

St Francis Community Special School

St. Francis Community Special School, Wickenby Crescent, LINCOLN, LN1 3TJ

Inspection dates

27/01/2015 to 29/01/2015

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Outcomes for residential pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of residential provision and care	Outstanding	1
Residential pupils' safety	Good	2
Leadership and management of the residential provision	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- This is a calm, relaxed, and safe residential special school. Young people experience a highly supportive and nurturing environment, with excellent health and welfare support. The positive impact of their time at school is clear in their high aspirations, improved self-confidence, and self-esteem. Young people and their parents are exceptionally satisfied with the arrangements for care and education.
- Safeguarding arrangements are very strong across all areas of boarding life: rigorous whole-school systems keep young people, who have a complex range of vulnerabilities, very safe.
- Leadership and management of residence is securely integrated in all aspects of school governance. Monitoring and quality assurance systems are based on effective consultation with young people and staff. School and residential leaders demonstrate a reflective drive for improvement.
- Positive relationships and good communication are the bedrock of young people's experience. Staff and students respect each other and enjoy their life in school with equal satisfaction. These affectionate, respectful relationships promote dignity and self-respect.
- This inspection finds the school has sustained an outstanding quality of residential provision and has improved the educational experience of those young adults transitioning into adult education. Arrangements for consultation, inclusion and person-centred-planning are key strengths.

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

Ofsted carried out this inspection with three hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice over two evenings; time spent with boarders; formal and informal discussion and observations; shared meals; meetings and discussions with boarding staff; contact with the statutory safeguarding authority to gather their views, and scrutiny of a wide range of documentation about boarding. Parent View information was not specific to boarding; but staff and boarders responded to Ofsted's point in time surveys.

Inspection team

Christy Wannop

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

St Francis Residential Special School is a maintained school that provides residential care within a 24-hour curriculum for young people up to the age of 19 years with medical, learning or physical disabilities. The school provides a full curriculum for nursery, primary, secondary and post-16 pupils. There is new post-19 educational provision at the school.

Boarding is available from Monday afternoon to Friday morning during school term time. There is accommodation in shared bedrooms for up to 18 young people each night. Young people spend a two nights a week for a term at a time and different young people stay each week. This term 27 young people are having a residential experience in groups of approximately 14 boarders. A small minority have a regular two-night stay throughout the school year.

The school is situated on a residential estate in Lincoln. All accommodation is on one level and there are two separate living areas. Each of these areas has a lounge with adjoining bedrooms and bathrooms.

The residential provision was last inspected in March 2014.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure consistent evidence of safer recruitment practice, specifically for volunteers and governors.
- Consider how mealtime arrangements can be made more homely by serving shared food at tables to increase opportunities for young people's communication and social skills.
- Consider how to demonstrate the progress of students in residence towards independence. For example, by linking their 'small step' residential goals with the 24-hour curriculum to make clear the value that residence brings to their whole school experience.
- Where appropriate identify specific risks and protective factors within care planning, for example, the rationale for risk-reduction measures for children's sleeping arrangements.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Outcomes and the experience of young people are outstanding. Residence ensures they maximise their potential. One young person described the personal benefits: 'To be a young person, without that parent restriction.' Another described the benefits for their families: 'Parents get a bit of time to de-stress, siblings get time with parents.' A parent described what it means for her son to stay in residence: 'It's his life line.' A social worker said: 'Progress really shows when children move here.'

Young people talk with passion about how their lives have changed because of coming to the school and staying in residence. One talked about his mainstream school before moving here, he said he had: 'lost that happy spark, now I feel comfortable in my own skin.'

There is a lively programme of creative and physically challenging activities that stretch young people's imaginations and physicality. Some enjoy intense sensory sessions and others love the competitive physicality of wheelchair basketball. They spend time with friends they would otherwise have been unable to meet up with after school. They have excellent opportunities to go out and about in the local community: to the pub to the local disco and for meals in town. They raise money and host fundraising coffee mornings for local charities. They say the best thing is, 'having fun, food, and clubs.'

There is a strong focus on building skills for the next stage of young people's lives: to college, work experience, or to the school's new post-19 educational provision. Young people overcome anxiety about transitions because they are better equipped to make informed choices. Parents see anxieties lessen in the more adult school environment. A parent described the realistic support for her child since moving to the school: 'He has come on leaps and bounds, not previously fulfilled. School will help him: they give him options, talk him through.'

There are excellent relationships between young people, staff and volunteers that promote responsibility and self respect. Formal and informal consultation is an everyday feature. One young person said: 'They promote you to be your best. You're given your rights and you make the most of it.' They talked about feeling respected as individuals; one said: 'It's incredibly easy to be different.' Young people feel they have a say in the school, they feel more confident to try and speak up. One said: 'I'm no Martin Luther King – but I will.' They describe a transformative experience. 'It can be a hard thing to speak out – spend a term or two here and you're pretty much set.'

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of residential provision and care is outstanding. The highly inclusive atmosphere promotes respect and dignity. There is seamless welfare provision between school and residence to meet the complex physical, health and learning needs of young people. Residential staff value the support from school-based occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and physiotherapy professionals to help young people in residential time. There is an excellent 24 - hour skilled nursing service on site. A student said: 'They handle the information, especially the medical issues.' Parents have great confidence that staff know how to care for their children with skill. One said her child had enjoyed really good health since moving to the school: 'All the right professionals help. They ring when they need to know something. Very happy.'

A placing authority described excellent clarity on care planning and support for children who are looked after. Young people create their own holistic personal centred plans (PCP) that follow them through their school career and inform academic and residential planning. These excellent

documents present young people's words and drawings about their aspirations and wellbeing. Pictorial learning journals are recently in place for young people with more profound disabilities. These chart less obvious, but significant achievements in touch, eye contact, concentration, and tolerance. Residential plans drawn from the PCP and the individual education plans are quite broad in their aims and could have more detail about how residential staff will promote the small steps towards young people's independence goals and reflect the 24-hour delivery of curriculum objectives.

Mealtimes are enjoyable, lively occasions and young people have sensitive staff support for feeding needs or special diets. Currently, kitchen staff serve evening meals 'canteen style' in the residential dining room. There could be more opportunities for young people to develop their social skills and maximise communication by serving themselves, staff, and each other at the table and sharing common food in a more homely way.

Boarding accommodation is well-equipped with specialist equipment for physical and sensory disabilities. Young people share bedrooms, but are satisfied with levels of privacy and many enjoy the camaraderie of the 'sleepover' as an essential part of their residential experience. Young people have access to excellent school facilities, for example, the post 16 unit is an excellent resource open to young people throughout their residential stay and there is a small kitchen where they can make hot drinks and snacks.

One young person described the impact of staying in residence on his quality of life and confidence to take part in new activities: 'Unbelievably amazing to see how it does bring us out of our shells.' Young people learn about healthy lifestyles and have good information and support about emotional and sexual health as they grow into adulthood. A young person said: 'It's built me up quite a bit-over the years – school's good for the learning, but residential teaches you more about life and yourself.'

Residential pupils' safety

Good

Young people's safety is good. Good policy, procedure, and training support rigorous safeguarding practice. Staff are knowledgeable about their responsibilities for child protection. Young people are often completely dependent on staff for their care needs. They appreciate staff's sensitive approach to delivering intimate personal care. They say staff are, 'respectful when it comes to privacy'. The local safeguarding authority reports confidence in the school's arrangements. No young person has gone missing from the school. Recruitment procedures ensure that all adults in unsupervised contact with children, are safe to do so. The school should consider how it can consistently evidence safer recruitment practice centrally, especially for volunteers and governors, where information may be held elsewhere.

Risk management protects young people, but also gives them the opportunity to get involved in activities like others of the same age or developmental stage. Staff carry out regular assessments of risk and check to ensure that every one is safe, from fire, accidents and unnecessary hazards. However, young people's care plans would benefit from a clear rationale for risk reduction measures, such as special equipment and sleeping arrangements considered necessary for young people's safety.

Behaviour is overwhelmingly harmonious. Restraint is not used. The head teacher describes an ethos of, 'rewards not negativity'. Staff are careful to ensure that dominant or irritating behaviour does not have a negative impact on more vulnerable young people. Young people say bullying is unknown and that staff are very good at dealing with those who have difficulty in understanding. One gave an example of how staff might talk to an autistic student: 'I know you're angry – take them aside – you have to calm down.' Young people say there are rules about language, about how they treat each other, especially how older pupils behave around the younger pupils. They

say get help with knowing what is appropriate: for example, their DVDs, choice of music and conversations.

Young people talk positively about having advice from a number of trusted female and male adults, including an independent visitor, who is, 'so easy to talk to'. One said: 'We still get things wrong, but the staff here try to make it right and steer us on the right path.'

The school is a place of safety for many young people who have not felt included in their previous schools. A parent said: 'We feel happy that he is safe and enjoys his experience.' There is a culture of acceptance and zero tolerance of homophobia and racism. One young person said: 'There's no discrimination here'. Young people were unanimous in feeling secure. One said it was, 'a really safe place to be'.

Leadership and management of the residential provision Outstanding

Leadership and management of residence is outstanding. Leaders in school and residence are effective, involved with young people, and think carefully about the service. They seek to develop and improve the school and this is reflected by young people's experience. One young person said: 'I moved from mainstream. It's been a joy to come here and be relaxed.' Another said: 'It's a good way of promoting independence and confidence.'

There has been excellent succession planning for the recent handover of residential leadership. The current residential leader is working towards a nationally recognised management qualification and is engaged in national developments of new inspection frameworks. This demonstrates the value placed on this aspect of school life. An independent reviewing officer described the school as excellent with, 'a proactive head teacher and strong organisation'.

There is effective monitoring and evaluation of residence, based on excellent consultation, active involvement by governors and continual review. There is a range of well-established and imaginative surveys of young people, parents, and staff. The information gathered is carefully considered and leads to action about particular issues, or problems, facing young people. For example, review has picked up some anxiety about vulnerability in the community and this led to a focus in individual learning about this through social stories. This is highly effective in improving the experience of social integration of young people. The school has developed provision for older learners, aged 19 to 25, with a local further education college. This is an example of how the school is making a significant difference to the lives of young people with greater needs, to continue their learning journey into adulthood.

Committed and enthusiastic staff are clear and ambitious about the part that residence plays in young people's learning in the school. A parent said: 'The staff really put 100 per cent effort into all they do for the children.' The well-trained, residential staff team is exceptionally skilled and enthusiastic about their role. They have regular professional supervision and appraisal and speak highly of their support and their happiness at work. Their enjoyment of their work is clear to young people too. One said: 'I can't pick a finer team', and another said, 'they're all here if you need to talk to someone.' One member of staff echoed this view: 'Working here has changed my outlook, I think this is down to the kids.'

Partnership working within therapeutic, nursing, and educational specialisms in the school, and with parents, is strong. Satisfaction levels across parents and associated professionals are very high. Complaints are extremely rare because communication is so good that any issues are resolved before they escalate. Parents and carers see phenomenal changes in their children. One described a dramatic improvement in achievement, 'a different child'. Another reflected on their daughter's time in residence: 'She has become a more mature, confident and well-rounded young lady.' Young people are clear about their value within the school. One student said: 'We are all a

massive team, including staff. The staff are the foundation of it and we broaden it.'

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	120755
Social care unique reference number	SC038622
DfE registration number	925/7016

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	Maintained
Number of boarders on roll	27
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 19
Headteacher	Mrs Ann Hoffmann
Date of previous boarding inspection	18/03/2014
Telephone number	01522 526498
Email address	admin@st-francis.lincs.sch.uk

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