

St Francis Community Special School

St Francis Community Special School, Wickenby Crescent, Lincoln LN1 3TJ

Inspection dates 16 March 2016 to 18 March 2016

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

- Children and young people flourish at this school, making significant progress with regard to their personal care, confidence and independent living skills. They thoroughly enjoy their residential experience, particularly the activities and making new friends.
- The safety of children and young people is paramount at this school. Staff know them very well, know the risks they are exposed to and know how to manage and reduce those risks effectively.
- The views and experiences of children and young people are highly valued. Their voice is critical within the school and they make mature contributions to the delivery of their care and the residential provision.
- The school has a strong and experienced management team. It has effective monitoring systems in place, which contribute to its understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This is a school that continually strives to improve the service offered to young people.
- The school could improve further by ensuring that planning documentation, development plans and governors' reports reflect the good work being carried out and work planned to enhance further the residential provision. Furthermore, although most staff have an appropriate qualification or are working towards one, some staff, who are extremely experienced, have not yet commenced a qualification course.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve some care planning and risk assessment documentation to ensure that there is clarity and understanding. This specifically refers to behaviour management plans and risk assessments for restrictive practice and off-site visits.
- Ensure that all residential staff hold an appropriate qualification.
- Ensure that reports from governors evaluate the effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded. Reports may also include a summary of conversations with children and staff.

Information about this inspection

This inspection was announced on the morning of the start of the inspection. The inspector visited the residential accommodation and spoke to children, 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 also able to gather information from Parent View which was overwhelmingly positive.

Inspection team

Joanne Vyas

lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

St Francis Community Special School is a maintained school that provides residential care within a 24-hour curriculum for young people with medical, learning or physical disabilities, up to the age of 19 years. The school provides a full curriculum for nursery, primary, secondary and post-16 pupils. There is also 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 and single bedrooms for up to 18 young people each night. Young people spend two nights a week for a term at a time and different young people stay each week. 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. There are also additional communal areas.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Children and young people say that the residential provision is 'Epic', 'Awesome', 'Amazing' and 'Magnificent'. They thoroughly enjoy their residential experience. A young person jokingly said: 'The staff here are half decent as well!' Children and young people have strong relationships with staff and each other. They are clearly respectful of each other, embrace their differences and go out of their way to help one another.

Children and young people consistently make significant progress at this school. The residential provision clearly supports this progress, particularly with regard to their social and independent living skills. A young person said that the residential provision, 'Promotes my independence and self-belief.' However, they particularly like meeting up with their friends: 'It feels like home but with friends.' A parent agreed: 'It's like a home from home', and, 'The social aspect is really important. It's giving them what they don't get at home.'

Children's and young people's achievements are celebrated, no matter how big or small. Their achievements are displayed on the 'WOW' board for all school staff and visitors to see. They enjoy showing passers-by their achievements and pressing the button at the bottom of the board which plays a recording of the principal residential care officer's voice, congratulating them on their success. Certificates are sent home to ensure that parents know what progress their child is making.

There is a strong management team which is effective at identifying and tackling shortfalls and securing improvement to ensure that children and young people are provided with the best care and education possible. The safety of children and young people is central to all practice. There are robust and effective arrangements for safeguarding children and young people. As a consequence, they have a strong sense of how to keep themselves safe.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Staff know and understand the children and young people really well. A parent said: 'He loves all the staff as he has known them for a very long time.' Current staff clearly understand the risks associated with the children and young people and ensure that practice keeps them safe.

Children and young people are encouraged to keep themselves fit and healthy. Meals are healthy and nutritious. A team of nurses provides 24-hour nursing cover for the school, ensuring that young people with complex healthcare conditions are well managed. Staff work closely with healthcare professionals to promote the physical, emotional and psychological health of young people.

Parents and young people consistently provide outstanding feedback about the quality of

care provided in the residential provision. A parent wrote: 'My son loves it and always asks for more (by asking for his suitcase on a non-boarding day). It has helped his confidence and independence skills (e.g. teeth brushing) massively. He comes here happy and contented so I know he loves boarding and time with his peers and staff.'

Children and young people are listened to and their views and opinions are highly valued. A young person said: 'Most of the ideas here are from students' suggestions.' Students make a significant contribution to the running of the school. They make good use of the suggestion box, and the principal residential care officer ensures that all requests and opinions are responded to.

All children and young people are treated with the utmost dignity and respect. They clearly model this behaviour back towards staff and each other. They experience care and support that is sensitive and responsive to their individuality. This enables them to develop a positive self-view and to build on their emotional resilience and sense of identity. Staff fully include children and young people in all decisions about the way they want staff to help them. The children and young people are consulted on the ways in which staff communicate, how personal care is provided, and on day-to-day decisions, and their views are highly valued.

Residential staff work collaboratively with parents, teaching staff and external professionals. A social worker said that staff go 'above and beyond'. Staff attend all relevant meetings, such as child in need meetings. They enable social workers to observe the behaviours of children and young people in residence and they produce good reports in readiness for meetings.

Children and young people enjoy a range of activities from bowling to cooking to sports and youth clubs. International evenings are very popular, where children and young people experience life from another country. The Bin Bag Catwalk and make-up evening (including the boys) also went down very well. Drama productions of 'War Horse', 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' and, currently, 'Goodnight Mister Tom' are much enjoyed.

Children and young people are very well supported with their transitions from the school. They are supported to learn a range of independence skills from independent travel to being able to brush their own teeth and make their bed. They are able to practise work skills by working within the school's own café, which is open to the public, and the hairdressing salon. They have access to a range of horticultural experiences and small animal care facilities within the grounds, and this further develops their employability skills as well as their confidence, self-esteem and self-worth. Most children and young people successfully move on to supported living, further education or employment. Some students are given internships or apprenticeships within the school and are successful with this.

Children and young people have access to a range of trusted adults, including an independent visitor who is also a vicar in the local church. He has a high regard for the work of the school and ensures that children and young people have access to him by visiting regularly. He said that children and young people also help out with the church luncheon clubs and other events. He wrote in one of his reports to the school: 'Just to

say thank you so much for coming to the Holocaust evening on Tuesday. It was so important that the school was represented and I will not easily forget the young person reading the St Francis prayer – it was a deeply touching moment and despite the overwhelming nature of the event, he was just inspirational.’ Children and young people are part of a diverse community and do not experience discrimination at this school.

The residential accommodation has been refurbished in places. The communal areas are spacious and provide comfortable spaces for children and young people to socialise and feel safe. They like their rooms and the communal areas. Specialist equipment ensures that children and young people are moved safely.

Planning documentation is up to date and mostly provides good information for staff. However, some planning documentation, such as behaviour management plans and risk assessments for restrictive practice plans and off-site visits, are not detailed and lack clarity. New staff may find these documents confusing.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

The safety of children and young people is paramount at this school. They have a strong sense of safety and well-being. The designated safeguarding lead demonstrates a very good understanding of current safeguarding issues, such as sexual exploitation, radicalisation and internet safety. She readily reflects on the steps taken to strengthen arrangements at the school and to consider the care provided in light of changing risks. Safeguarding concerns are recognised and referred on to the relevant agencies as appropriate. Staff are highly experienced and competent in their knowledge of keeping children and young people safe and the risks they are exposed to.

Positive behaviour is promoted, and consequently incidents are rare. The school does not use physical intervention. Strong relationships ensure that children and young people are happy, safe and secure. They have a good understanding of the rules and ensure that they are followed. They do not go missing from this school as they feel safe and secure.

Children and young people do not report bullying as an issue. Staff fully understand the risks associated with the internet and are working to educate children and young people, as well as their parents, in this regard.

Vetting procedures ensure that unsuitable adults do not work with children and young people.

Health and safety are well managed, leading to a safe living environment. Children and young people have a good understanding of fire safety as this is practiced regularly.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Leaders and managers are inspirational, passionate, confident and ambitious. They have high expectations for children and young people as well as their staff. The experienced

principal residential care officer is accessible, leads by example and generates creative ideas both from her staff team and the children and young people. The school strives for continual improvement and is highly responsive to suggestions for development. Personal investment is clearly evident throughout the school.

There is a longstanding residential team who know and understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. The team has a wealth of knowledge and experience, supported by regular guidance, training and support. They provide a high quality service where the ethos is centred on meeting the individual needs and aspirations of each young person. Their practice is exemplary. However, not all staff currently have a relevant qualification for their role. This is being addressed by the leadership team.

The leadership team has a robust system in place for monitoring activities within the residential provision. They fully understand the strengths and weaknesses of the residential provision and effectively address any shortfalls.

The governing body has a governor whose specific remit is to monitor the quality of care within the residential provision. He visits regularly and chats to staff, children and young people. He completes reports to inform the governing body about the residential provision, and offers robust challenge. However, his reports do not reflect his visit well or evaluate the effectiveness of the quality of care provided and whether children and young people are safeguarded.

The leadership team are very responsive to the minor shortfalls highlighted in this report and started to address them prior to the inspection being completed.

Staff and children and young people equally love coming to this school. Everyone walks round with smiles on their faces. This school has the 'happiness factor'!

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

Social care unique reference number SC038622

DfE registration number

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 154

Gender of boarders Mixed

Age range of boarders Two to 19

Headteacher Ann Hoffmann

Date of previous boarding inspection 27 January 2015

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