

St Mary's School

Horam, Heathfield, East Sussex, TN21 0BT

Inspection dates 27–28 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Outstanding	1
	This inspection:	Good	2
Leadership and management		Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils		Good	2
Quality of teaching		Good	2
Achievement of pupils		Good	2
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience		Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school.

- Although relatively new to their posts, senior leaders have made a good start in establishing a clear strategic direction for this expanding school.
- An effective governing body shares and understands the school's aims. It works closely with leaders in trying to achieve these goals.
- School leaders and governors have well-established procedures for maintaining good quality teaching, despite staff changes and the admission of more pupils with complex needs.
- The majority of middle managers have also held their posts for only a relatively short period, but they are beginning to have an increasing impact on improving provision.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools. The residential provision is outstanding.
- Teaching is typically good. Therefore, pupils generally learn well in lessons.
- Pupils' achievement is good. They make good progress when compared with pupils of the same age and starting points nationally.
- There are no significant differences in the performance of different groups of pupils. Disadvantaged pupils achieve as well as others.
- Most pupils' behaviour is generally good when they are in school.
- Excellent safeguarding procedures maintain pupils' safety when they are in school, in the residential provision and off site.
- Pupils confirm that they feel safe and speak highly of the school. They believe they are very well looked after.
- The school has strong links with parents and carers and it does much to involve them in their children's education. An overwhelming number of parents and carers value this and are very appreciative of the school and the work that it does.
- Pupils are prepared well for leaving school. All school leavers in 2014 went into continuing education, employment or training.
- Despite the school's rural location, pupils are prepared well for living in modern Britain. The school works hard and generally successfully to develop in pupils respect for differences and tolerance of others.
- The staff are very complimentary about the school and highly supportive of what it is trying to achieve.
- The school has established very good links with partner agencies, such as social services.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- There is insufficient outstanding teaching for pupils to make excellent progress.
- Attendance is too low and at times a few pupils' behaviour disrupts their own and others' learning.
- Pupils' progress data are not analysed and interpreted most effectively in ways that show pupils' progress and achievement in relation to the national picture for similar pupils.

Information about this inspection

- The school's residential provision was inspected by the social care inspector at the same time as the school was being inspected. The residential provision was visited during the day, after school and in the evenings.
- Eleven lessons were observed. These covered all age groups and each was taught by a different member of staff. Inspectors were accompanied by a member of the senior leadership team in every observation. Shorter visits were also paid to four literacy groups.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher; head of school; the three assistant headteachers; the head of care; the business manager and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body. Discussions also took place with four middle managers and the school nurse.
- A telephone discussion took place with the school's external adviser, who is appointed by the local authority.
- Parent View, the online questionnaire, could not be used to collect the opinions of parents and carers as too few completed it for the results to be displayed. Their views were gathered from the one who had a conversation with the social care inspector and from the 25 who returned the school's own questionnaire that it circulated in December 2014.
- The views of pupils were collected from meetings held with two groups in school and from conversations with residential pupils.
- The inspection team analysed the 17 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- A very wide range of documentation was examined in school and in the residential provision. This included information about pupils' progress and achievement, attendance records, care plans, safeguarding procedures, restraint and incident logs, leaders' judgements about the school's strengths and development areas, and improvement planning.
- The school works with a number of external agencies, such as social services, the child and adolescent mental health services team and colleagues from the youth offending team.

Inspection team

Mike Kell, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
James Waite	Additional Inspector
Jan Hunnam	Social Care Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- St Mary's was federated with Cuckmere House School at the time of the last inspection. Since September 2012, the federation has expanded and become The SABDEN (Social and Behavioural Difficulties Emotional Nurturing) Federation. In addition to St Mary's and Cuckmere House, it now includes New Horizons School, Lansdowne Secure Unit and College Central, which is a county-wide pupil referral unit.
- It is a small special school for boys with severe and complex behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The number on roll has grown by around a fifth since the last inspection, and this includes a few primary-aged pupils where there were none on roll at that time.
- The school has a small residential facility for up to 12 pupils. Arrangements for its use are flexible, with different pupils spending varying numbers of nights there. There were seven residential pupils on the days of the inspection.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- All pupils have a White British heritage. About a tenth are children who are looked after by the local authority.
- The school receives pupil premium funding for almost two thirds of its pupils, which is much higher than the national average. Pupil premium is additional government funding for pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and for children who are looked after.
- The school also receives additional funding for primary school physical education and sport.
- There has been very significant restructuring of the school's leadership since the last inspection. The head of school took up post in September 2012, and in the following year two new assistant headteachers were appointed. Most middle managers are also new to their role.
- Pupils do not attend any other schools or alternative off-site education providers apart from a few who make use of the special activity unit at Cuckmere House. A link with Bishop Bell School is used for assessing pupils' work in vehicle maintenance, but not for teaching the course.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the quality of teaching so that more is outstanding by ensuring that staff consistently:
 - provide pupils, and especially the most able, with work that enthuses them by challenging them to build on what they have learned previously
 - mark pupils' work in ways that help pupils to improve by pointing out aspects that need to be developed and how this can be achieved in order to get to the next level.
- Raise pupils' achievement by ensuring that all are able to benefit from available learning time by:
 - raising attendance
 - reducing the number of minor distractions in lessons caused by a few pupils.
- Develop the way in which pupils' progress data are analysed and interpreted so that leaders have a clear picture of how pupils' achievement compares with that nationally for pupils of the same age and starting points.
- Develop the outstanding residential provision even more by:
 - arranging specific staff training in child sexual exploitation
 - linking pupils' residential targets more closely to the targets in individual education plans.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Despite the many changes in the senior leadership team and middle managers, the school provides a good experience for pupils. The executive headteacher provides very good oversight.
- Leaders and managers at all levels are aware of their responsibilities. They are growing into their new roles and as they do so they are becoming increasingly influential in raising standards and improving pupils' personal development.
- The long-standing head of care provides outstanding leadership and management of the very well trained residential staff team. Close checking of the provision ensures that very high standards of care, guidance and support are maintained.
- Leaders have done well to maintain the good quality of teaching that was evident in the last inspection. This is despite a number of staff changes, difficulties in recruiting new teachers, a significantly bigger school roll and an increasing number of pupils with particularly complex difficulties.
- Leaders have ensured that teaching is typically good through their use of an effective range of procedures, including lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. A new marking policy has been established but this is not being applied consistently by all staff.
- Senior leaders have a secure understanding of what constitutes best practice, and have put in place effective processes for developing each teacher's individual skills. Teachers' performance management is used well to sustain and improve practice across the school.
- There are good procedures for collecting regular information about how well the school is doing. Leaders scrutinise this information and generally draw appropriate conclusions about the school's performance over the past year. They use this information well to establish future priorities in the detailed school improvement plan.
- Leaders' examination of the information they collect through school self-review includes analysis and interpretation of pupils' progress and achievement data. Though thorough in many ways, leaders do not examine the data sufficiently well to get a clear picture of how well pupils are doing compared with similar pupils nationally.
- Leaders have established a school that is generally calm, although the behaviour of a few of the most challenging pupils at times disrupts this atmosphere. There is a clear expectation that pupils learn to respect each other and members of the wider community. All staff promote tolerance, equality and an acceptance of people who are different. The values of British democratic society underpin the school's approaches. As a result, pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain.
- Leaders and relevant middle managers monitor pupils' behaviour very regularly. Daily meetings of these staff ensure that they keep a very close eye on individuals who may be having a particularly difficult time in their personal lives, which is reflected in more challenging behaviour. Behaviour logs are checked frequently and the outcomes are reported to the governing body routinely.
- Additional funding is used effectively to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils. Spending is carefully planned for individuals and the impact that it has on each pupil's learning and progress is checked closely.
- Additional physical education funding is spent well. In the past year, it funded swimming sessions and cycling lessons for all primary-aged pupils. These activities made an important contribution to encouraging a healthy lifestyle and developing pupils' confidence and self-esteem.
- The school provides pupils with a good range of learning opportunities, with a sharp focus on developing their communication skills, including literacy and numeracy. This is supplemented well by a variety of other subjects, such as citizenship and careers advice that develop other skills that pupils will need when they leave school. An excellent range of after-school activities provides very many opportunities for pupils to experience new activities.
- The school has made a good start in responding to the requirements of the new National Curriculum and on ways it will develop to check on how well pupils are learning. It is doing this through its close liaison with others in the federation.
- Although the views of only a small minority of parents and carers could be gathered, they were virtually unanimous in expressing positive opinions about the school. None raised any concerns about their child's safety.
- The unanimous staff view was that St Mary's is an effective school in which pupils do well. They all agreed that pupils are safe and looked after well.
- The close and productive links that leaders have established with external partners contribute much to

developing an integrated, cohesive multi-agency approach to supporting pupils and their families.

- The local authority receives detailed reports about the school from the external adviser who visits termly and these are useful in helping senior leaders in shaping the school's future planning.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Despite having vacancies and carrying wide-ranging responsibility for all schools across the federation, the governing body provides effective oversight of the school. Governors ensure that all statutory requirements are met, including those that relate to residential provision.
 - The governing body monitors all spending closely and it checks to see how expenditure improves outcomes for pupils. Therefore, it is well informed about all forms of additional funding and the impact they have.
 - The governing body is diligent in holding leaders to account. The Chair and Vice Chair of Governors are regularly in school for visits by the school's external adviser. Governors scrutinise all of the reports they receive from this adviser and from school leaders. By being so well informed about how well the school is doing, governors are well placed to seek clarification and to challenge the information, which is something they do routinely.
 - There are members of the governing body with vast experience of safeguarding children. Therefore, the governing body and leaders together have developed and implemented excellent procedures for ensuring pupils' safety. These procedures are frequently reviewed to ensure that they remain effective.
 - The governing body has insightful understanding of teachers' performance management arrangements and governors know the outcomes of leaders' checks on the quality of teaching. The links between teachers' pay and performance are closely monitored.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. For the majority of the time, most pupils arrive punctually for lessons, settle quickly and work steadily. Many make very good progress in learning to follow routines, listen to instructions and comply with requests.
- Good interactions between staff and pupils are commonplace. There is no graffiti, the grounds are free of litter, the fabric of the building is undamaged and wall displays are valued and -unharmed.
- Pupils' behaviour in the residential provision is excellent. This is indicative of their increasing ability to accept responsibility for their actions. Further encouragement is provided by a valued incentive scheme that rewards pupils for successfully managing their behaviour and emotions, and for other achievements in their personal development.
- When pupils are in class, most have positive attitudes. However, too few attend school regularly to indicate that pupils overall have a good approach to sustained learning.
- Pupils commented that bullying sometimes happens, but it is generally name calling or unpleasant comments and rarely physical. They confirmed that if it does happen, staff always deal with it quickly and effectively. Pupils in the residential provision agree that any bullying is dealt with immediately. Incidents in the residential provision that require physical intervention from staff are rare and sanctions for inappropriate behaviour are rarely needed.
- There have not been any permanent exclusions since the last inspection. The number of fixed-term exclusions has decreased each year for the past three years.
- Pupils make good progress in their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, such as learning to be tolerant and to appreciate and celebrate differences. This includes learning about people from different cultures or with different faiths, and this does much to help pupils to prepare for adulthood in modern Britain.
- Behaviour is not outstanding because attendance is low, even though some pupils make very impressive improvement in attendance compared with that at their previous schools. Leaders' concerted efforts are improving overall attendance each year, but despite this, not enough pupils have long periods of uninterrupted learning. Furthermore, the occasional disruptive behaviour and attitudes of a small minority of pupils have an adverse impact on their learning and that of their classmates.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding.
- Leaders and the governing body have implemented comprehensive and very effective safeguarding arrangements. Safeguarding training for school and residential staff is up to date, and both staff teams are suitably trained in the use of restraint procedures. Rigorous recruitment procedures are in place to

ensure that no unsuitable people work in the school or in the residential provision. The single central record meets all requirements.

- The school undertakes detailed risk assessments. These do much to ensure pupils' safety when they are in school and when they are off site, learning in the community.
- Leaders are vigilant in checking pupils' safety when they are absent from school by liaising very closely with their parents and carers and by working with the local authority's behaviour and attendance service.
- Individual risk assessments in the residential provision identify the behaviours and needs of each pupil and the strategies to be used to protect them. Pupils do not leave the residential provision without permission, but appropriate procedures are in place to protect pupils should this occur.
- Staff, parents and carers all agree that pupils are safe. No group raised any concerns about bullying or any other form of intimidation. The pupils themselves agree that they feel safe in school.
- Pupils learn a great deal about staying healthy and living safely, including appreciating the potential dangers associated with inappropriate use of the internet and social media. The school's effectiveness in this respect is enhanced by its close working with partner agencies and pupils' families.

The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching across the school is typically good with pockets of outstanding practice. Therefore, pupils typically make good progress in lessons.
- In most cases most of the time, staff manage pupils' behaviour efficiently and so little time is lost in dealing with minor disruptions. However, on a few occasions pupils do not respond positively and so their learning and that of others are hindered. At these times, teaching becomes much less effective and the pace of learning slows.
- Teaching encourages pupils' communication skills well. In particular, adults' expectations of good classroom manners do much to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills and as these improve, pupils' social awareness also grows. Pupils become more respectful of what others have to say and learn how to respond properly and non-aggressively to views and opinions with which they disagree.
- Teaching also promotes other literacy skills effectively. Reading and writing skills are developed well through daily literacy lessons. All pupils are in small groups that are determined by their reading competence and staff provide intensive support, using carefully chosen resources to boost pupils' reading skills. Teaching generally makes the most of opportunities to develop pupils' literacy skills through all subjects.
- Pupils' numeracy skills are promoted well. Teachers routinely promote appropriate mathematical vocabulary, and they encourage pupils to use and apply the skills and knowledge they have learned previously to investigate and solve new problems, such as exploring patterns or sequences.
- Regular checking of what pupils are learning in lessons is a consistent characteristic of teaching and staff generally make good use of pupils' responses to adapt or extend what has been planned. Staff also check pupils' learning by marking books regularly. However, this is not yet consistent enough to help pupils improve their work or show them what they need to do to get to the next level.
- Teaching assistants are generally well deployed. They support learning well and also fulfil an important role in helping pupils to manage their behaviour, such as helping them to re-focus when their attention wanders.
- Teachers' planning and learning materials generally take account of the range of pupils' ability in each class and what each has previously achieved. As a result, most teaching includes learning activities that are at the right level to engage and challenge each pupil. Consequently, pupils acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding quickly.
- Teaching is not outstanding because this good quality planning is not routinely evident in every lesson, particularly when pupils are in mixed ability classes. At times, the most able pupils especially are not challenged enough.

The achievement of pupils

is good

- Pupils make good progress. They do not make outstanding progress because too few attend regularly, minor disturbances sometimes interrupt learning and on occasions teachers' expectations are not high enough.
- Pupils achieve well. The majority of pupils make the progress that is expected of them and a few exceed these national expectations.

- The progress made by pupils of different ages from their starting points in English is good when compared with that made by pupils of the same age and starting points nationally. Pupils achieve particularly well in speaking and listening, although they also make substantial progress in reading and writing.
- Pupils make similarly good progress in mathematics, with most pupils performing in line with national expectations or exceeding them.
- The extent of pupils' progress in English and mathematics indicates that they are beginning to close the gap between their attainment and that of all pupils nationally. As a result, an increasing number are following a wider range GCSE courses and achieving higher grades in their examinations.
- There are no significant differences in the performance of pupils who receive additional funding, such as children who are looked after, and that of their classmates. This indicates that additional funding is being used effectively to accelerate their learning. Disadvantaged pupils and others do similarly well in English and mathematics.
- Very well presented and informative wall displays in classrooms and around the school make an important contribution to supporting pupils' learning and the progress that pupils make.
- Pupils' good achievement, including the qualifications that pupils obtain, prepares them well for moving into continuing education, employment or further training. Every school leaver in 2014 made this transition successfully.
- Close liaison between the school and care teams enables care staff to support pupils' learning out of school, such as with homework. Such close working ensures a consistent approach to guiding and supporting pupils whether they are in school or in the residential provision.

Outcomes for residential pupils are outstanding

Quality of residential provision and care is outstanding

Residential pupils' safety is outstanding

Leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding

- Very high quality residential accommodation provides a spacious, comfortable and well-resourced environment.
- Pupils receive excellent, sensitive and highly individualised care. Outstanding arrangements ensure that they are protected from harm. One pupil stated that he feels safe in the residential environment because 'staff take care of us', while another commented that he loves boarding 'because it is very calm'.
- Pupils thoroughly enjoy the residential experience and participate willingly in a wide range of on- and off-site activities. Community-based activities enable pupils to participate in different leisure pursuits and follow their personal interests.
- Pupils thrive in a nurturing environment that develops their confidence, self-esteem and trust. Staff listen to pupils' concerns and, as there are excellent relationships between staff and pupils, the pupils respond to staff and accept the support that they offer.
- Pupils are valued as individuals and their views are appreciated. They are consulted routinely and staff are extremely responsive to what they say. Residential meetings and questionnaires encourage pupils to put forward their views and influence day-to-day matters.
- Staff know the pupils extremely well. This is reflected in the care planning process, where pupils are fully involved in setting and reviewing their individual goals and targets, although these do not link particularly closely to their individual education plans.
- The school nurse monitors pupils' health needs closely and provides support for specific medical needs. She delivers health education sessions to groups of pupils. Pupils receive very good support for their physical and emotional health needs. A robust system for administering medication is in place.
- Staff training is comprehensive and up to date, although staff have not yet received specific training on child sexual exploitation.

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>

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	114681
Social care unique reference number	SC050392
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	448921

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	Community special
Age range of pupils	9–16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	68
Number of boarders on roll	12
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Margaret Southworth
Executive headteacher	Frank Stanford
Head of school	Paul Murphy
Date of previous school inspection	18–19 October 2011
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