

St Vincent's School for the Blind

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

Inspection dates	27/02/2015	
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

- Residential pupils flourish, and continue to progress extremely well in managing their own experiences and adventures, because of the exceptionally high quality of relationships that are encouraged and nurtured by staff. Residential pupils feel valued as staff and independent visitors listen to them and respond to their requests.
- Staff always place the well-being of residential pupils at the centre of their practice. Residential pupils are safe and say that they feel safe because of integrated and rigorously well-implemented safeguarding procedures. Residential pupils are empowered to use their voice to drive change and improvement within the school community, and this ensures the service remains relevant to them.
- Staff work well with parents and other professionals, to provide integrated and individualised packages of care that address the needs of residential pupils in a holistic and progressive way. Key workers involve residential pupils in identifying goals and reviewing their care plans, so that they can celebrate the progress they make.
- School leaders model high drive to plan and implement continuous development and improvement of the school. The school continues to be an example of residential provision that stands out as a beacon for equality and diversity. There are increasing opportunities for pupils to grow in confidence and independence. An exceptional arrangement for the provision of an integrated, whole school approach enables residential pupils to experience success in every aspect of their lives.
- Records and documents are generally very well maintained. On rare occasions, there are minor shortfalls in the records, such as occasional governor reports and complaints records that lack detail. However, these minor omissions have not detracted from the welfare and safety of residential pupils.

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 two days with feedback provided on the afternoon of day two. During the inspection records and documentation were examined.

Interviews took place with the residential pupils, head of care, principal, governors, 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 one extended evening.

Inspection team

Denise Jolly

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 20 November 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that records of complaints always include a written outcome to ensure the resolution is recorded for future reference.
- Further improve the records of independent visitor's reports to capture all service evaluation and action discussed with the head of care.
- Further develop independence programmes for pupils, to broaden the range of community based experiences offered to residential pupils

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outstanding

Residential pupils develop very strong social relationships with their peers and they significantly improve their self-esteem and confidence because of the residential experience. For example, some pupils who previously attended other schools lacked confidence and self-worth. Since their admission to the school and staying at the residential unit, pupils have developed into friendly confident young people. They describe themselves as having 'become more happy and confident because of better friendships and experiences.' They live in a caring social community where they develop trust in each other. Friendships have flourished and a strong bond has developed between the pupils. They enjoy their time in the residential unit and feel comfortable in the safe surroundings of the wider school. Residential pupils show an exceptional improvement in independence and self-esteem. They enjoy active participation in activities such as climbing, music and scouts. Visual impairment is not a limitation to their participation in wide ranging and demanding activities. This is an excellent example of equality and diversity.

The behaviour of the residential pupils improves significantly during their time at the residential unit. Through the empathetic and calm approach taken by staff, the residential pupils have over time, learned how to modify the way they respond to situations in which they previously reacted with anger and frustration. Residential pupils feel valued by staff and it is evident that they have developed a more tolerant understanding of their peers and other adults. They learn about acceptable behaviour in public settings. They respond well to the care and guidance of the staff. Staff said, 'We want the children to have the same opportunities as all children, to experience life's ups and downs.' Without exception, residential pupils describe the residential resource as a 'happy place where everyone gets on well, and the staff are fantastic.'

Pupils are actively involved in the life of the school through the elected student council. This body contributes to decisions about a wide range of activities. Their views are taken seriously by the school. For example, pupils are actively involved in exploring the development of opportunities for involving the community in projects such as those creating work experience and job prospects. This promotes their sense of responsibility and ownership in the life of the school.

The residential pupils are encouraged to take an interest in their health and fitness. They regularly go swimming, take part in horse riding and outdoor awards schemes. They are fully engaged in discussions about how to eat more healthily. The healthcare officer based at the school ensures that the arrangements for promoting and maintaining the physical, emotional and psychological health of the residential pupils are highly effective.

Through their residential experience, pupils learn important personal skills. Parents are very positive about the impact of the residential unit on their children. One pointed out, 'My child has learned to be more independent and is learning to do things for herself such as showering and making cups of tea.' By the time residential pupils leave the school they have learned significant life skills that enhances their ability to cope with the world of work, further training or education.

Quality of residential provision and care

Outstanding

The care provided to the residential pupils is of a high standard and each pupil has access to an experienced and very stable team of care staff who know them very well. The staff are responsible for the pastoral care of the pupils. This means that the pupils are able to share their personal thoughts and any concerns at any time, and they say that staff always listen to them. Care staff demonstrate a positive enthusiasm for their work in the residential unit. They are very active in supporting the residential pupils to enjoy life at the school.

All admissions to the residential unit are carried out with utmost sensitivity and careful planning involving the parents and the child. Staff carry out a detailed assessment to ensure that the prospective residential pupil will fit in with the other pupils who use the unit. This is to ensure that the pupil can gain the maximum experience from the resources of the residential unit.

Care plans are informative, and detailed. Managers regularly update the systems used for relevance and effectiveness. Key workers focus on safeguarding; behaviour and mobility support; raising self-confidence; promoting diversity and independence skills on an individualised basis. Young people agree their plans, and sign to say that they agree with the targets set for their personal development. A positive strength of the school is lively communication between the residential unit and school. All staff consistently aim high for pupils, and help them to achieve their best. The recording of each pupil's progress is evaluative, and includes the views of parents as well as each pupil. The partnership approach between care and teaching staff provides consistency for pupils. This supports their personal and academic development. Residential pupils' achievements are celebrated throughout the school with a range of certificates, photographs and examples of paintings and other work on display. Staff are knowledgeable about individual pupil's needs. The provision of residential care is effectively organised to complement the interests and achievements of the pupils.

The residential pupils enjoy an extensive range of activities that enables them to develop their confidence and team work skills. For example, Many pupils are enjoying the newly formed scout group that meets in the school. Typical of the school's approach to inclusion has been the initiative taken by the school that has resulted in the Scout organisation's development of a badge designed to increase national understanding of visual impairment. This celebrates the unique strengths and experiences of children who could be perceived by wider society as being less able, and is an outstanding example of diversity and equality. The culture of the residential unit and school is one that promotes and actively encourages pupils to fulfil their potential. For example, through activities such as rock climbing, one pupil has participated in world competitions and has achieved major success. She proudly told the inspector that she is undertaking a course that will lead to future employment as a rock climbing coach. Staff create a nurturing environment where pupils are encouraged to do their best within their capabilities. The school has an ethos of valuing pupils and this creates a culture of respect. The development of self-esteem and self-worth in all pupils is strongly and actively promoted.

Pupils have all their health needs appropriately met. A health care worker based at the school ensures that any medical needs are addressed in-house or from wider health services. Medicines are stored securely and administered by trained staff. Where appropriate, staff support young people learn to administer their own medication. Emergency plans are in place, to support young people whose health may deteriorate. Effective communication between school and parents ensure that their families care for pupils, should their health deteriorate.

The residential accommodation provides the pupils with a safe and comfortable environment to enjoy their stay. Most pupils have single bedrooms, although some like to share with their friends. Following consultation with pupils, each bedroom has a touch-readable nameplate, to help pupils to locate their own rooms with ease. Managers have identified the need to modernise kitchen areas, to make them more accessible for young people. This will enable them to become more independent in food preparation, to prepare them for adult life. There is plenty of space for pupils to enjoy communal lounges and dining areas, and pupils enjoy the sociability of a spacious youth club area where they can chat, buy items from the tuck shop, and play bar football and pool. Staff are mindful of improving the quality of residential accommodation, and a refurbishment programme has provided new sofas and replaced some curtains and blinds. In general, the residential provision is clean, comfortable and homely, and pupils move confidently, safely and freely within it.

Pupils enjoy meals from a choice of salads, meat or vegetarian options. The high standards of meals provided support the aim of encouraging a healthy lifestyle. A current topic of debate is how meals in the evenings can be healthier. Pupils are energetic in sharing their views of how their preferences for fast and convenient food can be accommodated as well as more healthy options. One pupil ruefully acknowledged that he ought to eat more healthily and take more exercise, but loved chips and pizza and was a bit of a couch potato. Staff used humour and tolerance to help him to make small changes that would improve his overall fitness.

Parents are very pleased with the quality of care provided for their children, and write letters and cards to show their appreciation of the service. They say that it is easy to contact the school, and share their concerns or anxieties with the home-school liaison officer. School governors said, 'The residential staff care enormously about the pupils, and because of this, pupils love staying at school.'

Residential pupils' safety

Outstanding

Staff take great care to ensure the safety of all the pupils. Managers follow comprehensive recruitment and selection procedures to ensure that only staff who are suitable to work with residential pupils are appointed. All required checks are undertaken before a staff member begins work. All staff have been appropriately trained in safeguarding, and regular updates include training from the local authority protection professionals. They have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to ensure that the residential pupils are cared for in a safe environment. The safeguarding lead for the school ensures that any matter of concern is appropriately escalated to professionals outside of school, to enable all matters to be addressed promptly. This enhances the safety and wellbeing of all pupils.

There are clear risk management systems in place for the buildings and grounds. Residential pupils are kept safe through robust checks on all fire-safety equipment and through regular practice of fire evacuation procedures. Pupils are confident about how to evacuate in an emergency, and demonstrated their knowledge to the inspector by locating the fire doors and alarm points. Key workers oversee whole school risk assessments for pupils that clearly define their vulnerabilities and identify strategies to minimise the risks to pupils safety and welfare.

Residential pupils say that bullying is not an issue. One pupil said, 'we are all in the same boat, and that means we are kind and helpful to each other. However, if any relationship issues are identified, the staff act quickly. Pupils are aware of the impact of intolerance on the feelings of others. In a rare instance of racial abuse, staff acted quickly to help the young person to understand that their behaviour was unacceptable, and helped him to find a way of making amends. Residential pupils say that they have only minor grumbles, and that staff always respond to help them to sort out their worries. There have been no instances of pupils going missing.

All staff are trained in behaviour management, and this is being refreshed according to appropriate timescales. They use positive and proactive strategies to defuse any disruptive behaviour. Restraint is rarely used within the residential unit and staff are competent in using de-escalation techniques to manage any behaviours effectively. Sanctions are rarely applied, because staff have high expectations of pupil behaviour, and use calm discussion to alert pupils to making positive choices.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Outstanding

The leadership and management of the setting is outstanding. The principal and head of care ensure that the residential community is at the heart of the school. The residential service is fully engaged in the changing vision for the school to become a centre of integrated enterprise and

learning for visually impaired pupils. Energetic and highly involved senior managers effectively promote clear visions and values that provide a safe, nurturing and dynamic environment. They demonstrate a commendable commitment to ensuring a whole school approach underpins every aspect of young people's lives at school. This has a very positive effect on residential pupils. They are proud of their excellent achievements and positive progress, and bask in the praise and recognition given by staff when high expectations are met.

The head of care and senior residential staff conduct performance monitoring of the residential unit. This informs the principal's annual report to the board of governors. There are strong links between the care and teaching staff and this contributes positively to the achievements of the pupils. The principal is positive about the need to continually review services with a view to improved outcomes for the pupils. Being resident plays an important role in the overall aim of encouraging pupils to achieve their potential both socially and educationally. For example, recent initiatives in bringing external businesses and challenges into school have opened up opportunities for pupils to demonstrate their employability in the field of electronic and computer game design.

Staff are enthusiastic, competent and well managed and they demonstrate a professional commitment to their work. There are always sufficient staff available at all times to ensure the efficient operation of the unit and to meet the care needs of the residential pupils. All staff are trained to the required level in order to carry out their roles and responsibilities. The management of the school is committed to ensuring staff are supported to develop their skills through regular supervision and training. Weekly meetings of senior managers are used to successfully communicate emerging concepts and projects to residential staff, to ensure they remain fully involved in whole school development. For example, staff are able to contribute to discussions about how to develop a café on site, to provide pupils with important work experience in catering and hospitality.

Records are generally well maintained. Complaints are rare, and when they occur, the leadership team responds promptly to work towards a successful resolution. On one occasion the records did not include an outcome letter to parents, because the matter was resolved through discussion and emails. This did not impact directly on the high quality of care provided to the residential pupils, but it prevented a record of the resolution being available for future reference.

The governors are active in supporting the school. They undertake regular visits to the residence, and write about their findings. This external scrutiny identifies strengths and areas for development that are acted upon to enhance the quality of care for pupils. For example, following an incident of young people making an unauthorised visit to another's bedroom, governors and the head of care reviewed privacy and appropriate social opportunities for pupils. The reports do not always cover all areas in sufficient detail, to record the discussions that take place between the visitors and the head of care. This limits management overview of evaluation of the residential service.

The school has developed positive relationships with parents who trust the staff to care for their children. The principal, head of care and home school liaison officer work closely with external professionals to ensure placements support pupil development. Care staff attend annual reviews of progress for pupils, and provide clear accounts of how pupils have benefitted from the residential experience.

Pupils value their time in the residential service. There is excellent rapport between staff and residential pupils. There is universal approval for staff. Pupils say, 'staff are the best in the country, this school is the best', 'staff help me', and 'staff are the greatest, even if they tell the worst jokes!'

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	24
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 19
Headteacher	Dr John Patterson
Date of previous boarding inspection	20/11/2013
Telephone number	0151 2289969
Email address	office@stvin.com

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