support systems are in place to ensure a smooth transition from the residential provision. Residential pupils are keen to tell visitors that they cannot talk for long as they are eager to be completing their independence tasks. Parents say, the school has given their child a 'life and a future'.

Residential pupils have an exceptionally strong 'voice' in school. They confidently put forward their ideas and to comment upon the organisation of the residence. They feel empowered, valued and respected as they know their views are listened to and acted upon. For example, they have requested new furniture in the lounges, new blinds on the windows as they are starting to look 'tired and worn'. They have with staff support compiled a letter to various charities asking for funds to help with the on-going refurbishment of the residence. This has enabled residential pupils to take responsibility for their surroundings and has helped them to make a difference to them.

Residential pupils are enthusiastic about keeping themselves fit and healthy. They have an excellent understanding of the importance of healthy eating. They are eager to tell visitors about how they stay fit by using the fitness suites, to build up their 'guns' (muscles) and to increase their stamina. Health care plans are exceptionally well written; are tailored to the specific needs of each young person and actively contribute to them remaining fit and healthy. In addition staff have an excellent knowledge of each residential pupil's individual needs.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the residential experience for pupils is outstanding. Residential pupils receive

exceptional pastoral care, because staff have an exceptional knowledge of their individual needs. Care planning is detailed and allows the uniqueness of each residential pupil to glow. This is supported by staff's innate understanding of each young person individual needs.

Care plans effectively take into account the diverse and complex needs of each young person. Consequently, a comprehensive picture is created which clearly identifies the residential pupils' care needs, which are met extremely well in day-to-day practice. Residential pupils are consulted about their care plans, but are not consistently asked to record their comments or sign to agree the plans. This is a minor shortfall within the recording system and does not impact upon the care of residential pupils.

The residential setting is an integral part of the school. Excellent communication between care and school staff means they are quickly alerted to any difficulties pupils may be experiencing. Ultimately, they are able to initiate additional support to help the pupil overcome these. Staff are highly committed to improving the outcomes for residential pupils and have high aspirations for each of them. As a result, pupils are making as much progress as possible in relation to their starting points.

Residential pupils are confident to approach staff regarding any worries and these are addressed sensitively. They say, 'you can talk to staff about any worries you may have.' All admissions are well planned and supported by a very caring, structured induction process for new pupils. Extended day activities are effectively utilised to enable pupils to gain a taste of the residential experience and helps them to settle in, in their own time. Residential pupils say, 'you get to do awesome activities and have fun too!'

Catering and residential staff are highly committed to ensuring that residential pupils enjoy healthy and nutritious meals which meet their specific dietary requirements. They are constantly adapting and refining menus to meet their ever-changing needs. Residential pupils say, 'staff get 10 out of 10 for cooking my special diet; awesome,' and they make my bland diet 'fun'.

Highly effective health care arrangements are in place. The arrangements for administering medication are robust and ensure that residential pupils receive their medication at the right time. This is enhanced by the excellent support offered by school health care staff. All staff are trained in the administration of medication and emergency medication. Staff are committed to enabling young people where possible to self-administer their medication and to take responsibility for this. Some young people are rightly proud that they can administer their own medication. They talk knowledgeable about their medical condition and how they are keeping themselves fit and healthy. This is achieved because of the excellent support and guidance young people receive from staff.

Effective systems are in place for residential pupils to remain in contact with their families. Parents, carers and family members are able to contact the school each day to speak to their child and to the staff. Families enjoy positive relationships with staff and are confident to contact them throughout the day to discuss their child with them. They are consulted and included in all aspects of their child's care. Parents' views are highly respected, valued and as far as possible, they are acted upon. Parents say the school teaches young people 'how to be a blind person in a modern society'; and that, 'the work they do is beyond outstanding; without them supporting us, life would be a lot tougher.'

Residential pupils enjoy a warm, welcoming and homely environment in which they are flourishing. Residential pupils have their own room, which they personalise to varying degrees. Each room is designed around the specific needs of each young person to ensure their comfort, safety and well-being. Careful consideration has been given to residential pupils' mobility and to their visual impairments. Consequently, they are able to retain the maximum level of

independence.

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

The safety and well-being of residential pupils is outstanding. This is because of the staff's excellent understanding of the safeguarding procedures. All staff are suitably trained in child protection. They are extremely aware of the residential pupils' diverse needs and behaviours and how these may impact upon them.

The school has appropriate policies and procedures, in conjunction with external agencies, to take decisive action to safeguard residential pupils. Residential pupils are very aware of whom to contact should they have any concerns. They confidently tell visitors about the various staff in school they can approach for support, as well as external agencies. Residential pupils are very clear that they feel safe and are safe here.

There are robust systems in place for the safe recruitment of staff, which assess their suitability to work with young people. Visitors are monitored and effectively chaperoned at all times. Staff provide an excellent level of supervision for residential pupils based on their age, understanding and ability, to make sure they are safe in school and in the community. Staff work extremely hard to ensure that risks to residential pupils are effectively managed. Residential pupils do not go missing. However, all staff are aware of the procedures to follow should this occur.

Positive behaviour is effectively and consistently promoted. Staff are highly skilled in de-escalation techniques, which are implemented extremely well in practice. This is supported by the staff's innate understanding of each young person and their vulnerabilities and how these impact upon their behaviour. Consequently the use of any sanctions is minimal. This is because staff are vigilant and respond quickly and effectively to residential pupils' ever-changing needs. Staff deflate situations effectively, by using simple hand gestures or by simply talking quietly to residential pupils offering them reassurances. This effectively avoids the behaviour escalating to a level where they become distressed.

The safety and well-being of residential pupils is at the heart of everything the school does. This enables young people to take safe risks, thus developing skills for life and independence. Residential pupils are protected by a comprehensive range of detailed health and safety procedures, risk assessments and checks.

Staff conduct regular health and safety checks, including fire drills, to ensure that the premises are safe and secure. Residential pupils have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They confidently explain to visitors about the fire evacuation procedures and how they must make sure they leave their dressing gown and slippers by their bed in case the alarm goes off in the night.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Outstanding

The leadership and management is outstanding. The residential provision is integral to the school and is fully encompassed into everything the school does. Highly insightful management by senior managers actively promotes a culture that ensures pupils are always listened to and respected as individuals. They are extremely committed to the on-going development of the school, for example sourcing outside support from companies to help improve the entrepreneurial skills and employment opportunities for pupils.

Senior managers and governors are highly committed to providing high quality care to each pupil. This is evident from the excellent progress young people are making. Governors refer to young

people as being 'inspirational' and because of school are able to develop 'practical skills to access the world; reach their goals and live their dreams.'

The Statement of Purpose clearly outlines the aims and objectives of the school and residence. In addition, parents and young people receive detailed information which clearly informs them about the school and the care that is to be provided. As a result, young people are appropriately placed, thereby enhancing their life experience.

A variety of arrangements exist for monitoring the quality of care by the strong management team. The experienced and nurturing head of care has very positive relationships with the young people in her care. She maintains a close day-to-day overview of each young person individually, alongside the general running of the residence. Any shortfalls are promptly identified and addressed. For example following consultation with residential pupils the arrangements for 'prep' time were amended and action was taken to enhance the facilities within youth club.

The highly committed and enthusiastic Principal and head of care inspire others to make a difference. This level of commitment means little goes unnoticed. This embodies the school's positive approach to ensuring every young person reaches their full potential and has fun doing so. The involvement and participation of residential pupils is totally inclusive of everyday practice and means that they can make informed choices and feel valued by those who care for them.

The care staff deploy their responsibilities in a manner that treats residential pupils with upmost dignity, respect and sensitivity. Residential pupils are effectively supported by the staff on duty which means they are able to fully engage in the activities provided. The deployment of staff is child-focused and provides young people excellent continuity of care from people they trust and respect.

Staff work extremely well as a team. They effectively create a culture where residential pupils' rights as individuals are respected and their differences are accepted. They receive regular professional supervision and meet regularly as a team to discuss how young people progress, and any emerging needs. They have excellent opportunities to attend additional training courses to gain new qualifications and skills.

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

Unique reference number	104734
Social care unique reference number	SC040724
DfE registration number	341/7018

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.

Type of school	
Number of boarders on roll	
Gender of boarders	
Age range of boarders	
Headteacher	Dr John Patterson
Date of previous boarding inspection	21/06/2012
Telephone number	0151 2289969
Email address	office@stvin.com

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