St Vincent's School

St Vincent's School is a specialist school for sensory impairment and other needs. The residential provision is inspected under the social care common inspection framework.

Information about this residential special school

St Vincent's school for children who have sensory impairments and other needs is a registered charity governed by the Board of Trustees of the Catholic Blind Institute. St Vincent's has specialist school status and offers a curriculum for children who have all levels of visual impairment, as well as additional needs. The school is located in a residential area with the accommodation being split into two separate areas. The school is currently using only one of the areas. The school caters for pupils between the ages of five and 18 years. The school provides residential places for up to 22 pupils on weekdays in term time, with a maximum of 18 staying per night. There is a large range of residential options available, depending on the individual needs of the child. The residential provision was last inspected on 16 January 2017.

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 February 2018

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:

- Young people are thriving in the residential provision and thoroughly enjoy staying here with their friends.
- The young people are not defined by their visual impairment, but by what they can and do achieve.
- Young people are provided with a bespoke care package that ensures that they make excellent progress across all areas of their development, including building their emotional resilience.
- Young people are extremely proud of their achievements. The exceptional support provided to young people in promoting their independence means that the world around them is now much more accessible to them.
- Staff have an excellent understanding of each young person's needs. They help and inspire young people to achieve and surpass their individual goals.
- Young people are at the centre of everything that the school does. Their views are intrinsic to the ongoing development of the service.
- Leaders and staff use their understanding of good safeguarding practice to continually develop and enhance young people's understanding of how to keep themselves and others safe.
- Leaders and managers are inspirational. They are continually looking at new ventures to extend the life experiences and opportunities afforded to the young people. Innovative work experience opportunities and enterprise schemes with partner agencies help young people gain a wealth of skills that will increase their future employability.
- Senior leaders respond quickly and effectively to improve identified shortfalls and have already taken action to address these. In particular, the recording of safeguarding concerns.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- To improve the recording of young people's transition plans into adult services in order to provide leaders and staff with a clearer view of the priorities for each young person.
- To further improve the recording of the actions taken by staff and the impact of this with regard to any safeguarding concern.
- To improve the quality of the evaluation in the monitoring of the residential provision in order to assist leaders with the key priorities for improvement and development.

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

Recommendations

- Ensure that all records of safeguarding concerns are sufficiently detailed.
- Ensure that young people's transition plans into adult service reflect the bespoke support that each young person receives.
- Enhance further the monitoring by the governors and the independent person to provide a detailed and evaluative report.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Young people thrive in the residential provision. They thoroughly enjoy spending time with their friends. Staff are extremely adept at identifying each young person's needs and in providing bespoke care packages. This means that young people are making excellent progress in relation to their education and personal development. One parent said that, when her child first arrived at the school, her child had no confidence. However, the parent went on to say, '(Name of child) now has her confidence back. She does lots of things outside of school, which has boosted her confidence. She has become an amazing young lady.' This is echoed by other parents who said that staff go 'above and beyond' for the children and their parents.

Staff turn every experience and interaction into a learning opportunity for the young people. This is typified by their response to a young person who wanted to hold a charity event. Staff supported the young person effectively, which allowed him to plan and organise the event. This was a massive achievement for him. He not only raised a significant amount of money for the charity, but by planning, organising and running the event, he also gained a range of skills that will stand him in good stead for future employment. A family member said, 'Staff gave him the space to do this, and he achieved this on his own back. He is very proud of this.' This was echoed by the young person, who enthusiastically told inspectors about his endeavours. His success has inspired other young people to try new things, such as setting up a successful Harry Potter quiz night.

Young people have trusted adults that they can talk to at any time. Young people said that the staff 'make them feel safe'. Due to the high levels of consultation with young people, activities and meals are continually changing. Young people work well together to make decisions that affect the whole group. This includes successfully negotiating which DVD they will watch on movie night. Consequently, young people are much more compassionate, tolerant and sensitive to the needs of others.

Young people have a secure understanding of their visual impairment and how this can affect their day-to-day life. They are confident to identify strategies that will help them to overcome any barriers. Young people are much more aware of their own health and well-being. One young person understands that they need to follow their bespoke physiotherapy programme, but they recognise that they do not always want to, 'as it is hard'. Their physiotherapist was complimentary about the progress the young person has made because the young person now has a greater scope of movement.

One young person spoke knowledgably about her specific health need and how staff are supporting her to independently manage this. As a result, the young person has much more control over the medical interventions that she needs in order to keep herself fit and well. Young people receive very good care and support from the on-site medical team and are confident to talk to any member of staff if they are feeling

unwell in the knowledge that the staff will help them.

Keeping young people safe is a key priority for staff. Staff work tirelessly to enable young people to develop the skills to keep themselves safe. Recent work on internet safety has provided greater insight on how the young people can keep themselves safe using social media or when purchasing items from the internet. Inspectors observed an excellent discussion concerning what the school would do if a young person was missing and could not be found. Young people confidently asked questions about why the police would be called, and why people needed to know about their medical needs. Staff provided clear, succinct answers to all of their questions. Ultimately, by the end of this interactive discussion young people had a greater understanding of what they should do if they were missing, and what the staff would do to find them.

Staff are not risk averse. Young people enthusiastically spoke about their trips to a burger restaurant. They explained how they now had the confidence to order and pay for their food with little or no support from staff. This is a key strength of the staff, as they clearly understand when guidance is needed, and when to step back. As a result, young people are increasingly independent. One young person proudly explained how she can now order her ice cream by herself. Other young people said it was important that they were allowed to be 'just teenagers' when they were out. This was because they were able to sit away from the main group in the burger restaurant. Here, they sat talking and laughing with their friends as any other group of teenagers would. This was wonderful to see.

Young people enjoy an extensive range of exciting and fun activities within the residence and in the community. Young people spoke enthusiastically about the recent concert that they took part in and how they stayed in school on a Friday night. This was seen to be a great success by the young people. They said that it felt more like a sleepover with their friends. This was carefully planned and orchestrated by staff to make it a fun event. Parents said that this was very well received by the young people, who are looking forward to the next time.

Leaders and managers work extremely well with partner agencies to increase young people's skills and employability. Enterprise schemes are utilised effectively to promote young people's individual skills and interests. For one young person, this has resulted in him becoming the photographer for events in school. Staff worked tirelessly with other professionals to ensure that his dreams of becoming a photographer came to fruition.

Another example of excellent practice is the work carried out with Marvel Comic Inc. to create comics with the young people about river blindness in Africa. Young people were involved in the whole process of creating the story, the characterisation and creation of the comic. On the back of this initiative, several international students are visiting the school in the summer term to share their life experiences and to talk about the 'sight box' initiative and the development of a rugby ball for the visually impaired. These initiatives provide young people with extensive project management and management skills.

The principal is a key driver in this. He said that he has a vision to ensure that, 'The school is leading the way to help open up a world of job opportunities for the creative talents of their students. The school's long-term vision is to tackle unemployment through the promotion of project-based creative learning opportunities. This means we provide a varied experience to promote young people's employable skills and strengths.'

Young people are well prepared for the next stages in their life, whether this is moving on to college, moving back home or to another residential provision. Plans are in place for this, but do not currently reflect all of the support, guidance and assistance that staff provide. Parents are extremely pleased with the support that their children receive and say that the staff provide information about alternative colleges that may provide greater support to their child.

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

Safeguarding is a priority for the school. Staff take seriously any safeguarding concerns and ensure that the appropriate persons are notified of any concerns. The school recently appointed a new designated safeguarding lead. She has attended the necessary training and is fully conversant with the school's safeguarding policies. She identified shortfalls in the recording of safeguarding concerns prior to her undertaking the role; these are in relation to the records not being sufficiently detailed about the discussions held with professionals, and the actions taken by the school as a result of the discussions. Testimonies from staff and leaders demonstrate that the young people are kept safe and action is taken to ensure their safety. Therefore, this is a recording issue, which the school is taking steps to address.

Staff are conversant with the school's whistle-blowing procedures and said that they feel safe to report any concerns to the appropriate person. Parents said that staff are an excellent source of support to them. Staff attend meetings when they do not necessarily need to be there to support the parent and young person. Young people do not go missing.

Staff's innate understanding of the young people enables them to ensure that their practice protects each young person from harm. Staff work well with parents to ensure that friendships and relationships between the young people are consensual and do not put them at risk of harm. Young people have a sound understanding of what positive relationships are. Staff attend regular training on safeguarding, child protection and keep their knowledge and skills updated through discussions at team meetings.

Young people have a strong sense of safety. This was demonstrated in their practised emergency evacuation during the inspection. Young people were keen to ensure that the inspectors got out safely by ensuring that they knew where to go and what was happening next. Some young people provided reminders to others about not running and walking down the stairs so that they did not fall. These evacuations are carried out on a regular basis, so that the young people can become familiar with the routines and where they are to evacuate to.

Young people said that they do occasionally 'fall out', but that these issues are quickly resolved. Young people enjoy warm, caring relationships with staff. Inspectors observed many very positive interactions between young people and staff. This included sharing their views on a range of topics, negotiating and compromising on what would happen next. This typifies the wonderful relationships young people enjoy with staff that enable them to feel safe, to challenge and to resolve any minor issues.

There are no physical interventions or sanctions used in residence. Staff take the time to skilfully talk through issues with young people. This enables the young people to have the time and space to think through their actions, the impact on others and how they can do things differently moving forward.

Inclusivity and equality of opportunity is a priority. Staff work tirelessly to ensure that any barriers to the young people's continued success and development are overcome. One young person at the previous inspection would often choose to sit in their bedroom listening to music. This year, they are engaging with the other young people and are going out on trips. This has been taken slowly to meet the young person's needs. As a result, the young person is now able to enjoy a wider range of activities and feel safe in a group of people.

Due to falling numbers at the school, the young people are now only using one residential area. The young people are thoroughly enjoying the opportunities for all have an en-suite bathroom. They said that it has been fun to spend more time with their friends. The premises are well maintained and meet the needs of the young people effectively. Recruitment practice is secure and helps to protect young people from harm.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Senior leaders and managers have an ambitious vision for the residential provision. They are aspirational, have high, but realistic, ambitions for each young person, and are influential in changing young people's lives. Leaders and managers all want the young people to leave school with a range of qualifications, skills and experiences that will help them to move forward into adulthood and succeed in their chosen career path.

There have been a number of changes within the governing body since the last inspection. Several new governors have come on board and are developing their roles within the governing body. As a result, some monitoring reports have not been as detailed or evaluative. This has been identified by the principal and head of care and is on the agenda for future governors' meetings. The residential provision is key to the success of the school and is seen as an intrinsic component to young people's learning and development. This is evident in the changes to how young people access the residential provision. Only a few young people stay all week, while others may stay for one or two nights a week, or once a month. This has successfully enabled young people to continue to access the residential provision.

Young people are cared for by a committed staff team. Staff take great pride in their work and thoroughly enjoy what they are doing. There have been a number of changes within the organisation of the residential provision, which have been sensitively implemented by staff. Staff are well aware of the main priorities for the service and have made great strides in improving the quality of record-keeping and the organisation of the young people's files. Many staff are now attending meetings in school about the young people. Consequently, they feel more empowered and communication between all departments has improved. Staff have regular opportunities to attend training to enhance their knowledge and skills. Recent training includes subjects such as epilepsy, rescue medication, first aid and safeguarding.

The head of care and principal continue to be strong forces for change. They enthusiastically sustain links with other professionals and organisations that will benefit the young people. Similarly, the school's relationship with the local primary school significantly enhances their primary school children's understanding of young people who have a visual impairment and/or a disability. The highly committed, skilled and enthusiastic care and educational teams work as one to ensure that all young people gain the most out of their stays at the school. Consequently, young people receive high-quality care, education and support that enables them to become independent.

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: SC040724

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Dr John Patterson

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

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