

# St Mary's School

St Mary's School, Maynards Green, Heathfield, East Sussex TN21 0BT

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

St Mary's School is a residential special school, which is part of a multi-academy trust. It offers a 24-hour curriculum for boys between the ages of nine and 16 who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school provides weekly and flexi boarding for up to 12 places. The school is situated between Heathfield and Horam in East Sussex. Residential accommodation is within the main school building.

**Inspection dates:** 13 to 15 March 2018

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>outstanding</b>
---	--------------------

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:** 13 March 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Pupils appreciate the range of activities available to them. Staff take care to obtain pupils' views so that they can plan the activities and boarding nights so that pupils access the activity of their choice. Pupils enjoy their residential experience. They want to stay and share new experiences with their friends. They have a sense of belonging.
- Pupils have excellent relationships with staff. They trust the staff to meet their individual needs. Staff keep a close eye on each pupil's welfare, redirecting them in a calm way if necessary.
- Pupils have easy access to specialist help, for example a clinical psychologist. Since the last inspection, senior leaders have developed a therapy room, making access to specialist support much easier for pupils.
- Pupils are safe. All staff are aware of the established safeguarding procedures and the action to take in the event of a concern. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) liaises with other agencies if necessary. She advocates for all pupils in her care.
- The independent visitor is a well-known face in the school. He is available for pupils to talk to him. He provides a report to senior leaders on the quality of care in the provision.
- As a result of staying in the residential provision, pupils' behaviour and attendance at school significantly improves. Pupils' social skills, confidence and self-esteem all increase.
- Catering is excellent. Pupils, who previously ate a poor diet, now enjoy a range of healthy food and can have seconds if they wish.
- A highly motivated and experienced senior team leads the provision. The head of care is a visible presence in the residential provision. She deploys staff effectively, putting pupils at the centre of practice.
- The collaborative working of care, education and therapy staff is impressive. The communication channels are clear so that all staff know the individual strategies to enable pupils to achieve their relevant targets.
- A board of trustees, with a vast array of experience and expertise, provides the necessary oversight, including monitoring policies, practice and records.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Recommended remedial work for fire safety is not completed.
- Staff have not documented some interim protocols for fire safety, pending completion of the remedial work.
- The single central register does not fully comply with statutory guidance.

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

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard for residential special schools:

- The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. In particular, complete the proposed remedial works and provide written instructions for the interim arrangements. (NMS 7.1)

### **Recommendations**

- Include care staff qualifications in the single central record.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

A strength of this provision is the vast range of healthy and meaningful activities that pupils engage with. For example, rock climbing, trampolining, fishing, swimming and mountain biking. Staff regularly seek pupils' views as to their choice of activity and do their utmost to accommodate their request. Consequently, pupils enjoy the residential experience and want to come and participate in the wide range of stimulating exercise. Pupils have a sense of belonging, trusting in the adults around them to keep them safe while they pursue their interests. A parent said, 'My son loves staying overnight and has so much fun. All the staff are fantastic and have been such a fantastic support to my son and myself.'

All pupils, including those with communication difficulties, have a clear voice. Staff hear pupils' views, wishes and feelings. Staff are readily available for daily dialogue as well as more formal key-work sessions. Some pupils serve on the school council representing the views of others in a more formal way. An independent visitor is available to the pupils. He listens to them, reporting their views and providing an independent assessment of the provision. As young people feel that their views, wishes and feelings are heard, they do not resort to the formal complaints procedure.

As a result of the residential provision, pupils' attendance at school improves significantly. A parent said, 'My son was in a mainstream school and was angry, disruptive, unable to focus, stressed and falling behind. He is now motivated in his learning.' Pupils' challenging behaviours diminish and they grow in confidence and self-esteem, maturing into responsible members of their community. Pupils' improved social skills open new opportunities for them, for example being able to have a meal in a restaurant with their family. Pupils, some with social communication difficulties, demonstrate an ability to be assertive without resorting to aggression. Staff treat pupils with dignity and respect. Staff demonstrate a comprehensive knowledge of individual needs, for example they allow pupils on the autistic spectrum to engage in a level of social interaction that is appropriate for them.

Parents take prime responsibility for their child's health needs. Staff ensure that the necessary consents and systems are in place such as to allow them to administer medication. Specialist help is readily available. Of particular note is the development of the therapy room where pupils can engage with the school counsellor or the clinical psychologist. Pupils develop skills to manage their emotions and be assertive without resorting to negative behaviour. A parent said, 'I've seen my son's confidence build and build since he has stayed in residential at the school and his progress has been amazing.'

Pupils make excellent progress. Care and education staff work exceptionally well together. There is excellent communication between care and education staff about the residential time and the school day. All staff know about pupils' behaviour and needs so can tailor the support. Staff manage transitions between school and

residential time exceptionally well, especially for pupils who struggle with change. Some pupils, who were once school refusers, now relish the opportunity to attend school as well as the residential provision. Other pupils, who previously demonstrated challenging behaviour when in groups, now enjoy meeting their friends in residential time. Pupils who have difficulties with social integration due to their disability are able to develop a social awareness, social assertiveness and impeccable manners.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of healthy meals. Staff seek pupils' choices about food and provide alternatives if necessary. Pupils are able to have seconds as well as choosing healthy snacks in between mealtimes. Some pupils, who historically have had a very limited diet, develop their culinary taste buds and enjoy a range of international cuisine.

Staff are sensitive to the needs of pupils who are considering boarding. They develop bespoke trial evenings and induction plans so that pupils embrace the residential experience at their own pace. Pupils, who once thought they would never board, stay for multiple nights, relishing the experience.

Staff do not place any unnecessary restrictions on pupils who wish to contact their family or other individuals who are important to them. Pupils can use a landline in private or their smart phone to speak to their parents and carers.

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

Staff are not risk averse. They write comprehensive risk assessments so that pupils engage in activities without compromising their safety. Staff entrust pupils with tools and equipment to do the nature projects that they love in the school grounds, a scenario once thought impossible. Pupils trust the adults around them to keep them safe. Staff keep a close eye on pupils' welfare, redirecting them and intervening in a calm way if necessary. Staff are on hand to deal with any issues and conflicts. Staff are effective in doing this without, mainly, needing to resort to physical restraint. There have been three physical restraints in residential time, since the last welfare inspection.

Staff do not tolerate bullying in any form and ensure that pupils know how to report any concerns. A parent said, 'Even though at times there have been bullying issues, the school is on to it straight away and I am very impressed with how they handled it. My son feels safe and cared for.'

Staff protect pupils from harm. Staff are clear on the procedures to follow when there is concern. This ensures that there is a swift response, including contact with relevant agencies. Key staff, such as the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), act as the contact point with other services. The DSL advocates strongly for pupils, making formal referrals to other agencies, regardless of whether a concern is in the school or elsewhere. A trustee with a background in safeguarding keeps an oversight of practice, meeting regularly with the DSL and acting as a critical friend.

Staff adopt safer recruitment practice and only employ adults deemed to be suitable to work with children. The single central register does not currently contain care staff

qualifications, which is not in strict accordance with statutory guidance.

Pupils do not offend, go missing from the residential provision or misuse substances. It is noteworthy that staff have carefully thought through the safety of pupils in the cyber world. Staff are aware of the risks and educate pupils to keep themselves safe. Staff have created an 'instanest' board where pupils share with other pupils their top tips for staying safe online. Staff use the wide range of activities to distract pupils and pupils are more interested in the healthy exercise than in spending time on their electronic devices. Key staff have further plans to improve practice, such as plans for a comprehensive e-safety audit to benchmark the performance of the school.

Pupils have easy access to other professionals for support, such as a clinical psychologist. The service is embedded into the school so that professionals can respond quickly to pupils' emerging needs and as a result pupils find new ways of coping with psychological distress. Therapists adopt a holistic approach and, on occasion, work with the wider family of the pupil and family relationships improve as a result. Therapists provide training to staff, for example in attachment theory. A professional said, 'The school is ahead of the game in terms of therapeutic intervention.' A placing social worker said, 'The progress is fantastic. (Name of young person) is more confident and able to manage emotions after the trauma in his life.' A professional said, 'Staff coax the worries from pupils in a gentle way.'

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

A highly motivated and experienced management team effectively leads the provision. Senior leaders monitor the quality of care on a daily basis as well as through more formal written reports. Pupils' needs are kept at the centre of practice so that pupils, regardless of their starting points, make excellent progress, especially in behaviour and school attendance. Senior leaders identify areas for improvement and make significant financial decisions, such as development plans for the environment. The board of trustees provides the necessary oversight, including monitoring policies, practice and records, including those addressing safeguarding.

Senior leaders strive to continually evaluate and improve practice. They commissioned a research project on young people failing to thrive in education. This included seeking information from present and past pupils. The research led to 12 strategies that senior leaders are currently developing. They have clear plans to implement the findings within the residential provision to improve practice and subsequent outcomes.

The head of care is a visible presence in the residential area and she deploys staff effectively. She uses the supervision and appraisal system, as well as ongoing professional development plans, to ensure that staff are up to date with the latest training. Staff speak positively of the regular meetings and the opportunity to consider individual pupil's progress and how their own training supports those needs. Staff complete a self-analysis of performance against the national minimum standards prior to an annual appraisal to identify any areas for improvement. Parents speak positively of the staff. One parent said, 'I really don't think there's anything they could do better. The team are amazing. This shows in the progress of my child's

confidence that has built up as a result of his residential experience.'

Leaders and managers build effective relationships with parents and placing authorities depending on the legal status of the pupil and any contact arrangements in place. Likewise, internal communication is excellent. The collaborative working of the whole-school team and external therapists is impressive. Communication channels are clear so that all staff know the individual strategies to achieve the relevant targets for each pupil.

The physical environment is comfortable and well maintained, with any damage or wear and tear quickly sorted out. Senior leaders have identified the improvements required for fire safety; these improvements require significant investment, and are well advanced. Safe interim arrangements are in place but are not reflected in written records. This has not had an impact on the safety of pupils. Staff ensure that pupils practice fire drills and know how to evacuate in the event of an emergency. The head of care writes personal emergency evacuation plans if any individual requires extra support.

Pupils care plans are an exemplar. The format is child-friendly, with young people making a significant contribution to inform staff how to best care for them and meet their needs. Staff implementation of the care plans is excellent as evidenced by improvements in pupils' behaviour, attendance and social presentation.

## **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:** SC050392

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Paul Murphy

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01435 812278

**Email address:** [office.sm@sabden.org.uk](mailto:office.sm@sabden.org.uk)



## **Inspector**

Keith Riley, social care inspector



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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

© Crown copyright 2018