

# 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 students who have speech, language and communication needs and associated conditions, such as autism spectrum disorders and attention deficit disorders. The residential accommodation is currently provided in three houses on the St Catherine's School site. At the time of this inspection, there were 59 students, of which 28 were accessing the residential provision. In addition, the school currently accommodates nine students aged 19 and over in separate residential facilities.

### Inspection dates: 3 to 5 March 2020

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of previous inspection:** 5 February 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

The inadequate judgement in leadership and management does not allow for the overall judgement to be higher than requires improvement to be good. Despite the shortfalls identified, the residential students say that they are happy at the school and enjoy the time they spend there. Parents are also overwhelmingly positive about the school, saying that their children are calmer and happier now, and that the staff are good at helping their children manage anxieties. One parent stated that their child had 'thrived and done amazingly well'.

The complaints system is not consistently implemented and residential students do not always get feedback on their complaint. Sometimes, incorrect assumptions are made about the concerns leading to the issues not being fully addressed. This is because the staff do not always listen carefully to what the residential students say or make sure that they fully understand what they are saying. Students say that they are listened to, and that they have a say in activities, meals and how the houses are decorated through the student council, post boxes, house meetings and just by approaching staff.

Residential students' communication methods are not supported by suitable or imaginative visible communication resources in the residential houses. Leaders have identified this shortfall and there is a strong determination led by the multi-professional therapy team to commence a project to improve communication around the school and residential houses. The education, care and therapy staff work very closely on this project.

A strength of the school is the quality of relationships between the staff and the residential students. Feedback from students is overwhelmingly positive about the staff; they say the staff are kind and funny. The staff respond to the students in a respectful manner and with dignity. However, the staff have not received any related equality and diversity training to underpin practice since 2014. This does not impact negatively in practice on a day-to-day basis.

The residential students make good 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. 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, when necessary, students and staff receive the guidance they need, and that staff are given the right guidance to meet the needs of students effectively.

The residential students access a well-developed independence programme and they make very good progress. The staff know the individual targets that each student is working towards and provide safe and sensitive support. The well-organised

programme allows for independence skills to be gained during and after school. For example, one student was researching the times of buses so they could go bowling after school.

The residential students enjoy the activities on offer, including football in the local community, access to a local gym and trips to local tourist attractions and the beach. The school has a scout group for its students and many students are completing the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, as part of which they work with a local homeless people's charity.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Leaders and managers, including the designated safeguarding lead, show a naïveté about online safety. The use of social media accounts has been poorly thought through. The school staff do not take full responsibility for online mobile safety, relying on parents to put the necessary filters and privacy settings in place. The staff do not monitor what students view or play on their devices while they are in the residential provision. Staff are not curious about what the students are doing on their devices. Staff said that residential students did not access inappropriate games or online gaming. This was not the case in practice. The policies in place for the safe use of IT are not reflective of current thinking and this means that the staff do not ensure that residential students are protected from all risks.

The designated safeguarding lead acts swiftly when there are any concerns regarding a student. Such concerns are reported to relevant professionals. When necessary, the school liaises with and appropriately seeks advice and guidance from the designated officer in the local authority. In particular, good early intervention work is undertaken to address more low-level concerns. This includes providing support to families at difficult times.

The staff understand the students and their individual needs. They are acutely aware of changes in presentation and the vulnerabilities of each student. Staff 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 or hate crimes.

Residential students are further protected by detailed recruitment procedures that, for the residential staff, meet safe standards.

Regular health and safety checks are undertaken, including fire risk assessments. The age and layout of the school and residential provision present many health and safety challenges. Minor maintenance requests, including those from the residential students, are not always addressed in a timely manner.

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

There has been a change in leadership since the last inspection. An interim headteacher has been in post since September 2019. Recruitment of a permanent headteacher has proven successful and a new headteacher commences in the summer term of 2020.

Leaders, managers and governors have failed to identify the shortfalls identified at this inspection. They have failed to ensure that all the national minimum standards for residential special schools have been met.

A significant shortfall is that the vetting of governors is not as it should be. The checks undertaken do not fulfil the statutory guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019. Immediate action was taken to ensure that all required vetting checks were recorded. However, this shows poor oversight and monitoring by the senior leadership team and the governing body.

Many of the residential staff are out of date with their training. A broader range of training is being considered. Staff are asking for more expert training, such as autism spectrum disorders and communication, but this has not been arranged. The staff receive regular supervision and appraisals.

The recent extreme bad weather has resulted in significant repair work being required to the buildings and grounds. Many of the buildings are old and in need of structural repair. This can also be said for some internal areas in the school and of the residential houses. Although residential houses have been subject to some upgrading and new beds have been ordered, there is still a need, and in some cases an urgent need, for the release of finances to address these concerns.

Leaders, managers and the residential staff have high expectations for all students in 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, are undertaken.

The governing body provides the leadership team with a level of challenge that needs improving. Governors visit the residential provision, in line with recommendations; however, they have failed to identify shortfalls. For example, an anti-bullying leaflet on display in one of the residential houses asks students to ring the Scottish anti-bullying line if they need to, and the lack of response to two students' maintenance requests over a long period of time has not been followed up. Other maintenance issues that were identified by the inspectors during this inspection were not known by the leaders or visiting governor.

Leaders and managers conduct comprehensive reviews where they highlight areas for development. There was a clear and strong commitment from leaders and governors that the findings of this inspection would be taken seriously and would be used to inform the school's development plan.

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

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

- 13.4 The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met.

This includes increased scrutiny by leaders, managers and governors.

- 13.1 The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school and takes appropriate action where necessary.

In particular, ensure that there is continued investment in the external structures and internal environments of the school.

- 17.1 Children are actively encouraged to contribute their views to the operation of residential provision, are able to raise concerns and make complaints, and their views are given appropriate weight in decisions about the running of the school. Children are not penalised by raising a concern or making a complaint in good faith.

In particular, ensure that there is consistency in managing complaints so that they are acknowledged as such and processed via the school's complaints procedure. In addition, that staff listen to what children are saying so that they fully understand the detail of their views and concerns.

- 11.1 The school ensures that:

arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

In particular, the guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019 (Appendix B, page 94) relating to online safety.

- 14.1 Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance 15 issued by the Secretary of State.

In particular, leaders need to be much better informed of the Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019 guidance, especially in relation to section 128 safer recruitment checks and Disclosure and Barring checks for the governing board (page 47, paragraph 173).

- 19.1 Staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children as they relate to the purpose of the setting. Training keeps them up-to-date with professional, legal and practice developments and reflects the policies, legal obligations and business needs of the school.

## **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:** SC012597

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Amanda Ellison

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspectors**

Liz Driver, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Keith Riley, Social Care Inspector

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