

St Bernard's School

St. Bernards House, Wood Lane, LOUTH, Lincolnshire, LN11 8RS

Inspection dates

15/09/2015 to 17/09/2015

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- The residential provision has been judged as outstanding in all areas and there are no failures to meet National Minimum Standards or recommendations for improvement. In a survey conducted with parents, for the second consecutive year, 100% of parents agreed they would recommend this provision to others.
- Young people make excellent progress in all areas of their development as a result of the residential experience. This is especially strong in the area of social skills and development of independence. This supports their transition to adulthood.
- Young people are fully involved in all aspects of their care. Staff ensure the views and opinions of every young person are heard and acted upon.
- There is a culture of openness and trust that encourages young people to share any concerns. They know who to talk to and know they will be listened to. This helps to keep them safe.
- Managers, leaders and staff are excellent. They constantly strive to improve the way they work, providing exceptional care and opportunities for young people resident in this provision.

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

This inspection was announced on the morning of the start of the inspection. The inspector visited the residential accommodation, spoke to the young people and staff, including key staff with responsibility for the residential provision. The inspector also observed practice in the residential provision and scrutinised school policies and records. The inspector was unable to gather information from Parent View as not enough had been completed. However, the inspector did speak to parents during the inspection.

Inspection team

Judith Longden

Lead Social Care Inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

St Bernard's School is a residential special school that has just gained academy status. It provides for 62 students aged 2-19 years. Three students currently reside at the school during the week and a further 13 have the opportunity to use the provision at weekends. The residential accommodation is located on the school site within one of three buildings and on a single level. The school is located in Louth, a small country town in the rural county of Lincolnshire. The school serves a population of primarily white British young people. The school caters for students with complex and severe learning disabilities. The last residential inspection was carried out in July 2014.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Young people at the residential provision make excellent progress academically, in their health, and in their independence skills. This is because staff and young people enjoy excellent relationships and they have developed a deep trust of the staff who care for them. The strength of these relationships enhances self-belief and confidence in their own abilities and enables young people to understand appropriate social interactions. This gives young people the confidence to excel in other areas. One parent commented: 'They have made such a difference in my son's personality and confidence. Communication with, and following instructions from, a wider range of people is clearly having an enormous impact on confidence and independence skills'.

Staff understand the individual young people and their needs. They are committed to ensuring the very best for each young person. Progress towards achieving their academic and independence targets is monitored and staff are clear what further input is required to ensure young people continue to achieve. Aspirations for every young person are high. When young people appear to be near to reaching their targets, staff identify an 'extension challenge' to push their achievements even further. Care practice continues to develop and improve as a result of research into, and the development of, varied interventions and ways of working with young people.

Young people are very happy and enjoy being at the provision. They work well as a team and show genuine affection for each other.

Achievement in education is excellent. The school and care staff work very closely to ensure the opportunities to learn and develop skills in school are consolidated in the residential provision. For example, young people take part in domestic science activities in the school's spacious kitchen and then help care staff to prepare and cook meals in the residential provision. Similarly, tasks and activities that young people take part in during the evenings, such as ordering on-line shopping, or going on a trip, are linked to their individual learning plan targets. This ensures young people are continually learning and enjoying varied activities. One teacher commented that the activities at the residential provision, 'enriches young people's experiences'.

The development of social and independence skills is a core feature of the provision. Care staff work closely with parents to provide consistent strategies to support young people to develop a range of independence skills to help them transfer to another setting and make the transition to adulthood. These include personal care, cooking, budgeting and accessing community activities. One parent said: 'He has learnt to help and has bought this home and is now more helpful around the home. He has come on leaps and bounds and is so much more independent.'

Young people also greatly benefit from the input from the transitions worker. This member of staff provides a key resource and access to a range of post 16 opportunities. They also help to identify learning skills programmes where young people can enjoy a weeklong programme in topics such as drama, gardening, administration and computer

use. Opportunities for work experience are also identified. For example, one young person is due to start his work experience at the local library. This range of opportunities and provision ensures young people are constantly benefitting from age appropriate activities to develop independence and social skills and enables them and their families to make informed choices about their future.

Young people make progress in their health because staff encourage them to take responsibility, especially for their personal hygiene and care routines. A range of healthy activities such as swimming ensures physical health is continually improving. Young people are aware of their development into adolescence and the effect this has on their bodies and their emotional development. Sexual health is appropriately explored ensuring young people are able to manage their feelings and behaviours as they become young adults.

Young people's views are constantly sought. Staff know that it is of vital importance to understand their communication needs and this ensures non-verbal young people are afforded the same opportunities to share their views and voice any concerns. One young person represents the residents on the school council. In addition, regular young people's meetings enable residents to share their views. Staff take these views very seriously. For example, one young person commented that there were not enough staff trained to drive the minibus. A number of staff have since acquired this training. This has resulted in an increase in the range of activities young people can enjoy.

Young people also have access to an independent advocate who visits regularly. This ensures they are well cared for, safe and making good progress. Again, the requests of young people have been appropriately addressed, for example they have been able to really personalise their bedrooms. This has provided a sense of belonging to the residential provision.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The school and residential provision have a clear ethos to provide a safe environment where young people are able to develop a range of skills and confidence to achieve their individual targets. This ethos is clearly implemented in the daily care of young people.

Staff know the importance of effective care planning and implementation. Each young person's care file starts with the following statement: 'To be an effective part of a young person's life as they grow up we need to ensure that our care plans reflect who the young person is and support them in where they and their families want them to be'. Staff understand the impact of the care they provide on the development and progress of young people. One member of staff, reflecting on the progress made by a young person who recently left the school to go to college, said: 'We shared 14 years of his life and it is great to see the progress he made'.

Care plans are highly individual and written with input from young people and their families. Clear targets are identified, as well as steps to take to achieve each target. These care targets are intrinsically linked with education and individual learning plans. Young people comment on their own abilities and starting points and monitor their

progress which boosts their confidence and self-esteem.

Residential and academic staff, parents and external professionals work effectively together in the care of the young people, utilising a variety of interventions and techniques to ensure each young person benefits from holistic care that is bespoke to their needs. These interventions include speech and language therapy, sensory integration, systematic instruction and intensive interaction. A therapist stated: 'They really do look at the whole child. It is a dedicated team wanting to strive to understand and meet each child's needs to bring out the very best in that child'. Staff are eager to learn and work well as a team providing excellent care and promoting a range of exciting and challenging opportunities to enhance young people's life chances. One professional commented: 'Staff are very welcoming, eager to learn and seem to work well as a team'.

Staff have excellent relationships with the young people and provide a nurturing and warm environment. One young person said: 'I give staff 10 out of 10'. A parent commented: 'Staff provide a settled place and care for him in a family environment; they love him, care for him and support him'. Young people receive a comprehensive and well planned induction to the residential provision including tea visits, overnight stays and social stories. This means young people settle quickly. Transitions from the provision are equally well planned. This ensures young people enjoy their experiences and feel ready to move on.

The residential provision is well decorated and furnished. Young people are able to personalise their bedrooms. There is plenty of space to share group activities. There are also areas where young people can enjoy solo activities or do their homework with staff. The garden has a range of play equipment and space for games. A new sensory room in the school will open shortly and all young people will be able to benefit from this facility. Care staff are to be trained in the use of the equipment to ensure young people gain full benefit from the sensory experiences.

Staff understand individual health needs and medication practice is sound. The shortfall identified at the last inspection has been addressed because staff have recently benefitted from further medication training. Staff are also able to access specialist health training as required and are supported by the specialist nursing team and local pharmacists. The food provided is excellent and any dietary needs are catered for. The school has an 'allergy ambassador' who ensures any food allergies are taken into account. Young people actively participate in the preparation of evening meals and this provides further opportunities for learning as well as a healthy diet.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Young people are protected from harm and they say that they feel safe. This protection is not just because staff are well trained and the building is safe, but because there is a culture of openness and trust where young people feel able to voice their concerns. Regular visitors such as governors, independent advocates, school staff, and other professionals ensure young people have every opportunity to talk to someone other than care staff if they are worried. Young people who are non-verbal are given the same opportunities to express themselves because staff and visitors understand their varied communication styles.

Staff are trained in safeguarding and understand the individual vulnerabilities and potential risks for young people. They are aware of the process to follow if they have a concern or an allegation is made. There have been no allegations or complaints since the last inspection. Staff are also aware of the risks associated with young people being absent or missing from the home. Detailed risk assessments highlight individual vulnerabilities and guide staff to reduce and control risks. Where appropriate, staff are trained in safe recruitment. Potential new staff go through a range of rigorous checks to ensure that they are suitable to work with vulnerable young people. A very robust induction and probation period ensures staff are supported in their new role. The school is also following safeguarding guidance by reviewing records on all existing staff and their associations. The monitoring of visitors also ensures young people are shielded from inappropriate adults.

A range of risk assessments ensure staff can effectively manage the risks associated with games, visits and activities. This management of risk does not prevent young people from engaging in challenging and exciting activities such as trips, visits to parks, and the use of community facilities. One young person said he wanted to have a lawn mower. This was risk assessed, protective footwear was purchased, and he is now able to enjoy mowing the lawn which gives him a new skill and helps to maintain the pleasant environment.

Staff, leaders, and governors are aware of the wide ranging safeguarding concerns that may affect young people such as the possible misuse of the internet, bullying, sexual exploitation and grooming. Opportunities to discuss these topics are provided both in school and in the residential provision. The appropriate use of resources such as theatre groups helps young people to understand such risks.

Behaviour is extremely well managed. The use of constant praise reinforces positive behaviour. Sanctions are never used and the use of restraint is very rare with only one incident since the last inspection. The regular monitoring of behaviour enables staff and leaders to intervene and support young people as appropriate. For example, it was noted there had been a recent peak in incidents and behaviours with one young person. This was identified as coinciding with a family event. Staff were able to reduce anxieties associated with this event by the use of social stories and increased support. This calmed him significantly and his behaviour improved.

The physical environment is very safe whilst not restricting activities and movement of young people. The building is kept safe and secure with a team of committed staff responsible for safety, maintenance, security and fire checks. Young people and staff practice fire drills. This meets a recommendation from the previous inspection and ensures that young people are aware of what to do in an emergency.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The provision is managed extremely well. Qualified and experienced managers and staff are constantly looking at how to enhance the way they work and develop as a team. The whole organisation has recently embraced a coaching model designed to enable staff to

understand their own strengths and feel valued. The Model encourages staff to explore different ways of working. This is already having a positive impact on young people. For example, staff understand their own skills and are encouraged and empowered to use these to provide a range of new activities and experiences for young people to enjoy.

The school has recently become an academy and has forged links with other local schools to form a trust. This promotes the educational and community opportunities for young people. A range of policies provide a sound framework for staff to work effectively. These are in the process of being reviewed following the move to academy status and staff will be trained to ensure they understand any changes to the way they work.

All staff have 'personal learning journeys' which encompass all their training, learning and supervision. Progress reports provide staff with the opportunity to reflect on what they have achieved and set targets for their continual development. They benefit from an excellent range of training opportunities and are supported very effectively by robust supervision which is utilising the coaching methods to help staff find solutions to issues and enables them to have a real sense of ownership of their practice and development. Regular staff meetings enable staff to discuss the young people, ask questions and raise any concerns. Leaders ensure they respond to and action these appropriately. Regular newsletters keep staff informed of any developments and provide an opportunity for those who have attended training events to share this information with colleagues.

The staff team, including domestic, catering and maintenance staff, are excellent. They work well together and are committed to providing the best care possible.

Monitoring by leaders and governors is robust in ensuring excellent standards are maintained and the progress of young people is identified and monitored. All previous shortfalls have been addressed. Feedback is regularly sought from partner agencies, stakeholders, other professionals and parents. The results of a recent parent survey identified that, for the second consecutive year, 100% of parents would recommend this provision to other parents.

All managers, leaders, governors and staff have extremely high expectations and aspirations for young people. They are enthusiastic for positive change and development and have clear plans for the future to ensure young people continue to receive exceptional care and make excellent progress at the residential provision.

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

Unique reference number	120761
Social care unique reference number	SC065118
DfE registration number	925/7025

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	Residential Special School
Number of boarders on roll	62
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	2 to19
Head teacher	Mrs Leanda Mason
Date of previous boarding inspection	17/07/2014
Telephone number	01507 603 776
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