

Inspection of St John's Catholic School for the Deaf (Boston Spa)

Church Street, Boston Spa, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 6DF

Inspection dates: 11–12 February 2020

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Sixth-form provision

Good

Previous inspection grade

Good

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a happy school with a great ethos. The school's mission statement sums up this ethos well: 'Every voice is heard. Every voice is celebrated.' Pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are welcomed with open arms by caring staff.

Pupils like coming to school. They say they enjoy being with their friends and feel safe. The school places great emphasis on pupils' personal development. Many pupils arrive with limited language and complex social and emotional needs. Staff nurture pupils' confidence and promote their independence well. Pupils and staff enjoy their Pilates classes and stress-busting art activities.

Pupils enjoy excellent relationships with staff. The school has a comprehensive bullying policy and keeps a close eye on any problems. If issues do arise, staff address these quickly and provide support.

However, the quality of education is not yet good. The knowledge and skills that leaders intend for pupils to learn have not been thought through enough in some subjects. Several subject areas lack a clear rationale and plan for exactly what will be taught and when it will be taught. There is scope for the teaching of early reading to develop further.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Leaders and staff made changes to many aspects of the curriculum last year. Changes included grouping some subjects into topics and prioritising the development of pupils' personal development. While this has brought about the intended increased focus on personal development, some parts of the curriculum are not coherently planned. For example, in art, craft and design, the end points that staff hope pupils will achieve are unclear. Leaders have not specified the exact knowledge and skills that pupils will acquire.

Similarly, in 'my world', staff have designed six topic areas. These topic areas provide pupils with rich experiences in subjects such as history, geography and science. However, the subject content that pupils are introduced to has not been sequenced through the year. As a result, staff and pupils find it hard to explain how important concepts in these subjects fit together.

The teaching of early reading is well established. However, the strategies that staff use to teach sounds sometimes lead to misconceptions and pupils guessing at words instead of reading them. Some pupils are introduced to some new sounds too quickly. The teaching of reading for pupils with greater confidence and fluency is stronger. Staff design special books with pupils that reflect their interests and the key words they are learning. Pupils read these books with enthusiasm and pride. The school fosters a love of reading.

Pupils' personal development is a strength of the school. Staff know pupils exceptionally well. Many make rapid progress emotionally because of the high-quality support they receive. Outdoor learning is key. Pupils enjoy caring for the school's quail and growing vegetables in the huge polytunnel. Leaders appointed a new member of staff to oversee careers guidance last year. Pupils receive regular advice and experience lots of opportunities to learn about the world of work.

Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Staff are alert to the things that may distract or upset pupils. The school is calm. Pupils are keen to do the right thing. Every pupil whom we spoke to told us that behaviour is good at their school. Some pupils have low attendance. Leaders monitor these pupils' attendance carefully. Swift action is taken to ensure that any barriers to attending school are addressed. For example, leaders work closely with social workers and families to address pupils' social and emotional needs. Some pupils have missed out on education for long periods of time before joining St John's. Staff successfully help these pupils develop their confidence and re-engage with learning.

The school's sixth form is well led. Students look forward to enrolling on vocational courses, based on their interests, at local colleges. Students make quick progress in these courses and some have been recognised for special awards. Students gain important qualifications in areas such as construction, horticulture, hair and beauty and painting and decorating. English and mathematics studies continue for all students in the sixth form. Schemes of work are carefully planned by teachers. Students engage well with their work and can describe the knowledge and skills that they are developing. During the inspection, students were writing imaginative stories based on their experiences. The teacher checked their understanding and provided clear, direct feedback. This helped pupils improve their writing quickly.

Leaders are professional and capable people who are keen to address the shortcomings in the curriculum. They are passionate about what they do and lead a committed staff team.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Safeguarding systems are well organised. The school has devised a comprehensive system for recording concerns and monitoring the actions that leaders take to keep pupils safe. Training is up to date. A number of governors have undertaken enhanced training, including safer recruitment training.

The curriculum is designed in a way that teaches pupils about key issues. These include online safety, county lines and drug awareness.

All staff who responded to our survey stated that they feel pupils are safe. Staff know how to manage concerns and are quick to record and follow up any issues, however small.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders have not given enough thought to the knowledge and skills that pupils should acquire through the curriculum. As a result, the curriculum lacks coherence, and important ideas and concepts are not sequenced in a logical way. Staff and pupils therefore find it hard to explain what is being learned and why. Leaders should make sure that the content for all areas of the curriculum is carefully thought out, broken down into manageable chunks and coherently sequenced.
- Leaders have not ensured that some aspects of reading are taught effectively. As a result, teachers sometimes use inappropriate strategies to teach sounds and introduce new sounds too quickly. Leaders should make sure that staff receive additional training so that the reading programme is adapted further to meet pupils' needs.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	108120
Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	10110652
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	56
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	27
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Barbara Auty
Headteacher	Ann Bradbury
Website	www.stjohns.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St John's provides support to hearing impaired pupils aged between three and 19. Some pupils have special needs in addition to deafness, such as visual and physical impairments, dyslexia, dyspraxia and autism spectrum disorder.
- There are currently no children in early years.
- All of the sixth-form students receive education at a local college (York College or Askham Bryan College) in addition to their school-based education. Students complete a wide range of vocational courses and are accompanied by school staff.
- The school has a Catholic religious character. The school received a section 48 inspection in May 2017.
- The school has residential provision. This is also managed by the governing body.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- We met with the following senior leaders during the inspection: the chair of governors, the headteacher, two deputy headteachers and the designated safeguarding lead.
- We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, art, craft and design, 'my world' and PSHE. To explore the effectiveness of these curriculum areas, we: spoke to senior leaders to understand their aims and rationale for overall curriculum design; met with curriculum leaders to explore long- and medium-term thinking; visited lessons to see the curriculum in action and consider the activities chosen by teachers; considered work in pupils' books and files; and talked to teachers and pupils about their experience and understanding of the curriculum.
- To determine the effectiveness of safeguarding we: reviewed the single central record; met with the designated safeguarding lead to consider how the school records information and makes decisions about the actions leaders take to safeguard pupils; talked to staff about the effectiveness of safeguarding training; and reviewed attendance, behaviour and exclusions information.
- The lead inspector visited York College on day two of the inspection.

Inspection team

Jonathan Keay, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

David Penny

Ofsted Inspector

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