

# St Francis Community Special School

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

<b>Inspection dates</b>	07/02/2017 to 09/02/2017	
<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
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 thoroughly enjoy staying in the residential provision. They say it is like their 'home in school'. They particularly enjoy meeting up with friends and participating in activities.
- Children and young people make significant progress in all areas of their lives, but especially with regards to their confidence, self-esteem and resilience.
- Staff work in partnership with parents and external professionals to ensure the safety and well-being of children and young people. Parents are also very well supported through training events and providing someone who will listen to them.
- The safety of the children and young people is paramount, but this does not prevent them from learning through carefully managed risks.
- The voice of the child is highly valued. Children and young people take ownership of their care, opportunities and experiences as well as the day-to-day running of the school.
- Staff have warm, trusted and nurturing relationships with children and young people. Children and young people have trusted and secure relationships with each other and feel well supported, respected and valued by each other and staff.
- Staff are highly skilled practitioners who are exceedingly motivated and enthusiastic to provide the best care possible for the children and young people.
- The head of the residential provision is a highly experienced and qualified leader who is fully supported by the headteacher. She provides strong and effective leadership and fully understands the strengths and weaknesses of the provision.

## **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?**

- Consider strengthening governor's reports by evaluating the progress of young people and the effectiveness of how well they are protected.
- Consider strengthening the residential student target system by evaluating students' progress more formally.
- Consider refreshing the decor in some residential areas, such as bedrooms and bathrooms.

## 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 residential students 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.

## Inspection team

Joanne Vyas

Lead social care inspector

# **Full report**

## **Information about this school**

St Francis Residential Special School is a maintained school that provides residential care within a 24-hour curriculum for young people up to the age of 19 years who have medical, learning or physical disabilities. The school provides a full curriculum for nursery, primary, secondary and post-16 pupils. Boarding is available from Monday afternoon to Friday morning during term-time. There is accommodation in shared bedrooms for up to 18 young people each night. Young people spend two nights a week for a term at a time. 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 three separate living areas. Each of these areas has a lounge with adjoining fully accessible bedrooms and bathrooms.

## Inspection judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Outstanding**

Children and young people thoroughly enjoy participating in residential life. They particularly enjoy meeting up with friends and doing activities. Staff support children and young people sensitively and discreetly. Children feel safe and empowered. They know exactly what is planned within the school. They feel that they make a significant contribution to the way they are cared for and what happens within the school. They are encouraged to take on responsible roles within school, such as prefects and organising the sports club.

Children and young people clearly enjoy the residential experience. A young person said in a card to the staff: 'Thanks for all the fun and laughs, I've really enjoyed boarding.' Another said: 'Res is my home in school.' Parents feel that their children are making good progress, which is then also continued at home. A parent said: 'I feel my daughter has become more independent and likes to do more when getting herself ready to go out and helps around the house.' Children and young people make significant progress in their education, social skills, communication, personal hygiene and independence skills, confidence, self-esteem and resilience. A parent said: 'My daughter has started to spend more time out of her bedroom and has become more independent.'

Staff have warm, trusted and nurturing relationships with children and young people. Children and young people have trusted and secure relationships with each other and feel well supported, respected and valued by each other and staff.

The residential provision is very well organised to provide a high standard of care and safety to children and young people. A parent said: 'I would highly recommend this school to any parent of a child with special needs; it really is outstanding in every aspect.'

### The quality of care and support

**Outstanding**

Children and young people receive a thorough introduction to the residential provision. This is carried out at the child's pace. Parents are fully involved in the process and provide staff with good information about their children. Staff and young people have recently put together a video introducing the residential provision. This demonstrates the range of care needs catered for within the provision, the activities on offer, as well as comments from children and young people about the provision. It is a very good introduction for parents and children who are thinking about using the residential provision.

The voice of the child is highly valued. This is a strength of the school. Children and young people influence the running of the residential provision. For example, they are keen to make suggestions through their regular meetings, the suggestions box, and informal discussions with staff. Voice recorders enable children and young people who are unable to read well to understand what is posted on noticeboards. The head of the

residential provision ensures that all suggestions are responded to and acted upon quickly.

Staff are skilled in communicating with children and young people. They can communicate effectively by using whatever form of communication the young person prefers. Some children and young people use communication aids, some use signing and some can communicate verbally. However the young person communicates, staff allow them time to say what it is they want to say.

Mealtimes are relaxed and sociable occasions. Children and young people are sensitively supported where this is required. Others help themselves to what they want. Children and young people have access to appropriate equipment to help them be as independent as possible. Themed nights are enjoyed. For example, they have had a French night and an American night. Children and young people say that they like the meals and the choice that is available.

Staff know and understand the children and young people very well. Care plans provide good information. Children and young people are fully involved in writing and amending their own care plans. All children and young people choose targets to complete while in the residential provision. Examples of children and young people completing targets are clearly recorded within their learning journals. This could be strengthened, as progress is not yet formally evaluated. However, staff are able to give good examples of where progress has been made. The headteacher is already looking at how the school's progress monitoring system can be used within the residential provision.

The achievements of children and young people are highly celebrated. For example, the 'WOW board' marks all achievements for each week. A young person proudly pointed to her name on the board and read what it said: 'Well done [name of child] for helping a friend.' She was also excited as this means a postcard will go home to parents to tell them of her achievement.

Some children and young people have complex healthcare needs that require nursing assistance. Nursing staff provide valuable help, guidance and training on medical procedures. They provide 24-hour nursing cover and implement safe medication storage and administration procedures. Children and young people also have access to other healthcare agencies such as mental health services, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists. High-quality healthcare arrangements promote children and young people's physical and emotional health.

Parents feel reassured by the warmth and friendliness of staff. Children and young people report that they have a 'brilliant time'. Parents appreciate the high standard of help and support that staff provide. A parent said: 'She was very happy and I felt she was very safe and I never worried about her when she was there.'

Children and young people feel ready and able to move on to the next stage of their lives. A parent said: 'Help with moving on from school is also very good. Students are provided with lots of opportunities to develop.' They are helped with college applications and given work experience. They are supported to learn self-help skills such as dressing, hygiene, shopping and cooking. They make great progress with their social skills,

confidence, self-esteem and resilience. This ensures that children and young people leave the school as ready for independence as possible despite their disabilities. For example, one young person, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, proudly talked about the GCSE grades he has achieved and passing his driving test at the first attempt. He now drives himself to and from school and gives his friends lifts.

Children and young people enjoy a range of activities that help them to develop their confidence, self-esteem and resilience. These include trips such as bowling, sensory shopping, the local pub and disco. They also fully participate in clubs such as youth and sports clubs. Furthermore, they have access to a multi-sensory and interaction room, table-top games, a music and karaoke room, and chill-out communal spaces where they can watch TV, chat and relax. Children and young people say that some of the best things about staying in residence are the activities and socialising with friends. A parent said: 'My son loves the boarding experience; he gets to socialise with his friends, which is hard to achieve at home due to the location of the children and their individual needs. He loves the activities they partake in and the outings as well.' Children and young people who are ordinarily isolated due to their disabilities are able to enjoy a good social life due to the residential experience.

Children and young people have personalised their shared rooms with posters and items from home. They appreciate the privacy afforded to them by peers and staff. They say that staff are very discreet when providing personal care. Some areas are in need of redecoration. This is planned for most, but not all areas after half term.

#### **How well children and young people are protected**

**Outstanding**

Safeguarding is taken seriously and is a consistent thread that runs through all practice. There is a robust policy that is clearly understood and implemented to a high standard. Staff have a thorough understanding of the issues affecting the children and young people in their school. Concerns are acted on quickly and effectively. Child protection concerns are reported to the appropriate safeguarding agencies. Staff work closely with external agencies and parents to ensure good communication and consistent safe practice. Children and young people feel safe. A parent said: 'For me it is reassuring to know he is safe and secure with staff that respect him and care for him like their own child.'

Children and young people are supported to take well-managed risks. This ensures that they have a strong sense of safety and well-being and are unlikely to put themselves at risk. This is a strength of the school. For example, children and young people access social media during residential time. The school have particularly focused on social media and online safety. Staff have also helped children and young people to set up privacy settings on their social media sites. Children and young people now have a good understanding of how to enjoy social media while keeping themselves safe.

The school has also supported parents to better engage with their children and gives them a good understanding of how to keep their children safe. Parents have accessed an accredited course run by the school. This has had a significant impact on parents, and one family has said that it has helped them to stay together as a family.

Highly effective planning helps to minimise risks inside and outside the school. For example, staff visit new venues to give them a good understanding of the risks that a venue may pose to the children and young people. Staff have a good understanding of the individual needs of each child. Records of risk management are much improved. However, these could be further strengthened by recording individual needs such as allergies, fear of dogs and anxiety-related issues.

Children and young people are well behaved, respectful and helpful towards each other, staff and visitors. They fully accept difference and do not report bullying as an issue. They very rarely go missing. This has occurred on one occasion only, and quick effective action means that the incident has not been repeated.

Children and young people have good opportunities to air their views, concerns and feelings with someone who is independent of the school. A vicar from the local church and a governor responsible for residence visit the provision regularly and ensure that children and young people have access to them. Their contact details are also posted on the residential noticeboard. Furthermore, children and young people all said they are happy to talk to a member of staff if they have any concerns.

The school is clean and well maintained. Health and safety are carefully managed and implemented effectively. The site manager is knowledgeable and meticulous about his work. This helps to keep children and young people safe from hazards.

Good vetting procedures help to prevent unsuitable adults from working with children and young people.

### **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

### **Outstanding**

The head of the residential provision is a highly experienced and qualified leader who is fully supported by the headteacher. She provides strong and effective leadership and fully understands the strengths and weaknesses of the provision. She has good plans to fully address shortfalls and further develop the provision. She is skilled in motivating and empowering her staff team, whose members feel very well supported by her. She has a good understanding of legislation and regularly implements research-based practice. For example, she has implemented aesthetically pleasing environmental changes to the dining room to ensure that echoes and noise levels are reduced to help children and young people who use hearing aids. She works in partnership with other agencies, such as health and social care, as well as with parents. Furthermore, she is highly supportive of parents who regularly phone her to discuss their children or generally just need someone to listen to them.

Staff are highly skilled and knowledgeable about the children and young people in their care. They are motivated and enthusiastic about delivering the best care and support they can, but also strongly believe in empowering the children and young people to help themselves and others. They have access to excellent training opportunities that are geared towards the individual needs of the children and young people they care for. This guarantees that they have the knowledge and skills to ensure the health and well-being of children and young people. Staff are very well supported through regular individual supervision, meetings and appraisal.



Staff work in partnership with external professionals and parents. Parents appreciate being fully included in decisions made about their child at school. A parent said: 'He is currently transitioning into post-16 from Year 11 and it has been well organised. We have been included in decisions and are confident that this will continue.'

The new residential governor offers good support and challenge. She is passionate about driving improvement and ensuring that children and young people are central to this. The governor's reports provide a good insight into the residential provision. The effectiveness of care provided and safeguarding are generally discussed within the text of the report. However, this could be improved further, specifically to evaluate the progress that children and young people are making and the effectiveness of how well they are protected.

A parent said: 'St Francis School is an amazing school with excellent staff; it always goes the extra little bit to make sure that all is OK. Children are children and not numbers on a spreadsheet. A truly special school.'

## 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 that 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** 137

**Gender of boarders** Mixed

**Age range of boarders** 2 to19

**Headteacher** Ann Hoffmann

**Date of previous boarding inspection** 27/01/2015

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