

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

This is a non-maintained residential special school for students with speech, language and communication needs and associated conditions, including 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 73 students, of whom 20 were accessing the residential provision. In addition, the school accommodates some students aged 19 and over in separate residential facilities.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

We last visited this setting on 24 September 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 July 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 3 March 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: requires improvement to be good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are supported by committed and skilled staff, who clearly understand each child's needs. This is underpinned by the multi-disciplinary approach to care and education, including occupational therapy, speech and language therapy and health needs, ensuring that there is genuine consistency across all settings. The staff's understanding of children's communication styles and needs allows children to learn self-expression, share personal choices and become more independent.

Children make significant progress through accessing the residential provision, and with their goals and targets as identified in their education and healthcare plans. These are broken down into achievable steps by the multi-disciplinary team. The children's development and learning are monitored effectively throughout the child's residential placement.

Children's views are shared and considered in student council, house meetings and feedback forms. There is an active response by the leadership team to children's requests. Where appropriate, changes are made based on children's requests. These changes have included menu choices for the whole school and improvements to the environment, such as choosing playground equipment and colour schemes for communal areas, and the use and design of these spaces. When children raise concerns or complaints, they are responded to swiftly and to the children's satisfaction.

Children are engaged in a wide variety of activities, some of which include raising money for charity. The recent walk of the coastal Isle of Wight has raised a significant amount of money and gave purpose to walks during lockdown. Staff and children have been incredibly creative during lockdown restrictions to devise memorable activities, including film nights, collecting and re-using sea glass, and a baking competition. Children have been completing the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the school's The Grove club provides structured social activities for children.

Children are well prepared for transitions into their residential provision, and then on to their education and/or residential placement. Parents comment on the high-quality guidance in helping them and their child decide their options at critical points, such as post-16 and post-19.

Links with the school nurses are effective. Children receive planned healthcare as required and are taught to understand healthy lifestyles and what this means for them, including varied diets and exercise. Specialist help is available as needed through the school's therapy teams and strong links with local child and adolescent mental health teams.

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

The school appointed a designated safeguarding lead at the beginning of the academic year. The approach to safeguarding has significantly improved, due to this now being a specific role. The roll-out of the internet monitoring and safety app for children's devices and increased online safety awareness have led to children being more internet aware. Staff are also able to provide a greater level of supervision and guidance to children when they are online.

Children say they feel safe in the residential provision and have staff they can go to if worried or upset. The culture in the school promotes discussion about safety across all forums, such as one-to-one sessions and the school council.

The use of the school online safeguarding reporting system has been fully embedded. All staff are confident in what should be recorded and how to do this. This leads to robust monitoring of children's needs and helps to create a picture from low-level concerns that may otherwise not be noted. Effective links with the family liaison officer and the safeguarding lead include appropriate challenge of partner agencies where necessary. This has resulted in children and families benefiting from extra support.

Behaviour is recognised by all staff as a form of communication. Close working with the therapists leads to consistency of approach in helping children to express how they are feeling. The use of zones of regulation and talking mats supports children to further explore what their feelings mean. There is little use of physical intervention in the residential settings, due to staff recognising when children become anxious or upset and exploring with them what they need to feel settled.

There have been significant improvements to the physical environment. All residential areas have been redecorated and some have been modernised. There is an ongoing renovation programme, which has suffered some delays due to COVID-19 and problems in accessing materials. However, there is a clear commitment to complete the programme to a high standard. Governors acknowledge this has lapsed in the past and it is now a clear priority. The most recent fire audit is brief, lacking the detail of previous risk assessment. There is no indication of actions, resulting in an unclear review of fire safety across the school.

Children have the opportunity to take age-appropriate risk in line with their skills and abilities. They are protected from avoidable risk as safer recruitment processes reduce the likelihood of children being cared for by unsuitable people. However, the employment histories for staff do not consistently contain months and years of their employment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The residential provision is well managed, with a clear structure of accountability. The head of care is due to retire at the end of term and the school has already appointed to the role, with the current head of care handing over to them. The leadership team across the school is aspirational for the children, but also for staff, helping them to increase their skills and knowledge. Staff say they are well supported and can approach leaders without fear. Supervision is regular and supportive of staff's development and personal needs.

Staff benefit from varied training and are looking forward to having more face-to-face training in the near future. There is a suitable number of qualified staff to meet the children's needs. New staff are complimentary about the induction process. This process involves getting to know the children and meetings with all teams across the school. Staff also commented on the positivity of children interviewing them as part of their recruitment.

The governing body has increased its oversight of the quality of the residential provision. There are imminent changes to the membership of the governing body and there is clear succession planning to ensure a smooth transition.

Varied approaches to monitoring and evaluation of the service lead to a genuine and reflective understanding of the quality of care provided. Children's progress is monitored to ensure that the residential provision remains appropriate for them.

Children are a welcome presence in the community, with some local cafes providing menus in symbol format. Children actively raise money for charities and the school at local events and festivals.

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

Recommendations

- The headteacher is to satisfy herself that the current process for recording the fire risk assessment is suitable for the school site.
- Pre-employment checks should detail a full employment history, including the months and years the applicant held that position.

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: Sarah Thompson

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01983 852722

Email address: thompsons@stcatherines.org.uk

Inspectors

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Mark Newington, Social Care Inspector

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