

St. John's School

St. Johns School, Firle Road, Seaford, East Sussex, BN25 2HU

Inspection dates

16/01/2017 to 18/01/2017

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

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Learners benefit from a committed, dedicated and child-centred staff team who strive to prioritise their needs.
- Key work is individualised and supportive, which ensures that learners make excellent progress from their own individual starting points.
- Admissions processes are rigorous and very effective. Staff visit prospective boarders at home and liaise closely with professionals, which ensures that there is minimal disruption to those already resident.
- Outcomes for learners are excellent. All learners leave with a planned programme of education or support in place. Progress is monitored very closely and options for transition are identified extremely effectively.
- Learners benefit from an excellent multidisciplinary professional network, the members of which monitor their complex needs and offer inventive and well-researched interventions.

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?

- To assist the parents of prospective boarders, the statement of purpose and key policies, such as the safeguarding policy, should be made available on the school website.
- The independent visitor's reports should include an evaluation of safeguarding practice and there should be sufficient consultation with learners so that their views are represented in the report.
- Include the contact details of the office of the children's commissioner for England in the children's guide.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted carried out this inspection with one and a half hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice over two evenings; informal discussions with young people during shared meals and during boarding time; meetings and discussions with the head teacher, the head of care, the care manager, residential staff, site managers, the multidisciplinary well-being team, the human resources manager, and the chair of governors; contact with the local statutory safeguarding authority; a tour of the accommodation; and scrutiny of the wide-ranging documentation about boarding. The views of parents and carers were sought during the inspection. There were no pupil or staff responses to Ofsted's point-in-time surveys; there were three parental contributions to Parent View; and three responses were made directly to the allocated inspector.

Inspection team

Barnaby Dowell

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

St. John's is a non-maintained independent specialist school. The school works with learners who have complex learning disabilities, including some learners who may have difficulties resulting from behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD), Autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), Asperger syndrome, and pathological demand avoidance syndrome (PDA). A further education college provision is registered with the Care Quality Commission and is known as the Brighton campus. Residential provision is on the Seaford campus within four separate living areas. Currently there are 26 learners on the Seaford campus school roll. Of these, 16 are residential boarders. The residential provision was last inspected in February 2016.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Learners are very happy in the residential provision and make excellent progress from their individual starting points. They enjoy a family-style environment with a young and vibrant staff team to whom they relate very easily. This offers learners consistency and structure. There is a purposeful ethos to the residential provision, and high staffing levels offer security and empowerment to learners. This promotes positive decision-making and improved life skills for learners and is driven by high staff aspirations.

Laughter and joking is consistently heard and learners clearly enjoy the help and support offered by staff. Learners value the residential experience and run to staff in excitement at the end of the school day. Staff take visible pleasure in watching learners grow and develop. A 'community spirit' is evident throughout the boarding house. Staff refer to learners with an in-depth knowledge of their needs and obvious affection. Privacy and respect is consistently recognised by staff and learners respond in kind.

The boarding accommodation is maintained to an excellent standard. A recent food hygiene inspection achieved level 5, the highest possible grading. Learners are housed in small groups, according to their particular needs. Learners are able to personalise their spacious bedrooms. Some learners have en-suite facilities. The environment enables learners to feel very relaxed and safe, and they are proud of where they live. The accommodation is regularly risk assessed and adapted to meet the needs of learners. Bespoke furniture and fittings allow for high levels of comfort.

The residential experience is exceptional. Learners make very consistent progress both academically and socially. One parent comments, 'She is now able to listen to me, enjoys going out and now has a smile on her face.' Older learners are encouraged to be role models and mentors to their younger peers. Recently, one learner won a competition to design a logo for the local council and another learner celebrated passing a mathematics examination. The school recently facilitated a music festival, at which learners performed and supported each other. One learner described this event as 'brilliant'. These achievements are celebrated by the staff team and photographs that document learners' accomplishments decorate the boarding house.

Learners enjoy an extensive variety of activities within the local community. These activities are tailored to meet specific needs or interests, such as fishing or attending sports events in the local area. Culture and difference is celebrated. Learners recently attended an event where they played African drums and learnt dance techniques. They have access to the wide range of facilities that are offered by the school, including a swimming pool and youth club. All activities are appropriately risk assessed, such as the provision of a 'sunken' trampoline. Learners are given individual staff support to help them attend their chosen activities. This means that arrangements can be flexible, which supports learners to make choices. The excellent relationships between learners and staff support learners very well when they are struggling.

Consultation is excellent. The voice of learners is consistently prioritised and their

concerns are acted upon. The school holds an annual event designed to allow learners to openly voice their wishes and feelings. Feedback is universally positive; one learner commented, 'I love this school.' Learners are given access to their case files and invited to contribute to risk assessments and care plans. Learners advise staff on strategies for de-escalation, for example permitting a walk in the garden. This allows learners to feel empowered and maintains excellent levels of behaviour.

Communication is prioritised. Staff are very skilled in their use of Makaton, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) and social storyboards to communicate. These techniques improve participation and assist staff in giving complicated or difficult messages. School work and progress is discussed and reviewed during regular key-work sessions. The BehaviourWatch' system allows residential staff to use their smartphones to view the concerns and observations that have been shared by teaching staff. This ensures that staff are fully prepared at the end of the school day and can make plans accordingly.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The school's admission, induction and transition processes are very effective. Learners receive a home visit and managers liaise closely with previous educational placements. This ensures a full and thorough assessment prior to admission. Managers scrutinise referrals very closely and challenge every detail. If it is considered viable, learners are invited to attend a 'taster session' in the boarding house. This assesses their adaptability and their interaction with staff and other learners. These rigorous processes ensure that when learners join the school there is minimal disruption in the boarding house and to other learners.

Transitions are handled very well. All learners leave school with a programme of education or training support in place. Managers have an extensive knowledge of local resources and institutions and use their in-depth knowledge of learners to plan very effectively. On leaving school, learners are encouraged to keep in touch via regular alumni events, which most recently involved a Halloween disco.

Opportunities for learners are extensive. Learners benefit from a wide range of educational options both in and outside of the school. Learners recently won an award for selling sensory toys, which were made from recycled rubbish, at a local market. One learner is resident in the boarding house yet attending a full-time education provision away from the school. Others benefit from apprentice programmes offered by the school. These include horticulture and a work experience placement in the main school's reception. This offers learners unique experience and the chance to develop work-based skills.

Risk assessments and care plans are extremely thorough. Case recordings are detailed and analytical. These are supported by the behaviour management specialist. His input results in clear and extremely effective interventions. Consequently, staff use inventive strategies, with the support of video recordings, to offer learners clear direction and guidance. Learners respond very well and learn new skills.

Learners understand behavioural expectations and respond very well to these. Staff consistently reinforce good behaviours and effectively challenge poor behaviours with clear and concise explanations. There is no use of sanctions. Goal setting is reviewed regularly and includes individualised key skills for independence, such as basic budgeting or laundry. When a learner struggles to maintain good behaviour, staff use their in-depth knowledge of the individual to recognise their feelings and de-escalate the behaviour quickly before it worsens.

Learners enjoy regular contact with their parents. Staff encourage phone contact via Skype and support learners to visit their parents at an agreed frequency at weekends or during the weekend. If contact is disruptive, staff work very sensitively with parents to address this. This contact is supported by weekly contact with key workers, which engages parents in their children's care plans and lessens the anxieties of learners.

Learners enjoy a holistic package of care. Staff work in close partnership with parents to monitor and evaluate progress. The Behaviour Watch system offers unique insight into patterns or trends in behaviour and informs comprehensive risk assessment and planning. Support services, such as home visits from the school's occupational therapist, are able to deliver professional support within the family home. Staff advocate strongly with placing local authorities for respite support when parents are unable to care effectively for learners during the longer school holidays.

Learners are offered a varied and nutritious diet and staff prioritise healthy eating. High staffing levels allow learners to eat alone or with their peers, depending on their wishes and feelings. Staff consistently prioritise the benefit of regular exercise and recently participated in a fitness challenge in partnership with one learner. When learners struggle with weight issues, the nurse works with parents to monitor weight prior to school holidays; she provides advice and guidance on strategies for managing eating and making healthier food choices.

Healthcare provision is extensive. Learners benefit from on-site healthcare professionals: a nurse, an occupational therapist, a counsellor, and a speech and language therapist. These services are expertly coordinated to meet the complex needs of learners with the full participation of parents. Medication levels are regularly reviewed by the professional network to ensure maximum effectiveness. The school nurse has established a close working relationship with the local child and adolescent mental health services doctor, who visits to monitor and support. The local GP offers regular advice and guidance. Medication is safely dispensed. Learners understand why medication is prescribed and self-medicate in accordance with care planning and risk assessments.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

The boarding houses are extremely safe and risk assessed. It is situated in large grounds in a secluded area. There have been no recent incidents of learners absconding from the school. Individualised plans, which are understood by staff and parents, are in place

should a learner go missing.

Learners benefit from a strong, visible and proactive safeguarding team. There are 13 members of the team and their photographs are displayed throughout the residential provision. They are accessible to learners and are described by other staff members as 'friendly and approachable'. The designated safeguarding lead is also the head of care and has clear insight into all areas of potential risk. Staff understand the safeguarding policy and report any concerns accordingly. The safety of learners is consistently evaluated. Safeguarding practice is inventive and proactive.

Communication is excellent. The resourceful use of technology promotes close communication between the school and the residential provision. They work together seamlessly and very effectively. Recently, school staff raised concerns over one learner, who was carrying a hammer back to the boarding house. The item was removed by staff upon his return, without the knowledge of his peers. His risk assessment was updated and staff and his parents now monitor the contents of his bag both before and after school and home visits.

Physical intervention is consistently used as a last resort. When restraints occur, the professional network meets to evaluate the incident and propose alternatives. Staff are offered an individual debrief if needed. Stringent risk analysis has led to a 17% reduction in physical intervention since the last full inspection.

Learners feel safe and report that bullying is not an issue. When peer relationship difficulties occur, staff act very quickly and devise safety plans that address the concerns.

Learners know how to complain and complaints literature is provided in numerous forms to meet their specific needs. At present the children's guide does not include the contact details of the children's commissioner for England. This will offer a further means of support for learners if required.

Internet safety is prioritised. An effective filter system is in place. Staff work to educate learners of the dangers posed by the internet, including the risk of grooming. Recently, on one learner's return from a home visit, staff reacted to possible concerns by asking him to reveal the contents of his downloaded material. Subsequently, pornographic material was confiscated and the learner's parents were informed. This kept him and other learners safe.

Despite the fact that independent monitoring visits occurring on a monthly basis, the reports are narrow in scope and demonstrate limited consultation with learners. They continue to lack an analysis of safeguarding practice. This concern was raised during the last full inspection.

Recruitment and induction processes are very robust. References are fully verified and checks are obtained for those staff who have worked abroad. An additional safeguarding interview occurs to fully explore any gaps in employment. This ensures a full assessment of potential staff and keeps learners safe.

Learners benefit from a long-standing, committed and child-centred management team. The head of care and the care manager have vast experience at the school and are integral to the caring ethos enjoyed by learners. They ensure that care practice is consistently of a very high standard. Both managers are qualified to level 5 and enjoy very positive relationships with the staff team and learners. They are supported by four senior care workers and a diverse team of residential care staff. The caring ethos is universally understood by the residential staff team. Staff are driven by a deep desire to use the wide range of specialist services on offer in order to empower learners to develop resilience and achieve their maximum potential.

Staff morale is very high and turnover is minimal. One staff member comments, 'I love my job here. Every day is different and it is great to see the learners make such great progress.' Staff report high levels of support and supervision from managers. This enables staff to be confident and secure in their working practice.

Managers work with staff and the professional network to consistently review and evaluate the training package and policies. Changes, such as weekend shifts becoming longer, allow staff to remain throughout the day and offer a full range of activities to learners. Practice is considered in the light of the latest policy and research into areas such as physical restraint and the potential radicalisation of learners. Staff make very good use of online and face-to-face training. Staff request specific training for perceived areas of weakness. This supports their ongoing development, a vibrant learning culture and excellent levels of staff retention.

Managers are ambitious and consistently seek to develop the service. They have taken steps to meet the recommendations of the last inspection. Accreditation with the National Autistic Society acts as a supportive source of advice and guidance and ensures that practice is developed in the light of the latest policy and research. Managers are supported by a strong and driven governing body who offer high levels of scrutiny. The chair of governors is experienced and committed to the development of the residential experience. He is well known to learners and sits as an independent person on the transitions panel. This offers invaluable insight into the outcomes achieved by learners and lessons for further improvement.

Feedback from placing professionals is very positive. Multi-agency work, both with the day school staff and outside agencies, is consistent. Regular communication and the high quality of reports ensure that full information is available when key decisions are made regarding learners. One professional commented, 'The care practice is brilliant. I have only positive things to say. Learners come a long way and gain confidence.' This is echoed by parents, one of whom said, 'They are outstanding. My life would be miserable without them.' Parents comment on the excellent exchange of information and partnership working shown by staff. This ensures consistency and supports close working relationships.

Case files indicate a high level of management oversight and audit. Managers use their close relationships with staff and learners to advise and guide extremely effectively and to prioritise the needs of learners.

At present, policies such as the statement of purpose are not available on the school website. When this has been addressed, potential and current parents will have easy access to key information.

There have been no complaints or allegations since the last full inspection. Rigorous systems are in place to address complaints or allegations should they arise.

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's 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 which mean that 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	114677
Social care unique reference number	SC050366
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	26
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	12 to19
Headteacher	Karen Grist
Date of previous boarding inspection	09/02/2016
Telephone number	01323 872940
Email address	headofcollege@st-johns.co.uk

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