

St Mary's school and sixth form college (part of the Talking Trust)

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

Inspection dates	04/10/2016 to 06/10/2016	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Good	2
The quality of care and support	Good	2
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- The consultant principal, interim management board and senior managers are providing effective and inspirational leadership resulting in significant and rapid improvement in the quality of care for residential pupils.
- Residential pupils enjoy their experience. Through highly individualised care and support they make significant progress. With a focus on maximising their independence and their emotional and social development, staff support helps residential pupils to achieve their potential.
- With a focus on collaborative working, the senior leadership team is implementing an integrated approach to incorporate individualised therapy into all aspects of the curriculum across education and the residential provision.
- Leaders and managers are driving forward improvement to ensure that all the needs of residential pupils are met, with increased opportunities for them to fulfil their potential and to advance their future life options.
- Through very positive relationships with staff and sensitive, nurturing care, residential pupils develop a sense of safety, protection and trust enabling them to respond to the support that staff offer.

- Robust and effective safeguarding measures protect residential pupils. The safety of residential pupils is central to all practice. Staff are competent and confident in their safeguarding role and implement appropriate action to protect pupils' welfare.
- Though care plans are detailed and take account of all aspects of residential pupils' needs, staff would benefit from these documents being simplified, with therapy fully integrated into the plans.

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?

- Review the arrangements for recording the needs of residential pupils and strategies of support, to streamline systems and make them more accessible to staff.
- Ensure that therapy strategies are fully integrated into care plans for residential pupils.

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of the inspection. Inspection activities included discussion with residential pupils and staff, a meal with residential pupils and observation of evening routines, activities and interactions between staff and residential pupils. Meetings were held with the consultant principal, members of the interim management board, head of care, head of therapy, health and well-being, associate head of education, house managers, lead nurse, site manager, catering manager, chair of governors and governor with responsibility for safeguarding. Policies, records and individual case files were examined. Information was gathered from Parent View during the inspection.

Inspection team

Janet Hunnam

Lead social care inspector

Teri Peck

Regulatory Inspection Manager

Full report

Information about this school

St Mary's school and college is a non-maintained, mixed, special school for children aged between 7 and 19 years (residential and day). Pupils attend the college from the age of 16 years into adulthood. There are currently 34 residential pupils and 22 day pupils. The residential accommodation is provided in five houses, three of which are on the main school site and two are located in the nearby local community. The school is situated in Bexhill-on-Sea and caters for children who have severe and complex speech, language and communication disabilities. Pupils may also have additional physical and medical difficulties, moderate learning difficulties, autism, epilepsy, acquired brain injury and hearing impairment. The residential provision had its last full inspection on 18 May 2015.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Through highly individualised care and support, residential pupils are making significant progress. Parents acknowledge this progress. A common theme in their comments is that their child is happy being a residential pupil and consequently engages in their learning. With a focus on maximising residential pupils' independence and their emotional and social development, staff support helps them to achieve their potential. A parent commented that staff's 'excellent care enables my daughter to engage well in school and manage to the best of her ability'. Another parent noted that their son's 'independence has increased and he is constantly encouraged and supported to care for himself and others'.

Residential pupils not only build trusting, positive relationships with staff but also form meaningful friendships with their peers. They appreciate opportunities provided by staff for them to meet and socialise with their friends after school and college. As residential pupils develop their social and communication skills, they learn how to deal with social situations and establish friendships. Residential pupils, as they grow into teenagers and young adults, are encouraged to go through 'rites of passage'. Staff treat college students age-appropriately as young adults, to prepare them for their transitions to the adult world.

Leaders and managers are aspirational and, with the enthusiasm and commitment of the staff team, ensure that residential pupils receive individualised support so that their unique and specific needs are met. Residential pupils thrive in an environment where they are valued as individuals and where their views and opinions matter.

The quality of care and support

Good

Staff provide residential pupils with individualised care and support delivered with a sensitive and nurturing approach. A parent commented that staff 'adapt their care well to my child's specific needs whilst encouraging independence'. Although care plans are detailed and take account of all aspects of residential pupils' needs, staff would benefit from these documents being simplified with therapy fully integrated into the plan.

Residential pupils receive appropriate support to maintain their physical health and they lead healthy lifestyles. Meals provided by the catering department are of high quality and there is a variety of choice. The school recently won an 'Eat Out Eat Well' gold award for helping pupils to make healthier choices. Catering staff are sensitive to pupils' individual dietary requirements and keen to respond to their specific requests, replying individually when pupils make such requests. One residential pupil commented, 'The food is not good. It's amazing.'

The qualified nursing team oversees the individual medical and healthcare needs of residential pupils and ensures that their specific needs are met. A multi-disciplinary team of therapists provides specialist support in areas such as speech and language, physiotherapy and occupational therapy, with other specialist health professionals, such as sign language tutors, making a valuable contribution to the team. Residential pupils

who have complex needs benefit from an individualised and integrated approach based on their specific needs. Currently, leaders and managers are focusing on ensuring that therapies are fully integrated into residential pupils' care plans and delivered effectively in residential time.

An important focus in the residential provision is on the emotional and social development of pupils. Led by an educational psychologist, the well-being team works jointly with staff and parents to understand the particular psychological needs of each residential pupil. They support residential pupils to manage their emotions and improve their self-esteem. Effective liaison with external mental health specialists provides additional support when the need arises.

A rich and varied programme of activities on site and in the local community provides development opportunities for residential pupils. These extend their social experiences and give them opportunities to advance their social skills, while having fun and enjoying leisure pursuits. A parent commented, 'There are so many well-planned activities to support my son's education that take place in his residential setting and in the community.' Senior managers are making concerted efforts to integrate residential pupils' goals into all aspects of their school experience, thus linking activities with their specific needs.

Residential pupils are very confident that they can approach staff with any concerns or worries. A specialist in communication supports staff in communicating with pupils, in whatever form is best suited to their individual needs. House meetings provide a forum for residential pupils to put forward their views, and staff follow up their comments and suggestions. Consequently, residential pupils know that their views matter, thus developing their self-confidence and self-esteem. One residential pupil stated, 'We wanted more swings – we have them.'

Accommodation for residential pupils is comfortable, spacious and homely and suited to their needs. Some refurbishment has taken place, and further work is planned. Overall, the accommodation is well maintained. Managers are keen to reduce any aspects that appear institutional and, instead, create a warm and welcoming environment where residential pupils can relax and feel at home.

A parent noted, 'Communication and information [has] improved massively', and 'I feel very involved with my son, his activities and the staff working and caring for him.' Another parent commented that the care staff 'communicate with me very well, enabling excellent collaborative working at all times'. Managers are enthusiastic about using technology, such as Skype and Facetime, to develop relationships between staff and parents and to enable parents to see pupils engaging in activities.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Effective safeguarding measures protect residential pupils. All staff are acutely aware of pupils' vulnerabilities and their responsibility for ensuring pupils' safety. This responsibility is not confined to keeping residential pupils safe while they are at school but extends to raising their understanding and awareness of keeping themselves safe in the future and in the wider community. The well-being team works closely with residential staff and pupils, providing sessions in each house that focus on specific

sensitive topics, such as bullying and sexual awareness, to develop their understanding and knowledge of how to keep themselves safe.

Staff are well trained, alert and confident in their safeguarding roles, with the necessary understanding of current issues that can present a risk to residential pupils, such as child sexual exploitation, e-safety and radicalisation. The head of care is the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) with four other senior staff members trained in this safeguarding role. Staff are diligent in informing the safeguarding team of any concerns, and there is a robust procedure for considering any issues affecting the welfare of residential pupils. Appropriate action is taken, including referral to, and consultation with, external authorities. A governor with specific responsibility for overseeing safeguarding across the school meets regularly with the DSL, ensuring that there is rigorous oversight of these matters.

Residential pupils are happy and relaxed in the residential environment. They feel safe knowing that they can talk to staff about any concerns or worries that they have and that staff will listen and respond. Trusting relationships built with staff are at the heart of safeguarding practice and underpin successful behaviour strategies.

Behaviour during residential time is excellent. Residential pupils are polite, helpful and mutually respectful. Staff know and understand each residential pupil very well. They are highly skilled in responding to the emotional needs of residential pupils and successfully implement personalised strategies to help them to self-regulate their emotions and manage their difficulties. The focus is on understanding the meaning of their behaviour and supporting them to behave appropriately. The use of individualised strategies is successful and, consequently, there is infrequent use of sanctions or physical intervention. Staff receive training to manage incidents of challenging behaviour safely. Any incidents are well recorded and closely monitored by managers to ensure safe practice. There have been no occasions when residential pupils have been missing from school.

Senior managers have recently reviewed the policy to promote positive behaviour. It now sets out a clear framework to respond to pupils whose behaviour is causing concern. Multi-disciplinary focus meetings, with valuable input from the well-being team and collaboration with parents, seek to understand the behaviour and to generate strategies to support the pupil effectively.

The maintenance team is committed to providing a safe environment for pupils. Rigorous health and safety checks protect pupils. Appropriate fire safety measures are routinely applied, including regular fire drills. Residential pupils have personal emergency evacuation plans identifying their specific support needs in the event of an emergency.

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

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

The consultant principal, interim management board and senior managers are providing effective and inspirational leadership, resulting in significant and rapid improvement in the quality of care for residential pupils. A culture is developing in which staff aspire for

pupils to achieve their potential and provide creative opportunities for them to develop skills and confidence to live as independently as possible.

Benefiting from the excellent leadership skills and experience of the interim management board, the new head of care and senior leadership team are working closely together. Their aim is to integrate individualised therapy into all aspects of the curriculum across education and the residential provision, to ensure that each pupil reaches their potential and that their needs are met. This process is not yet fully developed, but there is closer partnership working between care, therapy and teaching staff to promote positive outcomes for pupils.

Collaborative working with parents has significantly improved, and efforts by senior leaders and the governing body have been successful in rebuilding parents' confidence in the residential provision. From a point of low morale, comments from parents are now much more affirmative, acknowledging improvements in communication with them and the progress that their children are making. There have been no complaints since December 2015. One parent commented, 'The atmosphere and drive at the school [are] very positive and the staff work really well as a team.'

Providing residential pupils with a happy, enriching experience, within a safe, structured and nurturing environment that supports them to move towards independence, is the aim of residential staff. This is clearly at the heart of staff practice. Staffing ratios are high, allowing residential pupils to benefit from close, individualised support from experienced and skilled staff. Training focuses on ensuring that staff have the necessary level of skills and competence to meet the needs of residential pupils. Supervision for staff is regular, with an emphasis on improving practice to meet residential pupils' individual needs. Additionally, staff access support from the well-being team in relation to advice and guidance in supporting specific residential pupils. Individual clinical supervision is also available when needed. These support systems enable staff to maintain and improve the quality of care that they provide.

Monitoring of the residential provision is a continuous process on all levels, to drive improvement and ensure that residential pupils benefit from high standards of care and opportunities to develop. Incidents occurring in the residential provision are closely scrutinised by managers, to evaluate the effectiveness of support strategies. Detailed and thorough reports by an independent visitor identify action points to raise standards.

On a strategic level, the interim management board and the governing body monitor improvement strategies closely and provide a strong level of challenge to drive progress and development. They know what needs to change and, with energy and determination, are making significant advancements. Taking a 'lessons learned' approach, they listen and take heed of staff's and parents' views so that all parties work in collaboration to ensure that pupils flourish and develop.

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 their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	133653
Social care unique reference number	SC050390
DfE registration number	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.

Type of school	Residential and day special school
Number of boarders on roll	34
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	7 to19
Headteacher	Amanda Clugston, Consultant principal
Date of previous boarding inspection	18/05/2015
Telephone number	01424 730740
Email address	admin@stmarysbexhill.org

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/ofsted." If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/ofsted

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

if you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate
Store St
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.co.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016

