

St Catherine's School

St Catherine's School, Grove Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 1TT
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

St Catherine's School is a non-maintained residential special school for the education of students who have speech, language and communication needs and associated conditions, such as autism spectrum disorders and attention deficit disorders. The school is situated in Ventnor, a seaside town on the southern coast of the Isle of Wight. There is easy access into town, with Ventnor a short walking distance from the school. The residential accommodation is currently provided in three houses on the St Catherine's School site. Accommodation for sixth-form students is in a residential house close to the school. An additional three small cottages are utilised by students who are following post-19 programmes at the local college. At the time of this inspection, there were 68 students, of which 33 were accessing the residential provision.

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 February 2019

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: 7 March 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

- Residential students thrive through accessing the residential provision. They develop socially and emotionally and learn independent living skills and how to live with others.
- Joint working across school departments is seamless. The education, residential and nursing and therapies teams work cohesively to ensure that each residential student has bespoke, comprehensive plans to meet their educational, health and emotional needs.
- The school's independence programme is highly effective. Plans are highly individualised and allow residential students of all ages to learn new skills at their own pace.
- Residential students' actions and demeanour show that they feel safe in the residential provision. They confidently approach staff when upset or anxious, but also for a general chat.
- The senior team is reflective and identifies well the strengths and areas for development across the school. The team members continually strive to ensure that the best possible service is provided for residential students.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- The senior team needs to implement a clearer risk-assessment recording tool for when safeguarding concerns are raised about staff.

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

Recommendations

- Review the risk-assessment recording system for staff safeguarding concerns.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Residential students benefit from receiving extremely high-quality care, based on their individual needs. Staff have an excellent understanding of students' needs, and their plans and goals. They support students and help them to exceed expectations. Students enjoy the activities on offer, including football in the local community and trips to local tourist attractions and the beach. The school has two scout groups for its students and many students are completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, including working with a local homeless people's charity.

Students were incredibly positive about their time in residential and were able to show the inspector progress they have made through their life skills folders. Students are proud of their successes. Students' abilities are individually assessed with high expectations for all, but staff also recognise, appropriately, that some students will make progress in smaller steps than others.

Parents are particularly enthusiastic about the residential provision and the progress their children make. Some said that this is the first school where their child has thrived, and that staff 'do not give up' on them, thinking of new ways in which they can develop and nurture the skills their child has. An example of this is the use of 'Widget' recipes, which are meticulously put together by residential staff and which allow all students to follow instruction on how to make various dishes. One student was keen to show off his tea-making skills and ran to the kitchen when the inspector arrived to demonstrate his new skill.

Parents said communication from staff is good and they can contact the 'caring and devoted' staff at any time, and will always get a weekly summary or know if there has been an issue for their child.

Residential students make excellent progress in all aspects of their lives while staying at the school. This includes working towards managing their own health and emotional well-being with support from the dedicated nursing and therapies team. One student said he felt older and more independent through being assessed to carry his own emergency epilepsy medication. Those who are struggling to process or manage their feelings and emotions have access to a counsellor. The school's strong links with child and adolescent mental health services mean that, where necessary, students and staff receive the guidance they need and that staff are given the right support to meet the needs of students effectively.

Residential students moving into the school have a tailored induction dependent on their needs. Once they start staying overnight they have a bespoke action plan of the onsite induction they will need. Staff continue to help them until they know their way around the school and where all the key people are, such as the nurse and head of care. They are shown how they can share their views. The recently installed

postboxes allow students to post their views and ideas, make complaints or request time with the independent listener or member of staff of their choosing, putting the onus back on staff to provide support if they are not available when a student needs them. Students feel that they are listened to, and that they have a say in activities, meals and how the houses are decorated through the student council, postboxes, house meetings and just by approaching staff.

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

Residential students identify staff they would go to if they were worried or upset. Their actions and demeanour show that they are confident in their surroundings and they approach staff for help and support as well as to sit and chat. The use of colour-coded 'engine' charts around the school enable students to monitor how they are feeling and indicate how their 'internal engine' is running, identifying the colour to staff, if they feel they need support.

Staff have a strong understanding of each student and their particular needs. They are acutely aware of changes in presentation and the vulnerabilities of each student. They are confident in the procedures to follow should they be concerned for a student's safety or welfare. Senior staff have excellent links with specialist police officers and other local safeguarding professionals to ensure that they are aware of any current concerns in the community, including the risk of exploitation in all forms, such as hate crime and criminal exploitation.

The designated safeguarding lead and deputy team act swiftly when there are any concerns regarding a student. Such concerns are reported effectively to relevant professionals in the local authority. When necessary, the school liaises with and appropriately seeks advice and guidance from the designated officer in the local authority. Risk assessments do not clearly set out the rationale for decisions that are made in relation to staff following an incident or allegation.

All disclosures and allegations are regarded with the utmost seriousness; this has also been the case when students have made untrue allegations in the past. Records of actions are clear and the recently introduced computerised system enables all staff to report on concerns quickly without the risk of losing a paper trail. Chronologies of events, including bullying and behavioural issues, are clearly recorded with notes of actions and clear indications of what needs to be followed up. Staff will regularly challenge the right agencies if they feel that a student or family is not receiving the external support they require and will attend any planned meetings.

Residential students all have individualised plans for how their behaviour can be improved. Joint working with the therapist and nursing, behavioural, education and residential teams promotes a consistent approach to managing students' behaviour and students know what is expected of them. Staff liaise with child and adolescent mental health workers when they require further assistance. Behaviour recording is meticulous and has helped one student in particular to regulate his socially

unacceptable behaviour, to recognise his 'internal engine' and to be able to ask staff to help him regulate himself.

The school is not risk averse and will support students to be as independent as possible, including when able, to access shops in the community by themselves or with peers, and to travel independently. Those who require extra support in these areas have key plans in place to enable them to do as many activities and to be as independent as possible.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers have exceptionally high expectations for all students in the school. They strive for students to achieve beyond expectations and will consistently look for new ways to improve the experience for students across the school. The head of care and dedicated care staff team are consistently seeking to improve outcomes for students and to support them to develop their independence skills and broaden their experiences. Regular reviews of progress made, and of how the residential provision impacts on this progress, ensure that students benefit from an evolving service.

The needs of students are paramount and their views are consistently sought on what could be done better in the residential provision. There is a dedicated residential student council member to further ensure that the students' voice is heard. Joint working across departments and with external agencies is particularly strong, and includes challenging the decisions that have been made if the school feels that these are not in the student's best interests.

There has been an ambitious improvement plan for the residential houses, with most areas now decorated and maintained to a good standard. The cleanliness of the homes has significantly improved, with the domestic staff taking particular pride in their work.

Staff said they feel supported and that they have access to senior leaders at any time. In addition to regular supervisions and appraisal, they can share their views and feel they are listened to. Recent recruitment of residential staff has helped refresh some ideas and approaches, while respecting the experience of those who have worked in the school for a long time. The teams work well together and they said that they are a supportive a cohesive group. Staff benefit from regular training and have learned specialist skills as students develop.

The governors and trustees provide the leadership team with robust challenge. The visits to the residential provision, in line with NMS 20, are rigorous and challenging. The head of care provides action plans in response to any points that are raised. These matters are subsequently explored at the next visits.

Leaders and managers, including governors and trustees, are fully aware of the

school's strengths and areas for development. Comprehensive reviews of the whole school and residential provision using the national minimum standards and inspection framework have highlighted what can be improved. The senior leaders, including governors and trustees, have not become complacent after being judged outstanding, and know they need to consistently reflect and improve to maintain the judgement.

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: SC012597

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Rachel Weldon

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Jennie Christopher, social care inspector (lead)



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