

Inspection of St Mary's School and 6th Form College

Wrestwood Road, Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex TN40 2LU

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 March 2022

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Inadequate

What is it like to attend this school?

Each morning, pupils and staff greet each other with happy and smiling faces. Everyone is exceptionally kind and welcoming. Pupils are eager to explain why they believe St Mary's is such a special place to learn. They can confidently recollect fond memories of exciting and interesting experiences. Pupils are proud of their achievements. This may be a piece of artwork or something they baked in food technology. Particular pride is placed on receiving the many different awards in the Friday celebration assembly, including the much-prized Principal's Award.

Pupils enjoy learning with their friends and their trusted adults. Thoughtful support is provided daily that helps pupils feel safe. Staff and pupils use different communication aids to help all pupils explore their feelings and emotions. Staff are keen to find out each pupil's specific interests. Extra-curricular opportunities are provided to foster these talents. These include growing plants in 'Garden Club' or creating models with the school's 3D printer.

Everyone has the highest expectations for what each pupil can achieve. The education, health and care (EHC) plans are central to this. Pupils appreciate the dedication of staff that ensures each pupil has the skills and knowledge they need to be successful.

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

Evidence of the extensive improvements made by the dedicated leadership team can be seen across the school. They, with their committed trustees and governors, are determined to give every pupil an education that meets their complex needs. There is a relentless focus on developing the school's curriculum alongside providing highly skilled therapy. This is evident in the classroom where teachers and therapists work together to help every pupil achieve highly.

Staff are dedicated to their role and to the pupils they support. Strong relationships are forged. These help pupils to feel confident and safe as they learn. Underpinning these relationships is a depth of knowledge around the needs of each pupil. Staff value the regular training they receive. They also speak highly of the benefits of partnership working with a local trust. This support has been particularly important since the Ofsted inspection in 2019 and during the period of disruption caused by COVID-19.

The school's curriculum has been thoughtfully constructed. Lessons are adapted to meet the very complex needs in each class. There is a broad range of subjects on offer, including many vocational subjects in Years 10 to 14. Leaders think carefully about providing different courses that will motivate all their learners. Some subjects, such as English, mathematics and geography, have been redeveloped over the past year. These subjects have been carefully ordered so that pupils can build their knowledge from one year and into the next. Specialist training takes place regularly

in order to ensure that teachers have the expertise required. Leaders are currently developing other subjects, such as music and history, to ensure they are as well-designed and taught as the rest of the curriculum.

Leaders prioritise the importance of reading. Pupils in key stages two and three benefit from hearing their teachers read them different novels and stories. Staff also encourage pupils to read daily both in school and at home. Pupils do this keenly, knowing they will be awarded a raffle ticket that gives them the chance to win a new book. Leaders are currently implementing a new phonics scheme that is continuing to strengthen support for those pupils who find learning to read more difficult.

Assessing how well pupils are progressing towards the outcomes in their EHC plans is prioritised. Leaders use a multi-disciplinary approach that brings staff together to identify what further intervention is needed. However, the assessment of what pupils have learned and can remember in different subjects is not as well developed. Leaders know this and are already implementing new processes that will quickly identify where pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

Pupils know what is expected of their behaviour. They have excellent manners and are respectful to each other. If a pupil finds it difficult to control their emotions, adults take immediate action to support them. This support is always focused on ensuring that pupils can return quickly to learning with their classmates.

The school's personal development curriculum offers a wide range of different opportunities. The relationships education is carefully planned to ensure that each pupil is given the most appropriate information. Students in the sixth form benefit from individualised careers guidance and work experience. This is focused on what each student needs to be successful when they leave the school and move into adulthood.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff follow specific processes to build detailed knowledge about every pupil. Action is taken if a pupil displays any unusual or concerning behaviour. Staff work together to identify any risks to pupils' safety or well-being. When required, referrals are made swiftly to external agencies to ensure that pupils and their families get the help they need.

Adults have in-depth safeguarding knowledge because of detailed and regular training. This knowledge is used to help pupils develop an appropriate understanding of how to stay safe. Most recently, pupils have valued the guidance around how to stay safe when working and playing online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's curriculum is not yet securely and consistently embedded across all subjects. This means that pupils are not always confident in using the identified knowledge and skills. Leaders should continue to monitor the full implementation of the curriculum to ensure that all pupils know and remember more across every subject.
- Leaders are currently developing and refining assessment processes in the different subjects. As a result, teachers are less confident in accurately checking how pupils' understanding is developing. This means it is difficult to determine where further support may be required. Leaders should carefully monitor the implementation of assessment processes across the school's curriculum.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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	133653
Local authority	East Sussex
Inspection number	10211981
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	98
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	14
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Jean Haigh
Principal	Natalie Edwards (principal), Richard Preece (chief executive officer)
Website	www.stmarysbexhill.org
Dates of previous inspection	1 and 2 December 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- St Mary's School and College provides specialist support for pupils with speech, language and communications difficulties and associated complex needs. All pupils attending the school have EHC plans.
- The school also provides residential provision for a small number of pupils.
- The responsible body for the school is the Talking Trust. This is a charitable trust.
- There have been significant changes in the senior leadership of the school since the school's last section 5 inspection in February 2019.
- The school is currently working in partnership with the Torfield and Saxon Mount Academy Trust.

- The school recently obtained approval to admit pupils in key stage 1. This provision had not opened at the time of this inspection.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical educational qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

In accordance with section 13(5) of the Education Act 2005, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, staff and pupils. They also spoke with representatives from the board of trustees and the interim executive board, including the chair. An inspector also spoke to the chief executive officer.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, geography and personal, social and health education. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers, and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered the 12 responses to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, including nine free-text comments. They also took account of the responses to the confidential survey for staff and gathered the views of both staff and pupils throughout the inspection.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors viewed the school's website and policies, met with the designated safeguarding leads, spoke with pupils and staff, checked school records of safeguarding checks carried out on adults working at the school and spoke with trustees.

Inspection team

Aimee Floyd, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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