

St Bernard's School

St. Bernard's School, Wood Lane, Louth, Lincolnshire LN11 8RS
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

St Bernard's School is a residential special school that has academy status. It provides education for 67 students aged 2 to 19 years. Two young people currently reside at the school during the week, with additional young people accessing the school for targeted intervention projects and short breaks. The school caters for students with a range of additional needs including complex and severe learning difficulties. The last residential inspection was carried out in July 2016.

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 June 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 5 July 2016

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Young people make excellent progress because of their residential experience. This is particularly evident in the development of independence skills and improved communication. The revision of the school curriculum and class structure enhances this progress.
- Work with parents is exceptionally effective and implemented in a variety of ways. This enables all parents to access information, undertake training and share their views.
- Pastoral care across the whole school site is outstanding. Numerous programmes help young people develop essential skills and knowledge, and help to keep them safe.
- Safeguarding is a high priority at this school. All staff and academy advocates have an excellent awareness of national and regional perspectives relating to safeguarding. Leaders welcome audit and review by other agencies to improve safeguarding throughout the school.
- Leaders and managers of this provision are not content to rest on their laurels. They continue to make substantial improvements across the whole school site.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Year on year, young people who utilise this provision make excellent progress and enjoy a raft of positive experiences. This is equally true of those who board, those young people who attend for short breaks and those who enjoy targeted intervention projects. One parent reported, 'The [residential] sessions really help build confidence and independence.'

Since the last inspection, the two boarders have made tremendous progress. One has progressed in his play, being more imaginative and expressive, and involving others in his creativity. He has also made extraordinary headway with his independence skills. He is able to do household chores, such as loading the dishwasher, and can make simple meals, including sandwiches. He is utilising these skills in the school kitchen, regularly helping the cook. His communication is also much improved. The other young person is making excellent progress in learning practical living skills, such as cooking and gardening. His continued growth in confidence and self-esteem means that he is interacting more effectively, and building positive relationships as a result.

A complete overhaul of the class structure and curriculum in the school has really assisted this progress, providing new opportunities and more consistency across the whole school site. The school environment now supports vocational learning, which is mirrored in the residential provision. This cohesion is recognised by others. One professional commented, 'The changes in class and curriculum are really working well across the site.' A parent said that their child, 'needs a more practical curriculum and the new changes bring this'. This consistent practice enhances cross-site monitoring, with regular opportunities for school and residential staff to share information about young people's progress and highlight any areas that may need more support. Evidence, including videos, enables staff, parents and the young people to identify the progress that they make. It also enables them to recognise what the young people can achieve by themselves.

Young people enjoy a range of activities, including trips to the seaside, shopping, meals out, going to the leisure centre and walking. Physical activities, alongside varied and very healthy meals, help to promote excellent health. Staff access specialist health training as required and are supported by a range of professionals, including a speech and language therapist and occupational therapist. This ensures holistic healthcare for young people.

Pastoral support for young people is excellent. A number of new initiatives are being implemented across the whole school site. These include a programme helping young people develop a sense of individuality and a better understanding of themselves, their sexual health and relationships. One member of staff stated: 'If young people don't know about their bodies they cannot be informed and cannot be

safe.' Other programmes enhance skills in social interaction, help young people to understand risks associated with the internet and enable discussions about bullying. A restorative practice project is helping young people to understand and express their emotions throughout the day. This is helping young people feel comfortable about discussing how they feel, and enables staff to monitor students' emotional well-being. This, in turn, is strengthening relationships between young people and with staff.

Parent engagement is outstanding. Staff continue to build on the success of the parent and family seminars, providing opportunities for parents to come together to share their views and learn about things such as anger management, autism and relationships. Drop-in sessions give parents the chance to meet with a range of professionals to discuss any specific concerns. Parents who request everyday contact receive phone calls to update them on their child's progress. Updates and newsletters inform parents of events in school and the wider community. This range of opportunities means that parents feel they are fully involved in their child's education and care.

Managing transitions continues to be a real strength of this school. Work with young people, parents and providers ensures smooth transitions to new placements, work or further learning opportunities. One young person has successfully moved on to adult provision since the last inspection. The transition period was extensive and very well planned. The remaining boarders visit him in his new placement and he maintains contact with the school and residential staff. This helps maintain the strong relationships built while residing here.

Staff fully understand the needs of each young person and their developmental targets. This ensures that activities enable young people to reach and exceed these targets. This understanding is underpinned by detailed care plans, devised with parents and young people, which clearly identify young people's aspirations and how they would like to be supported. The format of these plans has changed since the last inspection. They now more clearly represent the views of young people, and any changes made to plans are clearly identified.

Young people have a wealth of formats to share their views and opinions. The introduction of email for both the boarders has enabled them to share any thoughts or concerns immediately with a number of people, and has really expanded their communication skills. Avenues that are more formal include residents' meetings and the student council. Young people's views are listened to and their opinions influence change. For example, when the residential area was being used as an extra classroom during the day, one young person complained that this was invading his space and this practice has subsequently stopped. The student council has also been instrumental in forming a student singing group. This brings much joy to those who listen to the group and improves the confidence and musical abilities of the young people. Young people have access to an independent advocate and an academy advocate (previously known as a governor) who visits regularly. This provides opportunities for them to share their views with people outside the staff team.

The residential provision provides a homely feel, with a comfortable lounge area, bedrooms and eating area. The well-equipped kitchen gives young people the opportunity to prepare and cook meals. Maintenance issues are highlighted by staff and young people, forwarded for action, and dealt with as swiftly as possible.

**How well children and young people are helped and protected:
outstanding**

The developments and improvements in care and education positively influence the safety of young people. The change in curriculum and class structure has seen a huge improvement in behaviour. A restorative practice model is being implemented to resolve conflict. A focus on emotional literacy enables young people to express their feelings, self-regulate their behaviour and resolve incidents. Staff and young people understand the various triggers and warning signs of each young person. This enables staff to intervene swiftly at an early stage.

Detailed recording of behavioural incidents on a centralised computer system allows for frequent updates across the site, ensuring that point-in-time information is accessible to all staff. Monitoring of incidents enables staff to note trends and patterns, and implement effective interventions. There has been no use of physical intervention in residential and a significant reduction in school.

Other improvements within safeguarding include the introduction of an online safety group consisting of parents, staff and young people. This, combined with training by an external agency, helps keep young people safe and educates parents in how to protect their children when using the internet.

There have been no allegations or suspicions of harm since the last inspection, nor have there been any complaints. There are no concerns regarding the misuse of alcohol or drugs or radicalisation. Young people do not go missing from this environment. However, the staff across the whole site have an attitude of 'it could happen here', and therefore maintain their knowledge through extensive training. They also retain excellent links with a range of professionals. Supervision is now used to provide staff with scenarios and questions about all aspects of safeguarding. This ensures that staff continue to understand their role in protecting young people.

Detailed risk assessments allow young people to take part in age-appropriate activities, enabling them to grow and develop.

A highly effective and swift response to concerns raised in a recent fire audit means that young people are protected. This includes revision of all emergency evacuation plans and re-siting of the assembly points. Leaders actively encourage audits of their safeguarding practice in order to continuously improve and enhance their protection of young people. The academy advocate responsible for safeguarding undertakes regular monitoring visits and reviews to ensure that staff practice keeps young people safe. Managers make sure that young people have access to a variety of

people with whom they can share any concerns. This ensures the ongoing protection of young people.

Already excellent recruitment practices have been further enhanced with the introduction of a revised induction programme that has greater focus on safeguarding practice.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The leaders and managers of this provision are very experienced, highly motivated, and committed to improving the lives of young people. They continue to make a raft of changes and improvements that enhance young people's experiences. They have been recognised as a national support school, enabling them to share their expertise, knowledge and good practice. The restructuring of classes, changes in the curriculum and increased use of residential provision for preparing young people to leave school have been instrumental in increasing positive outcomes for young people. Extensive work in partnership, including work with the rural learning centre, provides new and exciting learning opportunities for young people.

Improvements in staff support are also evident. One project is helping to develop and increase the skills of support staff, not just in this school but also across the county. The coaching programme established two years ago is now an accepted part of everyday practice and fully embedded into the whole school culture. This helps develop individuals and teams, helping them to realise their potential. The implementation of a new form of appraisal complements the coaching model, identifying the individual's strengths and areas that can be improved. A new project that aims to develop staff resilience has also been implemented recently. Supervision and training remain of the highest quality. Staff meetings reflect on any matters raised in residents' meetings and the student council, ensuring a response to young people. Staff have either completed the relevant qualification, or are undertaking the qualification. This means that young people benefit from skilled and experienced staff.

Monitoring of young people's progress is excellent. Weekly meetings highlight any gaps in learning, and progress is also tracked by the leadership team at varying points throughout the term. Leaders constantly seek the views of parents to inform their monitoring. Suggestions in questionnaires and surveys are responded to with a 'you said, we did' report that is fed back to parents. This strengthens the already excellent relationships between parents and staff. External monitoring by an independent advocate and academy advocates provides challenge and scrutiny. Governance remains a key strength of this school. Advocates clearly understand their roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to safeguarding young people and monitoring their progress and development.

There are no failures to meet national minimum standards or recommendations for improvement.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people, and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC065118

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Inspector

Judith Longden, social care inspector (lead)



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