

St Mary's Special School and Sixth Form College

Wrestwood Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN40 2LU

Inspection dates 12–14 November 2014

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Good	2
	This inspection:	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management		Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching		Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils		Inadequate	4
Sixth form provision		Inadequate	4
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience		Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires special measures

- The school's leaders have not secured good teaching and learning across the school.
- A sizeable proportion of parents have concerns about the school's leadership and management.
- The governing body has not been effective in holding the school to account for pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and the effective deployment of resources.
- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is inadequate because procedures are not properly followed.
- The curriculum has not been planned and monitored systematically enough.
- The sixth form is inadequate and is not enabling students to reach their potential.
- Teaching is inadequate because teachers do not plan work effectively enough to ensure that all groups of pupils make the progress they should.
- Pupils' achievement is inadequate. Not enough is expected of them and too many make poor progress. Pupils are not sufficiently prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
- Pupils' achievement in English is inadequate. Pupils do not build on their existing skills sufficiently, particularly in writing.
- In mathematics, pupils' achievement is too variable. The work they are set is sometimes too easy, or gaps in pupils' basic knowledge limit their progress.
- The school must ensure that it meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools which have not been met.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils have positive attitudes. They are well behaved and help to create a very positive ethos.
- The school successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are tolerant and supportive of one another.
- Pupils' achievement in science, art and drama is good, helped by well-planned teaching in these subjects.

Information about this inspection

- In this integrated school and residential inspection, inspectors met with groups of pupils, representatives from the governing body and trustees and members of staff with leadership and management responsibilities. They also looked at attendance information, safeguarding arrangements and other key documents.
- Inspectors visited 14 lessons, covering all year groups. Inspectors were accompanied on all classroom observations by either the school's head of education or the consultant headteacher.
- A sample of pupils' work and their assessment records from across the school were analysed and comparisons made between the achievements of different groups of pupils. Inspectors also listened to pupils of different ages read.
- Inspectors analysed the school's performance data showing the attainment and progress of pupils.
- Inspectors took account of several written communications from parents and also held telephone conversations with several parents. They took account of 67 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View), 94 questionnaires from school staff and 31 questionnaires from residential staff.
- Inspection activities by social care inspectors included visiting all the residential accommodation, speaking with and observing residential pupils in the houses, eating meals with residential pupils, observing a school assembly and education and care staff at the morning handover, and speaking with parents. There were also formal discussions with groups of care staff, the head and interim deputy head of care, the catering manager, the nurse manager, therapy staff and the admissions officer. Documents relating to the welfare and safety of pupils were sampled.

Inspection team

Barnard Payne, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
James Waite	Additional Inspector
Anna Williams	Social Care Inspector
Emeline Evans	Social Care Inspector
Jackie Graves	Social Care Inspector

Full report

In accordance with the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that this school requires special measures because it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.

Information about this school

- St Mary's is a special school for pupils with speech, language and communication needs; some pupils also have autistic spectrum disorder and other difficulties/disabilities.
- The school has the capacity for up to 130 residential pupils and 30 day pupils. At present, just over a third of pupils are girls.
- There are currently 86 residential pupils. The residential accommodation is provided in eight houses, six of which are on the main school site and two located nearby. One of the houses is not currently in use. The residential provision had its last full inspection on 15 October 2013. A monitoring inspection took place on 10 June 2014.
- The proportion of pupils from minority ethnic groups is broadly average; a very small minority speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils eligible for the pupil premium is lower than the national average. The pupil premium is additional government funding provided for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and those in the care of the local authority.
- A few Year 7 pupils are also supported by the additional literacy and numeracy catch-up funding.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- St Mary's is part of the Talking Trust and is a registered charity. It has a board of trustees and governors to provide strategic direction and management.
- In September 2014, the chief executive officer of the trust took on the additional role of acting principal. This followed the departure of the previous principal, who had been in post for under two terms, and was just one of many changes in staffing and governance over the past two years. There has been a complete change of senior management, a very recent restructuring of the governing body and significant changes to care staff. The head of education and head of care are very recent appointments, and the head of therapy and well-being is on a temporary contract.
- In September 2014, the school commissioned regular support from a consultant headteacher.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that all posts for the key staff responsible for leading the safeguarding systems are filled.
- Improve the quality of teaching so that all groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well by ensuring that:
 - teachers have high expectations of the pupils they teach and provide consistently high levels of challenge for all pupils regardless of learning needs, but particularly the more-able
 - pupils' receive work that builds on their previous attainment, notably in English and mathematics
 - any gaps in pupils' knowledge are addressed, especially in their written work
 - teachers use assessment effectively to set targets for pupils' achievement, and provide pupils with feedback that helps them improve their work
- Improve leadership and management at all levels to secure at least good outcomes for pupils by:
 - ensuring that all staff rigorously follow the school's policies for keeping pupils safe
 - making sure that risk assessments for pupils, whose circumstances make them vulnerable, are kept up to date and that record keeping is of high quality and shared with key staff
 - establishing an effective system for monitoring staff performance and holding them to account
 - establishing formal middle leadership roles, making sure all middle leaders have the skills needed to lead their areas of responsibility well and that they are held to account effectively
 - making sure that the curriculum supports effective learning and achievement and prepares students well for their next stage in education, training or employment
 - ensuring leadership of the sixth form is effective and accountable.

- An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.
- An external review of the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

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

- 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
 - the involvement of a child's parents/carers or significant others in health and welfare issues (NMS 3.12).
- The school ensures that:
 - Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (NMS 11).
 - A written record is kept of major sanctions and the use of any physical intervention. Records may include the information in Appendix 2 (use of physical restraint). The record is made within 24 hours of the sanction being applied and is legible. Children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records. The school regularly reviews any instances of the use of physical intervention restraint and examines trends or issues to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice (NMS 12.6).
 - The records specified in Appendix 2 are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate (NMS 13.3).
 - All adults visiting residential accommodation (e.g. visitors, outside delivery and maintenance personnel) are kept under sufficient staff supervision to prevent them gaining substantial unsupervised access to children or their accommodation (NMS 14.4).
 - 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 produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day-to-day basis. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible, children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans, and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans (NMS 21.1).
- Ensure that residential staff are provided with formal training in autistic spectrum disorder.
- Improve the internal audit system for medication, in particular for emergency medication and homely remedies.
- Ensure all residential pupils' independence plans reflect their individual abilities and incorporate their views.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are inadequate

- Because of the very significant changes in senior staff over a short period, strategies being introduced to bring about improvements are at a very early stage. The school's leaders have accurately identified what needs to be done. The school's track record over recent years has not demonstrated the capacity to improve and it is too early to judge the impact of recent changes. Policies and procedures, including those to promote reading, writing and mathematics, and those to ensure pupils are kept safe, are not followed consistently. This has led to widely differing rates of progress and also weaknesses in pupils' safety.
- The school's leaders have not ensured good quality teaching or good levels of achievement for pupils. Until very recently, the school had no coherent system for collecting data and analysing how well pupils were making progress. Initial assessments of pupils' starting points were unreliable. Because this performance information has been unreliable, neither senior leaders nor governors have had an accurate view of pupils' achievement or whether all pupils have had an equal opportunity to succeed.
- There is no effective middle leadership within the education-focused part of the school. Those who are meant to be responsible for core subjects have no formal role, feel untrained and have had no appraisal of their performance. There is a lack of clarity regarding the amount of additional funding the school should be receiving through the pupil premium and other sources such as the primary sport fund. The governing body is neither monitoring how additional funding is being spent nor evaluating its impact on achievement. The school lacks systems to track the impact of additional funding, due in part to past shortcomings in the management of performance data.
- The school has not had an effective system to manage the performance of staff. The national Teachers' Standards, which require teachers to plan and teach well-structured lessons, have not been adhered to.
- On paper, the school's curriculum offers a variety of courses and accreditation for older pupils and sixth-form students. It also includes work experience for older pupils and students. In practice, shortcomings in planning and teaching mean that the curriculum is not delivered effectively so does not lead to good achievement across the school.
- The majority of parents who responded to Parent View do not agree that the school is well led and managed. This view was also reflected in the telephone conversations and other communications inspectors had with parents. Particular concerns centre upon the significant staffing changes over the past two years, which parents feel have unsettled their children, and other changes, such as timetabling, which some parents feel have had an adverse effect on their children's education.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding do not meet statutory requirements. The new head of care has set about improving the monitoring systems but they are not yet fully effective at identifying weaknesses in safeguarding practices within the residential provision and across the school. At the time of the inspection, some posts for the key staff responsible for leading the safeguarding systems were vacant. Action has been taken to recruit to some of these posts, but not all.
- Residential staff supervision was an identified weakness in the last residential provision inspection. Although some progress was made following the inspection, this has not been sustained, and the performance management and appraisal of residential staff are still weak. Not all staff receive the formal and regular feedback necessary to ensure that a good standard of care is maintained.
- Staff are caring for some residential pupils who are on the autistic spectrum. Although residential staff receive basic awareness training during their induction, they do not receive formal training on autistic spectrum disorder as part of their professional development. This means that staff with only basic skills and knowledge are supporting some residential pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- Over the past two years, the school's leaders, including its governing body and board of trustees, have made significant changes, in part to rationalise staffing in the face of a falling school roll. These changes have not been managed effectively and there has been resistance from some school staff and parents.
- The new senior leaders have an accurate view of teaching and learning across the school. Leaders' recent self-evaluation concluded that, following a period of success, the school's performance had declined. Leaders have accurately assessed that the quality of teaching is inadequate. A revised appraisal system is being established and measures have been taken to improve lesson planning and teachers' use of assessment data to plan work. A system to collect and analyse pupils' achievement data in order to measure the impact of teaching and chart pupils' progress is being established.
- The school's leaders have secured pupils' consistently good behaviour and maintain a positive ethos in which pupils feel happy and willing to learn and interact. The school successfully promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils are tolerant and supportive of one another. They understand and show respect for faiths and beliefs different to their own. They are prepared adequately

for life in modern Britain.

- The school should not seek to appoint newly qualified teachers.
- The governance of the school:
 - Historically, the governing body has not been sufficiently diligent in holding the school to account for pupils' achievement, the quality of teaching and the effective and efficient deployment of resources. Many governors are new to their roles and lack experience of school performance data. While there have been very recent improvements in the quality of the information given to governors, they have until now not been sufficiently well informed to hold the school and its senior leaders to account. The governing body accepts that teaching and learning are inadequate, but has not previously acted rigorously enough to remedy weaknesses. Governors accept that there has been no fully functioning system for staff appraisal. They also accept that the school's strategic direction was uncertain until very recently. Governors lack knowledge of the school's additional funding, including the pupil premium, and how it is spent.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are inadequate

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Their attitudes to work are always positive and they are always willing to try hard. There are no disruptions in lessons. Pupils respond well to staff, with whom they build good relationships. Parents and pupils express very few concerns about behaviour.
- There is no discriminatory language and all groups of pupils get on well together.
- Younger pupils are happy in school. They make friends and feel happy and safe. They understand the dangers of different forms of bullying. Pupils say that bullying is rare and that the school deals with it well.
- Older pupils and sixth-form students are also happy in school and share similar views about behaviour and bullying; they too feel well informed about the adverse effects of bullying, and say it is rare.
- Pupils make a significant contribution to the positive ethos of the school and conduct themselves extremely well. Their attendance and punctuality are good. They take pride in the school and there is no litter or damage to buildings or property.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is inadequate. Safeguarding arrangements are inadequate.
- Senior leaders are failing to ensure that the school's child protection policy is robustly and consistently implemented by all staff, volunteers and visitors; this includes the school's lone working policy. Referrals relating to suspicions or allegations of harm involving children to local external safeguarding agencies are not consistent. Records relating to child protection concerns in the school and the actions taken are poor. Patterns and trends within safeguarding records have not been identified by senior staff. Overall, as a result of the failings in safeguarding practice, pupils in the school are not being effectively protected.
- At the last full welfare inspection of the residential provision, health and welfare plans, including risk assessments, were identified as a weakness. In December 2013, new 'my plan' documents were introduced and at the following monitoring visit it was judged that good progress had been made in implementing the measures in these documents. However, this progress has not been sustained. Residential pupils' individual 'my plan' documents and personal risk assessments are not being consistently and robustly re-evaluated following significant incidents, such as safeguarding concerns. As a result, both residential and education staff do not have clear procedures to follow in order to reduce risks in the future and keep children safe.
- The use of physical restraint and sanctions within the school is low. Records kept adequately describe the reasons for the use of physical intervention, or the use of a sanction. However, these records do not capture pupils' views on the use of these measures of control and discipline. As a result, opportunities for the senior leadership team to hear and reflect upon pupils' views about the implementation of the school's behaviour management policy are lost.

The quality of teaching is inadequate

- Teaching is inadequate, resulting in pupils making inadequate progress over time. Teachers' planning is often poor and does not help pupils learn well. Teaching does not have a sufficiently positive impact on

pupils' progress in reading, literacy and mathematics.

- Too many pupils make insufficient gains in knowledge because teachers do not take enough account of their different levels of ability and previous levels of attainment when setting tasks. The most able pupils are not sufficiently challenged. Teachers' low expectations mean that pupils do not produce enough work.
- Teachers do not use the assessment of pupils effectively enough to plan their teaching. As a result pupils are often set work that provides insufficient challenge or does not take enough account of the difficulties they are having. Teachers' marking is often ineffective. Pupils often do not know what to do next to improve their work. Where pupils have individual targets, for example in English, these are not used consistently enough to enable them to make good progress.
- Pupils do not get sufficient feedback on the levels they are working at or what they should be aiming for. Some say they are not challenged enough to do better and that they have to repeat work, putting in effort without learning anything new.
- Teaching is good in science, art and drama. Pupils know clearly what they have to do and are moved on quickly once they have grasped new concepts.
- Staff build good relationships with pupils, and classrooms are very pleasant places to be, but teachers do not always vary their approach enough to keep pupils fully engaged.

The achievement of pupils

is inadequate

- Pupils' achievement is inadequate overall and varies too much across the school and between subjects. This is reflected in the school's own recent performance data and in an analysis of pupils' work from across the school, both of which show pupils' very patchy progress.
- There are no significant differences in the achievement of the relatively small number of pupils eligible for the pupil premium and others; their attainment and progress show the same inconsistencies as other pupils. Pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, including those who speak English as an additional language, make the same inadequate progress as others.
- The most able pupils make inadequate progress because the work they are set does not systematically build on what they have done before and provide them with new challenges.
- Pupils' achievement in English is inadequate because, while many pupils are able to read and write independently, the work they are set does not consistently develop what they can already do, for example a sixth-form student who could already structure his writing using paragraphs still had this as an English target. Some folders of work in Key Stages 3 and 4 contain little or no written work.
- Pupils' achievement in mathematics is too variable and they rarely make sufficient progress from their starting points. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson, pupils' folders showed they had already covered the work set and could work at a higher level. In some sixth-form lessons, students' low basic mathematical knowledge and skills holds them back. Students' lack of skill in using computer spreadsheets meant they struggled in a lesson where they were to plan a monthly budget. In a lesson on independent living, a lack of understanding of time, and how to measure it, meant they were confused when planning rail journeys.
- A minority of pupils make good progress towards meeting their targets for mathematics. The folder of a pupil in Year 10 showed good coverage of key mathematical skills, including time, measuring, sequencing, sorting and using money; the work was practical and well planned, and shows what can be done.
- Pupils achieve better in science, where work is planned to meet clear criteria and each topic builds logically on previous tasks. For example, a Year 10 folder showed how a pupil could group animals into different categories and collect and present data in different ways.

The sixth form provision

is inadequate

- The school's recent assessments show that only half of the sixth-form students made the expected progress in English and mathematics by the end of last year. An analysis of their current work shows that students are still underachieving.
- Teaching in the sixth form is inadequate. Teachers do not take enough account of students' past performance in their planning. Where students have specific targets, for example in English, these are not referred to enough to help students move on.
- Teachers are not astute enough in pinpointing gaps in students' knowledge and understanding. As a result students' make limited progress. Some students said that they have repeated work.
- The leadership of the sixth form has been ineffective. Following changes in staffing, there was a period when there was no designated leader accountable specifically for outcomes in the sixth form. The role of the recently-appointed head of education is to oversee education across the whole school, including the

sixth form. It is too early to judge the impact of the new leadership strategies.

- The sixth form curriculum offers a broad range of studies, including literacy and numeracy, and a range of accredited awards, including BTEC courses. However, students do not have the opportunity to pursue their studies to the levels of which they are capable; the school's own self-evaluation accurately judges that accreditation routes are not varied enough or matched well enough to students' needs and aspirations.
- Students develop their personal and social skills well in the sixth form. A new programme to promote independent living in the sixth form is relevant to students but at a very early stage of development. Students understand the importance of acquiring the skills they need to become independent, but discussions with them showed that some feel that they are not being pushed hard enough.

Outcomes for residential pupils	are adequate
Quality of residential provision and care	is inadequate
Residential pupils' safety	is inadequate
Leadership and management of the residential provision	are inadequate

- There are significant shortfalls in both the leadership and management of the residential provision, and residential pupils' safety. The evaluation of the leadership and management of the residential provision and residential pupils' safety are incorporated in the relevant sections above. This section only covers outcomes for residential pupils and the quality of residential provision and care.
- There have been weaknesses in assessing the safeguarding risks individual pupils face. This has had a serious and negative impact on the quality of residential provision and care. This is why the quality of residential provision and care is inadequate, even though the overall outcomes for residential pupils are adequate.
- Residential pupils spoke positively about the school and their boarding experience. The houses provide residential pupils with friendly and harmonious environments. Diversity is strongly celebrated through themed evenings and events, and relationships between residential pupils and care staff are positive and constructive.
- Residential pupils make their views known through regular house meetings. Improvements have been made in the recording of these meetings. Minutes are now accessible to pupils and are recorded in alternative communication styles.
- Arrangements for the administration and recording of medication are safe and effective. However, systems for auditing the storage of emergency medications and homely remedies require improvement. The current system has the potential to be misused, as it relies on trust and does not accurately record quantities signed in and out.
- Catering arrangements within the school are good; pupils' individual dietary needs are identified and fully met. Systems for the assessment, admission and induction of potential new residential pupils are detailed and implemented effectively.
- Outcomes for residential pupils are adequate. They engage well in a wide variety of activities. These include computer time, the gym, local youth clubs, swimming, music club and the use of the school facilities with appropriate supervision. Residential pupils keep fit through regular exercise after school, for example in formal fitness classes and through 'fun swims' and local walks. These activities help them to make friends and build their confidence and self-esteem.
- Residential pupils spoke positively about how they have learnt life skills through their boarding experience. Examples cited included cooking, budgeting and shopping, independent travel and household tasks. However, some older residential pupils feel that the activities planned to develop independence do not prepare them sufficiently for adulthood because they do not take account of what they can already do.
- Residential pupils successfully maintain contact with friends, family and others important to them through electronic messaging, email, telephone and letters.
- The residential accommodation has benefited from recent investment. This includes new carpets, new beds, and new soft furnishings. Residential pupils like their boarding houses and personalise their bedrooms appropriately.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

Boarding/Residential provision		
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	133653
Social care unique reference number	SC050390
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	448024

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of residential provision 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	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	104
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	53
Number of boarders on roll	86
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Don Young
Principal	Sharon Menghini, acting principal
Date of previous school inspection	29–20 May 2012
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