

# St Mary's Special School and Sixth Form College

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

## Inspection dates

18 to 20 May 2015

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people

### Requires improvement

Quality of care and support

Good

How well children and young people are protected

Requires improvement

Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Requires improvement

## Summary of key findings

### The residential provision requires improvement because

- The residential provision provides pupils with good quality care and support but the judgement for the overall experiences and progress of pupils is requires improvement. The shortfalls in the national minimum standards for residential special schools identified at the previous inspection have been met, demonstrating that leaders and managers have focused on improvements. However, some weaknesses remain.
- Safeguarding procedures have improved, thus more effectively protecting the welfare of pupils. However, shortfalls remain in relation to the behaviour management of some pupils and these failings are affecting the well-being of other pupils.
- Monitoring of the residential provision is now more effective. Managers are identifying areas for improvement and taking action to remedy areas of weakness. Staff are receiving appropriate training, support and appraisal of their practice. Although, pupils' individual plans are detailed and comprehensive allowing staff to promote their development more effectively, further development of targeted key working and a focus on implementing therapy programmes to meet all pupils' specific needs is required to enhance pupils' overall experience.
- Most pupils report that they feel safe and happy boarding at the school and are positive about their relationships with staff. There continues to be a mixed response

from parents with some parents reporting extremely favourably on the progress pupils are making as a result of their residential experience. However, some parents continue to have concerns and anxieties about staffing levels, leadership and management and consultation with parents. Leaders and managers continue to endeavour to re-establish the confidence of parents during a period of change.

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school does not meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The school has and consistently implements a written policy on managing behaviour, including promoting good behaviour (NMS 12.1)

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that parental consent is obtained for the use of monitors
- Ensure all incidents of physical intervention are recorded
- Ensure all risk assessments are clear and regularly reviewed
- Establish a more structured key working system targeting specific support to meet pupils' individual needs
- Ensure the therapy team provides support and guidance specific to each pupil's individual needs
- Ensure the governance of the school provides sufficient and robust scrutiny and oversight.

### **Information about this inspection**

The school was given two hours' notice of the inspection. All the residential houses currently in use were visited. Residential pupils' feedback was obtained through Ofsted surveys completed during the inspection, meetings with pupils, evening activities, house meetings and shared meals. Inspectors met the senior management team including the head of care and deputy head of care. There were also meetings with residential staff, the designated child protection officer, safeguarding governor, head of therapy, human resources lead, nurse manager, estates manager, vice chair of governors, governor and catering manager. Parents' feedback was obtained through surveys and telephone calls. Documents relating to the welfare and safety of pupils were sampled.

## Inspection team

Jan Hunnam	Lead social care inspector
Sophie Wood	Social care inspector
Keith Riley	Social care inspector
Suzy Lemmy	Social Care Inspector

# **Full report**

## **Information about this school**

St Mary's Special School and Sixth Form College is a non-maintained mixed residential special school for up to 130 residential pupils and 30 day pupils aged between 7- 19 years. There are currently 89 residential pupils. The residential accommodation is provided in eight houses, five of which are on the main school site and three are located nearby. One of the houses is not currently in use. The school is situated in Bexhill-on-Sea. It is a school for pupils with speech, language and communication needs. Some pupils also have autistic spectrum disorder and other difficulties and disabilities. The residential provision had its last inspection in November 2014.

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people

### Requires improvement

Residential pupils experience positive, sensitive and nurturing relationships with staff enabling them to trust the adults who care for them and accept the support offered. Most pupils report that they feel safe and happy boarding at the school, though currently there are some pupils who are occasionally anxious due to the behaviour of another pupil. However, staff are supportive in such circumstances and continually promote appropriate relationships.

Pupils are positive about the school and state that 'staff are kind' and they are treated with dignity and respect. A parent commented that the 'residential provision is outstanding and their child would not have made the growth and progress they have achieved without boarding at the school and the benefits of the waking curriculum'. Another parent commented that 'staff are very supportive and focus on what their child can do rather than what they are not able to do'.

Pupils make good progress and significant development in their social skills, confidence and self-esteem. They have a strong voice within the residential provision where staff ensure all pupils have opportunities to put their views forward. Consequently, pupils feel valued and respected. There is a strong focus on developing independence and daily living skills at a level and pace that takes into account the pupil's individual abilities. Such opportunities prepare pupils for the next stage in their lives and allow them to maximise their potential.

The residential provision is an integral part of the school and central in advancing pupils' academic, personal, social and emotional development. More cohesive collaboration amongst teams across the school is benefitting pupils. However, further development of targeted key working and a focus on implementing therapy programmes to meet all pupils' specific needs is required to enhance pupils' overall experience.

Although safeguarding procedures have improved, thus more effectively protecting the welfare of pupils, shortfalls remain in relation to the behaviour management of some pupils. These failings are affecting the well-being of other pupils.

### Quality of care and support

### Good

The quality of care and support provided by the residential provision is good. Effective support by a dedicated and enthusiastic staff team provides nurturing and individualised care. A parent reported that the residential provision provides 'a positive environment'.

Pupils report that they are confident they can make their views known. Staff are patient and sensitive to their individual needs, ensuring they all have opportunities to put their views forward. A strength of the residential provision is the commitment of staff in communicating with pupils who have difficulties in this area. Regular house meetings provide a more formal setting for pupils to put forward their views. In a relaxed atmosphere, staff take time to ensure pupils have opportunities to ask questions, discuss issues and fully participate. Pupils report that they find these meetings helpful to them.

This increases the pupils' voice within the residential provision. Pupils are aware of the support they can access outside the school if they have concerns. Contact details for this support are clearly on display within the houses. Pupils report that they are comfortable talking to staff if they have any concerns.

There is a thorough assessment and induction process for pupils new to residential life, ensuring staff identify the individual needs of each pupil with plans to meet their specific requirements. These plans are detailed, and take account of their communication, medical, personal care, emotional, safety, social and educational needs. Such comprehensive plans enable staff to have sufficient knowledge and understanding of each pupil to promote their development. These plans are current and are updated as pupils' needs change.

Managers have identified that key working requires improvement. They are planning to introduce a new system involving a detailed baseline assessment of each pupil's particular skills, enabling staff to target specific support to promote pupils' development through more structured key working. Currently, evidence of key working is not demonstrating that staff are using opportunities to promote pupils' developmental needs effectively.

Care staff, education staff and the therapy team are working more closely together. Work is in progress to further improve procedures for closer liaison between different teams, including health professionals and therapists, and closer involvement with parents to promote positive outcomes for pupils.

A range of activities is available to residential pupils both on site and in the local community. They are encouraged to pursue their individual interests and to participate in group activities, which enrich their social experiences and develop their social interaction skills. Some activities are specifically linked to pupils' targets and their statement of educational needs, thus ensuring that the residential curriculum supports their development.

Pupils receive the support they need to meet their individual health care needs. The qualified nursing team oversee pupils' medical and health needs to a high standard. Emergency protocols, compiled by the lead nurse, are in place for pupils who require specific support and who have discrete health plans to identify their health requirements. Pupils who do not have specific health or medical requirements have their health needs identified in their care plan. The nurses administer medication for the pupils living on site. Staff who administer medication to pupils living off site are fully trained to administer medication safely. Staff are also trained to administer emergency medication when it is required. Internal audit systems for medication, including emergency medication and homely remedies, have improved ensuring a safe process for recording quantities signed in and out.

The nursing team also contribute to pupils' health education, providing information at an appropriate level to promote healthy living. A team of therapists, including speech and language therapists and occupational therapists provide specialist support and guidance. Some pupils' individual plans do not fully incorporate their therapy goals to ensure staff

are supporting their development at every opportunity. Currently, the head of therapy is reviewing pupils' individual therapy programmes to ensure the programmes meet pupils' needs as identified in their statement of educational need.

Staff use monitors at night for those pupils who have specific medical needs and require a greater degree of staff supervision to ensure their safety. There is no evidence that staff have obtained parents' consent for the use of these monitors.

Pupils enjoy the food on offer, which is healthy and varied. Pupils have opportunities to make suggestions and change menus through the school council and college forum. Catering staff provide for special dietary needs when necessary with risk assessments in place for pupils who have severe allergies. Meals are well-ordered, social occasions with occupational therapists supporting pupils with independent skills at the dining table and staff promoting healthy eating habits.

Residential accommodation is of a good standard. Living areas are comfortable, relaxing and maintained to a high level. Refurbishment is on-going with new carpets recently fitted in bedrooms and communal areas. Managers are planning improvements to bathrooms as the next stage of up-dating. Pupils personalise their own bed space and choose pictures and soft furnishings for living areas. This helps them develop a sense of belonging and self-identity. Managers address pupils' specific needs in relation to the environment particularly well, ensuring they have full access to amenities within their house thus demonstrating dignity and respect.

#### **How well children and young people are protected**

#### **Requires improvement**

The arrangements in place to ensure residential pupils receive safe care and are protected from harm require improvement. Some pupils report they do not feel safe. This is due to the behaviour of one young person, which is causing concern and affecting the well-being of others. Although appropriate strategies are in place to protect pupils and minimise the disruptive effect of the pupil's behaviour, there is no behaviour management plan in place to direct staff in the safe management of the escalating behaviour. This is not in line with the school's behaviour management policy.

Senior managers have recently reviewed and updated policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding and child protection. The designated lead for child protection is a qualified social worker who has undertaken the required safeguarding training. Recent examples of timely referrals to safeguarding agencies and dialogue with placing authorities demonstrate a proactive approach to safeguarding and the promotion of pupils' welfare. Four other senior managers have also received designated person's training in relation to safeguarding and child protection. All staff are receiving further comprehensive training to ensure they are fully aware of the risks pupils may face and the procedures they need to follow for reporting any concerns. A new governor has been appointed with specific safeguarding responsibilities and they have completed safeguarding governor training. Regular meetings with the designated lead for safeguarding and child protection now provide rigorous and robust oversight of these matters. Consequently, the school's child protection and safeguarding policy is more robustly implemented to protect pupils effectively.

Effective links with external safeguarding authorities are in place. Records demonstrate that staff are now appropriately referring concerns to protect pupils. Senior managers have strengthened the links between different staff groups and weekly meetings take place to monitor concerns about pupils' welfare. This clear focus on safeguarding pupils, with all staff taking responsibility for raising concerns and understanding reporting procedures, protects pupils and demonstrates improved safeguarding practices.

Promoting positive behaviour is a clear strength of the residential provision. Positive, trusting relationships between pupils and staff underpin pupils' safety and allow them to accept the support staff offer. Consequently, the behaviour of the vast majority of pupils is excellent. Incidents of inappropriate behaviour are infrequent. Staff receive training to manage behaviour and are skilled at diffusing and de-escalating potentially difficult situations. Physical intervention is used infrequently and is appropriately recorded, including a de-brief with staff and the pupils. Staff are now recording the comments of the pupils regarding the incident. However, one incident of physical restraint was not recorded. A new, improved system for recording sanctions is in place, which involves the pupil reflecting on their behaviour and identifying future action to help support them individually.

Pupils are aware of the complaints procedure and use it to make their views known. Staff respond to these complaints appropriately. Pupils are confident they can approach an adult if they have any concerns and staff will respond and support them.

There is an improved risk assessment process in place detailing individual strategies to safeguard pupils. Staff are re-evaluating risk assessments following significant incidents to ensure there are clear procedures to reduce future risks and keep pupils safe. However, the quality of some of these documents is variable and not all risk assessments are up-to-date.

The safety of pupils when on-line has a high priority. Managers have recently updated guidance for staff. There is a clear focus on raising pupils' awareness of the danger they may face when using the internet. Through on-going group and individual discussions, staff support pupils to use the internet safely. Discreet supervision and appropriate filters are combined with teaching pupils to think for themselves, as far as their learning needs allow.

Recruitment processes are robust ensuring that only adults who have been checked as being suitable to work with children are employed.

The safety of the residential environment is monitored effectively. The maintenance team regularly carry out a range of health and safety checks and fire checks, including fire drills for residential pupils. This ensures the environment is safe and protects pupils and staff from the risk of harm. Pupils have personal emergency evacuation plans identifying their specific support needs in the event of an emergency.

#### **Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

#### **Requires improvement**

The head of care has been in post since March 2014. A new deputy head of care commenced in February 2015. Staff report managers are supportive and they feel included and consulted about necessary changes and improvements in systems and



procedures. Staff report that morale is good with 'everyone working together' to support pupils to make progress, achieve their goals and ensure their safety. Other senior managers within the school are relatively new in post but they are working cohesively to integrate the different areas of the school and provide a high level of consistency to benefit pupils.

Appropriate staffing levels are in place to meet the identified needs of pupils. Independent needs assistants are employed to assist pupils specifically where one-to-one support is required, thus providing consistency for pupils. A comprehensive training programme is in place to ensure staff can meet the needs of pupils. This includes training in autism spectrum disorders. Induction programmes for new staff support them to develop the skills required to work with pupils. 94% of staff who have completed their probationary period are qualified to the required level or are currently working towards the qualification. Individual supervision sessions for staff are regular and in accordance with the school's policy. Staff also receive timely appraisal. Such systems ensure staff receive formal and regular review of their practice to maintain high standards of care for pupils.

Managers are now more effectively monitoring the care provided in relation to day-to-day documentation and recording. They also review policies and procedures to ensure that systems adequately support staff to meet the needs of pupils. Managers are currently reviewing the process of key working with the aim of different staff teams working together and with parents to achieve a more integrated approach to promote pupils' positive outcomes. A new independent visitor provides reports on the standards of care. Their analysis contributes positively to the quality assurance system and provides a tool for improvement and maintaining standards of care. Currently, the governance of the school is under review, with the aim of clarifying and strengthening the role of governors and trustees to provide rigorous oversight of the school. At the present time, there is insufficient robust scrutiny to effectively monitor and review the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

There have been five recorded formal complaints since the last inspection. Responses from parents on Parent View show that a majority of parents do not agree that the school is well led and managed. A significant number disagree that the school responds well to concerns raised by parents. Telephone conversations with parents demonstrate that some parents continue to have concerns and anxieties about staffing levels, leadership and management and consultation with parents. Senior managers and trustees recognise the need to improve communication with parents considerably and are determined to develop transparent channels of consultation to re-establish the confidence of parents through a period of change.

Senior managers are committed and focused on improving the standards of care. Ensuring the residential provision meets the national minimum standards has been a priority since the last inspection. Managers have instigated the necessary changes to secure considerable improvement in the quality of care provided for pupils to the extent that the previous national minimum standards shortfalls are now met. Managers recognise the need for further improvement and are closely monitoring and evaluating practice to ensure this improvement journey continues.



## What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	133653
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC050390
<b>DfE registration number</b>	845/7000

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Non-maintained residential special school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	89
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	7-19
<b>Headteacher</b>	Sharon Menghini
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	12-14 November 2014
<b>Telephone number</b>	01424 730740
<b>Email address</b>	admin@stmarysbexhill.org

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