

# St Bernard's School

St Bernard's House, 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 75 students aged from two to 19 years. One young person routinely resides at the school for part of the week. Other young people access the provision for short breaks. Post-16 students access the provision for targeted intervention projects as part of their education, health and care plans. The school caters for students who have a range of additional needs, including complex and severe learning difficulties. The last residential inspection was carried out in July 2018.

**Inspection dates:** 12 to 13 November 2019

**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:** 17 July 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

Staff work in a positive and proactive way. They have extremely well-established and positive relationships with the children, their families and other professionals. They ensure that, as the need for any additional support is identified, families are quickly signposted to the most appropriate professionals and agencies. A strength of the service is the consistency of care that is achieved between the school and the children's family. Excellent communication ensures that children are cared for by staff who fully understand their needs, abilities and objectives.

Children accessing stays are primarily from the post-16 cohort. The stays provide additional opportunities for them to develop the independent life skills that will assist them throughout adulthood. A parent said that they had initially felt wary about letting their child stay. However, she now sees the immense improvements in her child's confidence levels and the numerous transferable skills that her child has developed. Another family member described the team as 'part of our extended family'. Parents especially value the fact that residential stays enable children to widen their friendship groups.

Children are set developmental and learning targets during their stays. These targets are ambitious and individually tailored to reflect the objectives and ability of each child. Once achieved, targets are further extended. There are excellent examples of how, over time, this approach has significantly improved children's lives. For example, one child has now learned to cope much better with transitions between their home and school. Creative and carefully targeted care strategies demonstrate the commitment of staff to ensure that each child achieves their full potential.

A wide range of technology is used very creatively to enable children to express their views and wishes. Children's views are then fully taken into account when planning for stays. Children also have input into the 'one-page profiles' that are used to ensure that the school staff and staff at community-based activities understand the child's needs and preferences. An elected child represents the views of boarders on the school parliament.

The school runs inspiring initiatives such as parenting programmes. The programmes are based on up-to-date research and are an excellent example of how to empower children and their families. A parent spoke about how amazing these programmes are and the lasting effect of the support networks that have stemmed from them.

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

The school has demonstrated that it has taken real and meaningful learning from an incident that was referred to in the last inspection report. Leaders have appointed additional designated safeguarding leads and provided very good additional training

for staff. This has ensured that safeguarding systems are now very strong.

When safeguarding concerns recently arose about a child, the school was proactive in raising these with the placing authority. The school worked with the authority to provide the highest possible level of support to those involved. A representative from the authority described the school as having 'gone over and above what was expected in trying to support'.

The school is adept at working through children's challenging behaviours and identifying the underlying causes of children's anxieties. A professional praised the comprehensive way that this is done. Strategies have included the provision of 'sensory diets' and modified leisure activities. These have enabled children to better self-regulate. Children are also very well supported to cope with the way that changes in their bodies may make them feel. Staff fully understand the additional needs of children who have learning difficulties as their bodies develop. They ensure that children do not experience confusion or distress. The school's very effective behaviour management approach is a key strength. This is evident in the absence of any physical interventions or significant behaviour incidents.

Children do not go missing from school or while out on activities. This is due to very careful planning and the staff team's detailed knowledge of the needs and vulnerabilities of each child. The school completes very good-quality risk assessments. These incorporate strategies to support children to become safer. Over time, children's identified risks have greatly reduced.

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

The structure of the leadership team was revised soon after the last inspection. There is strong management structure that puts the residential provision at the heart of the school. One of the changes involves staff working across the residential and school setting. This has provided continuity of care for children and enabled the staff to observe the children's behaviours in and out of the classroom environment.

Governance arrangements are particularly robust. Governors' visits are used constructively to identify opportunities to enhance the children's residential experience.

Children's plans are devised in a way that ensures that their individual learning and communication styles are incorporated. This ensures that the children receive a bespoke package of care and education. The team is ambitious and sets aspirational targets for the children. Targets are now linked to accreditation. This means that, in addition to achieving valuable life skills, children enhance their portfolio of qualifications.

Leaders place great emphasis on developing their staff. This is done through formal and informal coaching and mentoring programmes. The success of this approach is evident in the staff retention rates and internal promotions. Staff who have ceased working full time often remain on the team as bank staff. The stability of the staff team enables children to receive consistently high-quality care.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Leanda Mason

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

**Telephone number:** 01507 603 776

**Email address:** lea.mason@lwf.lincs.sch.uk

## **Inspector**

Sonia Hay, social care inspector



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