

St Mary's School

St Mary's School, Maynards Green, Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 0BT

Inspection dates	02/03/2016 to 04/03/2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The quality of care and support is outstanding. Leaders and managers have an excellent understanding of the strengths and development areas within the residential provision.
- Safeguarding arrangements are good. Residential pupils feel safe. Good links exist with external child protection agencies.
- Staff members across the whole school work effectively to help residential pupils succeed. A pupil commented that, 'There's no difference between care staff and teaching staff. Staff are all the same, they all help us'. Residential pupils develop personally and socially. They enjoy their time boarding.
- Areas for improvement identified during this inspection include the consistent application of the school recruitment policy, addressing fire safety shortfalls, identifying an independent person for residential pupils to contact outside of the school and ensuring staff do not amend medication guidance.
- The school took immediate actions to address some of these points to improve during the visit.

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?

- Ensure the recruitment policy is consistently applied.
- Provide residential pupils with an adult, who is outside of the staff and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who they can contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school.
- Ensure self-closing fire doors are only kept open with approved devices, in line with the fire risk assessment.
- Ensure confirmation is sought directly from the prescriber in relation to any changes to prescribed medication dosages.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was announced and the social care inspector was on-site four hours later. The inspector was shown around the residential accommodation by boarders. The inspector took part in an off-site activity and shared mealtimes with residential pupils. Discussions took place with the head of care, executive head, clinical psychologist, residential staff and trustees. Observations took place of boarding time, an assembly, a residential staff handover, a pastoral meeting and a whole staff briefing. Feedback was sought from family members and carers by telephone. Records relating to the welfare and safety of residential pupils were sampled.

Inspection team

Anna Williams

lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

St Mary's School is a residential special school which is part of a multi-academy trust. It offers a 24-hour curriculum for boys between the ages of nine and 16 years who have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school is situated between Heathfield and Horam in East Sussex. Residential accommodation is located within the main school building. The school provides weekly boarding for up to 12 places. At the time of the inspection, there were 73 pupils on roll. The residential provision was last inspected in January 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

The residential provision is known as the NEST which stands for 'Nurture. Emotional. Social Training'. This ethos is followed in practice. Residential pupils are well cared for and make good progress socially and emotionally. Systems in place to protect residential pupils' well-being are good. Leaders and managers have high ambitions for all pupils. The residential provision is exceedingly well organised for the benefit of all pupils who stay.

Residential pupils are extremely positive about their boarding experience. One pupil described it as, 'a home from home'. Relationships between residential pupils are warm and friendly. They encourage and help one another. A family member said that, 'He has made friends through boarding. The whole school is fantastic, but the NEST has really boosted him up'. Behaviour is good. Residential pupils think of others by taking part in charity fundraising events.

Termly 'care days' provide an opportunity for the whole school to visit the NEST and learn about it. Extended day activities assist pupils in understanding and experiencing residential evening routines and structures. New overnight boarders settle quickly. Specific duties, such as 'NEST' prefect and mentoring younger boarders, offer residential pupils chances to take on additional responsibilities. They value these opportunities to be a good role model to other pupils. Newer residential pupils confirm that induction systems are effective and they feel welcome.

Academic progress is notably good, and for some pupils it is outstanding. This takes into account individual pupils' starting points. A residential pupil reflected that, 'My learning has got better, because my behaviour has got better by staying over.' Celebrations assemblies are a fun way to reflect back over the school week. Pupils receive certificates of achievement for both their academic and NEST efforts. 'I have grown in confidence and socially since coming to the NEST,' commented a residential pupil. Another pupil said, 'I like that certificates are on the wall: everyone sees how well you have done. It makes me want to work towards the school cups and awards.'

Independence is well promoted. Residential pupils acquire life skills such as helping to prepare meals, cleaning and washing. A family member said that, 'He makes and strips his bed. He cooks. Staff keep him motivated there. Before, there is no way he would have done that.' This ensures that residential pupils are well prepared for when they leave the school.

Regular NEST meetings and a frequently used suggestions book are the formal ways in which residential pupils share their views about boarding time. They influence areas such as menus and activity choices. A residential pupil said, 'Staff listen to us. I asked for some new posters in the bedrooms and they have happened.'

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Residential pupils receive care that is highly individualised. Staff members effectively

follow care plans which clearly detail the unique needs of children and young people. A carer said, 'Staff are really good, they know his needs. They are brilliant!' Children and young people learn about world events through themed activities. Different nations and religious events are explored each month. This unquestionably makes residential pupils more inquisitive about different cultures and countries.

Residential pupils benefit from key working systems that work across both residential and education time. For example, some residential pupils follow personalised programmes with their key worker to help improve their physical development. These sessions are well planned and fun. A residential pupil reflected on progress that he has made, 'I like doing these sessions. My coordination has got much better.' Residential pupils maintain appropriate contact with their family and friends when staying.

Accommodation is of an excellent standard. Residential pupils like the well-equipped bedrooms, which each have a television, DVD player, radio, lamp and books. Rooms are brightly decorated with cartoon posters and colourful artwork. During their stays, residential pupils personalise their rooms through choosing their own duvet and photos on the walls.

Mealtimes are social events where residential pupils sit together and reflect on their day. They enjoy the broad range of food, which is plentiful and varied. A residential pupil said, 'We plant vegetables like potatoes or pumpkins outside and help them grow. Then we eat them in the NEST!'

Residential pupils enjoy an extensive range of activities. They develop new interests. For example, regular skiing lessons mean that children and young people build confidence and skills on the ski slope. This was recognised by a family member who said that 'Staff encourage [child] by giving him lots of praise and certificates'. Residential pupils take part in many activities which benefit their physical health. Swimming, circuit training and mountain biking for example. Other events which residential pupils participate in include art club, bowling, kayaking, woodland walks and beach trips. These provide engagement with the local community, where children and young people discover their talents and try new experiences. A residential pupil commented that, 'Activities are the best thing about the NEST'.

Regular input from a clinical psychologist benefits residential pupils' emotional well-being. This support includes direct work with some families. Following this intervention, strategies are successfully implemented across all areas of the child's or young person's life. Medication administration systems are effective. However, one pharmacy label has been amended by hand, increasing the dose of the medication. There is no confirmation directly from the prescriber with regard to this amendment. It is unclear if this change is approved and suitable alongside any other medication the residential pupil is currently taking.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Residential pupils are protected by good safeguarding arrangements. They feel safe. Bullying is not identified as an issue within residential time. Relevant information is promptly shared with the local authority if there are concerns regarding the welfare of children and young people. Good-quality records show that the senior leadership team

works well in partnership with external safeguarding agencies.

Staff members demonstrate a good awareness of child protection matters and how this relates to their role as boarding staff. Communication systems across the whole school are excellent. This ensures that significant information relating to the welfare of residential pupils is effectively and promptly shared with all relevant staff.

Residential pupils learn about child sexual exploitation through seeing the 'Chelsea's Choice' drama production. They are taught how to keep safe online by completing worksheets. Through these they successfully learn about potential dangers and how to use the internet safely. There have been no residential pupils reported missing since the previous inspection.

Behaviour within the residential provision is excellent. Two physical interventions have taken place since the previous inspection. Sanctions imposed are reasonable. Children and young people are encouraged to sign records and add their own comments. Residential pupils like the reward system which runs across the whole school day, promoting the 24-hour curriculum. A pupil told the inspector that, 'NEST credits can be earned. They are linked to school credits. You have to do homework, or shower and help out at mealtimes. They motivate me.'

One recruitment file sampled showed that vetting checks have not been consistently applied to one adult who has regular and unsupervised access to the children and young people at the school, including residential pupils. The senior leadership team took immediate steps to address this. However, this had not been identified by internal monitoring systems.

Good health and safety routines exist. Equipment is regularly maintained and the grounds are hazard free. Otherwise robust fire safety is compromised through the propping open of some self-closing fire doors in the residential provision. These doors will not close automatically in case of an emergency. This is not in line with the school fire risk assessment.

Residential pupils have access to information regarding external helplines if they have concerns. However, there is no identified adult independent of the school and its governance who residential pupils can contact directly regarding personal problems or school issues if they wish to.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

The senior leadership team is stable, experienced and suitably qualified. They have high aspirations for each and every pupil. The statement of purpose is followed in practice. Residential pupils are effectively supported to 'find solutions, develop opportunities and achieve success'. Residential staff members work creatively to find openings so that residential pupils learn and develop after the school day ends. The whole school staff team work together dynamically to help pupils' progress. A residential pupil commented that, 'The teachers and care staff talk to each other. They always know what is happening. It's good because they are all around to help me.'

Termly monitoring of the residential provision takes place. This covers a wide range of areas including complaints, medication, menus and individual care plans. Actions are identified which focus on further developing the residential provision. There have been no complaints since the previous inspection. Parents are comprehensively kept up to

date with progress and achievements through weekly phone calls from key workers.

Staff members are deployed appropriately to meet the needs of residential pupils, and to safely supervise activities. Training is highly valued. Courses in preventing radicalisation, care planning and fire safety have taken place since the previous visit. This equips staff members with up-to-date knowledge and skills to effectively safeguard children and young people. Staff receive regular supervision. Every session includes discussions around safeguarding and reflective practice. This effective support assists residential staff members to grow and advance as professionals.

Structured systems track the progress of residential pupils as a group within the school. These demonstrate the positive impact that accessing the residential provision has on many pupils. For example, their attendance increases. Senior leaders use learning from feedback from parents, carers and pupils to further improve the service. Together they strive to further enhance residential pupils' experiences. This forms the centre of the residential aspect of the school development plan.

Trustees play an active role in oversight of the residential provision. Feedback is sought from residential pupils during regular trustee visits. Records are scrutinised. This feedback forms part of the reflective culture that senior leaders actively promote.

Previous points to improve have been met or suitably addressed. Staff members have undertaken training on child sexual exploitation. They demonstrate excellent knowledge of signs and indicators of possible grooming. Residential pupils' targets now link more closely with educational goals and plans. This is through the new planning system across the whole school, which is still embedding.

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 exceed the standard of good and result 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	142163
Social care unique reference number	SC050392
DfE registration number	845/7011

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	73
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	9 to 16
Headteacher	Mr Frank Stanford
Date of previous boarding inspection	26 January 2015
Telephone number	01435 812278
Email address	frank.stanford@sabden.org.uk

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