

St John's School

St. John's School, Firle Road, SEAFORD, East Sussex BN25 2HU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

St. John's is a non-maintained independent specialist school, working with learners who have complex learning disabilities, including some learners who may have difficulties resulting from behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (SEMH), Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC), Asperger syndrome, and pathological demand avoidance (PDA) syndrome. 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 in four separate living areas. Currently there are 23 learners on the Seaford campus school roll. Of these, 13 are residential boarders. The residential provision was last inspected in January 2017.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 September 2017

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

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

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: 16 January 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Learners make exceptional progress. They learn to manage their own behaviour and develop new social skills.
- Learners benefit from an outstanding, committed team of staff who consistently seek to engage them in new learning opportunities.
- Managers are extremely ambitious and continually develop practice in the residential provision. This has recently resulted in a significant reduction in the use of restraint.
- Outcomes for boarders are excellent. At the end of the last academic year, each boarder enjoyed a planned transition to a provision that was specific to their individual needs.
- Learners benefit from an outstanding level of professional input. Professionals who provide input include counsellors, occupational therapists, and speech and language therapists. Professionals work in partnership with parents to support learners at home during the holidays.

The residential special school's areas for development:

- This inspection identifies three minor areas for development. These areas relate to the provision of independent advocates, documentation on the school's website, and awareness of staff about the potential risks posed by female genital mutilation. These concerns do not impact on the care offered to learners.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- To assist the parents of prospective learners, key documents such as the children's guide should be placed on the school's website.
- Staff should consider a referral to an independent advocate who will ensure that learners receive full advice and guidance when care planning decisions are made.
- Refresher training is required for staff to alert them to the possible risks to learners of female genital mutilation.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Supported by outstanding levels of individualised care, learners are extremely happy in the boarding provision and they make exceptional progress. Learners and staff enjoy very close relationships, and staff talk about learners' progress with a high degree of pride and pleasure. Staff are motivated and highly aspirational on behalf of learners. Inspectors found that learners are overcoming considerable challenges, and are making clear and measurable progress in developing social skills and learning to manage their own behaviours. One learner recently performed the lead role in the latest school production, to great acclaim.

Feedback from professionals and parents is extremely positive. One placing social worker refers to the level of care being 'very impressive, with a caring and dedicated staff team producing a warm and creative environment'. Parents point to excellent partnership work, and regular updates and reports from the staff team. A parent referred to her daughter, 'loving it there', adding that she was reassured, 'that she is so well looked after'.

Outcomes for learners are excellent. Four learners left the boarding provision at the end of the last academic year. All moved on to specific, individualised provisions, supported by intensive key work and introduction programmes which ensured positive moves for all concerned. Staff use their extensive knowledge of resources in the local area to guide learners and parents as to the most appropriate resource.

Induction programmes for boarders are equally positive. Managers ensure that each learner has an individualised plan, drafted with the full involvement of parents, and implemented within the specific timescales of the learner concerned. Where difficulties occur for learners, managers ensure that the professional network convenes quickly to address any concerns before they escalate.

Staffing levels are high, with a minimum of one-to-one supervision, where this is an identified support need. If not identified, the staffing ratio is one staff member to two learners. This supports excellent work in helping learners to develop independence skills, or engage with further supported adult provision. Where possible, staff encourage learners to visit local shops, and staff supervise them from a safe distance. Staff escort learners while they are in the community, and provide them with intensive support to promote success. After rigorous risk assessment, and with close ongoing support from the school nurse, learners are able to manage their own medication. This promotes learners' understanding of their own health conditions and supports their ownership of a key element of their daily routine.

Learners are accommodated in small, well-maintained accommodation units with their own separate bedrooms. Pictures on the walls celebrate the achievements of learners, such as performing in front of a large crowd at a recent concert. Learners

are free to personalise their rooms. Staff ensure that facilities meet the specific needs of learners. For example, learners who struggle to share bathroom facilities are allocated en-suite rooms.

Learners enjoy a broad range of activities and experiences. Staff access autism-friendly activities in the local area. Discos and cinema trips allow learners to expand their social lives in the local community. Learners enjoy the use of the school's facilities, which include a swimming pool, an outdoor gymnasium and a sensory garden. Activities are targeted to meet specific needs. For example, one learner enjoys going for a drive with staff after school. The timing of this activity is altered throughout the year so that he is not over-stimulated by bright street lights after dark.

Communication between staff and learners is varied and effective. Staff make excellent use of Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) to ascertain the wishes and feelings of learners. When difficult or complex information needs to be communicated, staff use social story boards well. This allows learners to absorb important information at their own pace, and in privacy.

Behaviour management is outstanding, supported effectively by the school's behavioural specialist. Staff enforce boundaries with high levels of consistency and compassion. With staff support, learners learn how to reconcile their differences with each other and, in most cases, work towards an apology and a greater understanding of their own behaviour.

Staff use their detailed knowledge of learners to identify quickly when a learner is struggling. Staff suggest specific interventions, such as a hand massage or an impromptu walk. Staff think through the behaviour and consider what emotions or messages the learner is trying to convey. Staff communicate clearly with learners at the right pace and at the right moment, when learners are ready to reflect on their part in an incident.

Support for learners is holistic and wide ranging. Staff implement a very successful 'waking curriculum'. They achieve this through close communication with academic staff in the day school. The curriculum involves linking academic targets with daily routines, for example developing numeracy skills in the boarding provision by baking a cake or preparing dinner. Specialist support from the school is available in the boarding provision. For example, the school's counsellor visits the boarding provision once a week to support learners.

Staff actively support learners during the school holidays. They visit learners at home (subject to agreement from funding authorities), to support parents in replicating the behavioural management strategies that are used in the boarding provision. This supports consistency and reassures learners. The school's occupational therapist recently worked with a parent in proposing bathroom adaptations for the family home. A recent successful piece of work supported one learner in the preparation of his first basic meal at home. This promotes stable and enjoyable family life.

Healthy living is actively encouraged. The school's nurse liaises very well with key health professionals to ensure that health care plans meet the complex needs of learners, and that they are regularly reviewed. The nurse also offers inventive strategies to control learners' portion sizes, and levels of sugar and salt in food. Learners are able to access sexual health advice individually or through group work, dependent on their wishes and feelings.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

A strong safeguarding culture is evident. The head of care and the care manager are a key part of the school's safeguarding team. Pictures of the team are displayed throughout the school, and all are very familiar to learners. The safeguarding team meets regularly to review and evaluate practice. The team has established a positive relationship with the safeguarding specialist in the host local authority, and this ensures that concerns are dealt with correctly.

Learners feel extremely safe in the boarding house. They talk about staff with trust and affection. There are no reports of bullying. When peer issues persist, high staffing levels provide closer observation until the issue is resolved.

Staff benefit from good knowledge of safeguarding concerns. Case recording illustrates a keen awareness of risk factors in the local area, such as local hot spots for child sexual exploitation. Staff speak with learners regularly about the risks of 'stranger danger'. However, staff were not clear about all potential risks, for example female genital mutilation.

Activities are rigorously risk assessed, and they are planned effectively. Staff ensured that priority passes were available for learners who visited a local leisure park. This negated the need for long periods of waiting, and ensured that learners enjoyed the experience.

Internet safety is properly prioritised. Learners understand the dangers, as well as the positives, of using the internet. Staff are alert to the dangers of social media and the internet. Staff work in partnership with parents to analyse computer equipment on return from periods at home, and staff also ensure that unsuitable material is not brought into the boarding house.

Learners are supported by excellent partnerships with other professionals. Plans are reviewed regularly to avoid any potential delays in the needs of learners being met. Close work with a behavioural specialist from the local child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) identified a link between self-harming incidents and seizures for one learner.

Risk assessments are complex, and are of high quality. They provide a vivid picture of the needs of each learner, and are based on strong theoretical principles. Staff

understand assessments, and they consistently implement recommendations. Risk assessments incorporate the key themes of documents, such as education, health, and care plans, in order to provide well-targeted interventions. Staff regularly review interventions, incorporating recent behaviours that have occurred during the school day. Assessments are used appropriately to understand the needs of learners, and to support their safety and well-being. For example, when concerns over possible sexualised behaviour emerged, assessments and resulting plans ensured that there was no lone working by female staff members.

A marked reduction in restraints is evident. This is a source of immense pride to the staff team. Managers recently introduced a programme of 'Positive Behaviour Support'. The programme encourages staff to focus on their verbal de-escalation skills, and to learn to assess learners' key trigger behaviours. As a result, staff intervene before the situation moves towards physical restraint. Since implementation, the programme has resulted in a 34% reduction in one specific form of restraint.

Staff advocate strongly on behalf of learners. They challenge placing authorities to ensure that respite provision is both consistent and of good quality for learners who are looked after. Learners do not have access to independent advocacy, limiting the availability of independent support and representation at key decision-making points.

Learners do not go missing. Staff understand the process they need to follow in the event of a missing incident occurring. A specific risk assessment and action plan is in place for each boarder.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Management of the boarding provision is outstanding. The head of care and the care manager are highly experienced, and both have the required management qualification. Managers lead by example. They maintain a consistent presence in the boarding house and have a close relationship with learners and their parents. Managers have infectious enthusiasm to improve the outcomes for learners, and this permeates through the staff team.

Managers have high expectations for practice and seek new and innovative ways of improving the service. This is supported by excellent levels of support from the governing body. Managers attend a local forum for similar providers, and this acts as a useful forum for exchanging ideas and good practice. The school received accreditation from a nationally recognised charity for autism. This assessment commended the school for its 'holistic approach', underpinned by 'a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of autism'.

The living area is maintained extremely well. Managers undertake regular risk assessments to ensure that the environment meets the complex needs of learners. Security gates have been fitted, and this provides further protection. When

breakages or damages occur, items are swiftly replaced to maintain the appearance and comfort of the environment.

Managers continue to explore training needs and gaps in staff knowledge. Staff have received training on supporting learners who experience difficulties with expressing their sexuality and gender identification. Managers evaluate the effectiveness of training. A further session exploring the radicalisation of learners was arranged after initial staff feedback that the first session did not explore the issues sufficiently.

Managers have acted appropriately to meet two of the recommendations of the last inspection. The boarding provision now benefits from the increased scrutiny of a new independent visitor. His picture and contact details are advertised throughout the boarding house. Managers review recommendations from visits on a monthly basis, and an action plan is put in place to address any areas for improvement. This recently resulted in new personalised fire evacuation plans for learners.

Parents report that key documentation such as the children's guide is not available on the school's website. The planned addition of these documents to the website will provide further information for parents who are planning or seeking a placement in the boarding provision, and also to those who are going through the induction process.

Case files evidence a high level of management oversight and audit. Managers review service provision regularly so that it meets the changing and developing needs of learners.

The admissions process is detailed and effective. Managers ensure that referral information is fully explored, and that it is supplemented by a home visit or a visit to the learner's current school. Assessments fully explore all relevant information and possible behaviours that could affect other learners in the boarding provision. Recently, this averted the admission of a learner to the boarding house who would not have been well matched to the provision.

Staff morale is excellent. One staff member said, 'This is the best job I have ever had, I would not change anything.' Staff turnover and agency use is minimal. Staff report high levels of management supervision, appraisal and de-briefs after behavioural incidents. Staff are eager to learn, and are ambitious. Staff training needs are closely monitored by a new computer system. This ensures that managers can oversee and plan the training of staff.

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 differences 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 and 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 whom 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: SC050366

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Simon Charleton

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01323 872940

Email address: Louise.harman@st-johns.co.uk

Inspector(s)

Barnaby Dowell, social care inspector (lead)



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 and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, 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.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence>, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2017