

# St John's Catholic Specialist School, Boston Spa

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

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

St John's School Catholic Specialist School, Boston Spa is a non-maintained day and residential special school for children aged three to 19 years who have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities, including hearing impairments.

Residential accommodation is in the main school building and is arranged in separate groups according to the ages and needs of children. The school has extensive grounds, which were enjoyed by children staying in the residence during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The school's ethos is based on Christian values. There is significant emphasis on supporting the development of children's spoken language. The school has 55 children on roll. At the time of inspection, 12 children used the school's residential facility. Nine of these were post-16 students, most of whom attend local colleges to complete their education.

A new head of care has been appointed since the last inspection. She has appropriate experience and qualifications for this role.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 15 to 17 March 2022

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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:** 24 June 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

Children thoroughly enjoy being part of the residential provision of this school. They enjoy excellent relationships with staff, who they come to know and trust very well. Some children make a case to attend more days than is allocated to them. Others feel able to request a return home if they are unsettled. This sense of ownership over the time they spend in the residential provision helps children to develop an invaluable sense of self-determination and confidence.

Staff are highly skilled. A combination of empathy, training and knowledge of the children means that they respond effectively to individual children's needs. Staff are endlessly patient and take time to appreciate children's feelings. They help children to understand their own emotions when this is difficult for them. This means that children get the help they need, rather than the help staff think they need. Children benefit enormously from the care and dedication that staff bring to their role.

Children who attend the residential provision make remarkable progress. One parent said that 'a light came on again' for their child when they began staying in the residence. Children become more confident, and their social skills improve. Children who tend towards social isolation are helped to become more involved with the other children. One child said, 'If I was not in residential, I would just play computer games all night. Being here means I mix with the others, and I know that is good for me.' Becoming more self-assured helps children to prepare for life beyond the school.

A structured programme helps staff to measure children's progress. This is used throughout the school and is part of the 24-hour curriculum. Staff help children to work towards goals, such as completing laundry or travelling independently. Progress is reviewed regularly. Targets are agreed with children, meaning that they invest in their own development. As well as making progress, children learn that their views carry significant weight with those who help and guide them.

Children make excellent progress with their education. For some children, coming to residence leads to considerably increased attendance in lessons. They are more engaged in their learning and achieve markedly improved results. Older children are supported to attend college courses, which help to prepare them for independence. They are proud of their achievements, and some go on to higher education. The progress for some children is remarkable, given their starting points.

Children's physical well-being is prioritised. Children with medical conditions receive high-quality care from staff who are supported by the school nurse. Children are encouraged to be active. This enhances their fitness levels and supports their emotional resilience. Children learn about the value of a balanced diet and practice cooking healthy meals with staff. As a result, most children become increasingly healthy.

Children's mental health and well-being are a significant priority for the school. When children struggle with their mental health, staff use their positive relationships with children to help them to talk. They involve family and professionals to ascertain the issues that matter the most. Staff devise individualised plans for children's recovery, some of which are creative. Children begin to feel empowered to work towards their own solutions, which leads to high levels of success. The school has achieved a gold level mental health award. This reflects the high-quality work that staff undertake with children.

Children thoroughly enjoy the activities that they undertake in the residence. During the period of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, children and staff made excellent use of the school grounds and gym equipment. Cinema nights were held in the drama facilities. Since children have been able to go further afield, children have enjoyed swimming and ice skating, among other activities. Some children have challenged themselves to go for meals with the rest of the group. For them, this is a significant achievement. Other children attend local community groups. Children's lives are enriched by the activities they take part in during their time in the residence.

Children routinely provide their views about their experiences in the residence. They learn that their voices are heard and acted on whenever possible. For example, one child made an excellent, and successful, case for a games console to be bought. Children decide about the décor of the communal areas, as well as their own bedrooms. Staff respect these views, even if children's choices are not their own. This approach empowers children and reminds them that they have as much right as anyone to say what they want.

The physical environment in the residential provision has improved since the last inspection. The communal rooms are bright and cheerful. Furniture and furnishings make the most of the available space, while still feeling homely. There are rooms for children to have quiet time, as well as rooms large enough for everyone to congregate together. Children contribute to the way that the residential provision is arranged. This helps them to feel comfortable during their stays.

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

Children become increasingly safe in the residential provision. Safeguarding issues are rare. When they do occur, staff respond swiftly and effectively. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) always acts in children's best interests, including when staff performance is in question. Safeguarding records are meticulous and provide an accurate account of action taken. The context of any such incident is examined to identify any wider learning. As a result, children's safety is assured and their wider well-being promoted.

Staff receive considerable training on safeguarding issues. Team meetings, supervision and appraisals all include consideration of safeguarding matters. Safeguarding processes are clearly set out for staff, who know what to do in the event of a concern. The head of care is the DSL. This means that residential children have access to her expertise when they need it, including outside of normal working hours. This works very well and affords children additional levels of protection.

Children's behaviour is generally very positive in the residential provision. Expectations are clear and children are encouraged to provide their views about rules. This means that children are invested in the guidelines for behaviour and respond positively. Physical intervention is rarely used. There is significant emphasis on staff using their excellent relationships with children to defuse difficulties. Any restraint that is required is used at the lowest level. Records of incidents are detailed. They include significant reflection from staff and the views of the child. This means that learning is taken from any incident immediately, and plans adjusted if necessary. Importantly, there is an accurate record for the child to look at, should they want to.

Children undertake learning about being safe. Experts, including the police, talk to children about risks from exploitation and online safety. Residential staff reinforce this information. When appropriate, staff involve family members in these conversations to extend the impact on children. This means that children are helped to develop their own abilities to be safe.

Children's risks from self-harm reduce because of the help that they receive from staff. The school nurse devised an award-winning protocol to support staff if a child is at risk of hurting themselves. This is particularly helpful for residential staff as there are fewer professionals available during residential hours. The protocol is used alongside the wider work on improving mental health and well-being. As a result, staff are more confident about what to do in a crisis and children trust staff to help them.

Children's risk assessments and care plans are effective. They contain salient information to help staff understand what will help a child. For example, care plans include phrases that staff can use, or should avoid, when a child needs support. Risk assessments and care plans are individualised and regularly reviewed. Staff know their content. This means that children receive the support they need in a way that is most helpful to them.

Issues around health and safety and fire risk are taken very seriously. The school building is complex and old. Fire risk and other health and safety assessments take place regularly. Any recommendations are acted on swiftly, including when there is a substantial financial cost. As a result, risks are kept to a minimal level and children are protected from harm.

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

The residential provision is led by an exceptional head of care. She recognises her own strengths, which include significant knowledge of mental health services. This has contributed to the help provided to children to build their emotional resilience. However, she also understands where she needs more development. She undertakes substantial learning and obtains professional consultation. This reduces the impact of any gaps in experience. As a result, she leads the residential provision from a secure knowledge base. This means that children make progress and staff perform well.

The head of care is aspirational for children. She encourages staff to help children to meet their potential. She supports creative solutions for individual children to help them to make the most of their lives. For example, one child is developing their self-esteem by drafting residential documentation. Staff know that leaders act in children's best interests and respond well. This means that children receive a coordinated approach from a staff team that has a shared ethos.

The head of care advocates strenuously on behalf of children. As a result of her efforts, children enjoy the residential provision when this is in their best interests, even when formal decision-making is slow. For some children, this brings about immediate improvements to their emotional well-being. Family members are extremely grateful to the head of care for what she does for their children.

The head of care is developing the residential provision to offer a service to a wider group of children. She is working with the senior leadership team to ensure that staff understand the needs of children with complex needs, in addition to those with hearing impairments. This means that more children benefit from the high-quality care that is provided to residential children. In some instances, the impact on children and families is considerable.

The head of care has an excellent level of oversight of the residential provision. She carries out audits of all aspects of the residence, from safeguarding files to menu choices. Identified gaps are explored and solutions identified quickly. Where staff are found to be performing below expectations, the head of care instigates processes to bring about improvements. This means that any shortfalls in the residential provision are dealt with effectively.

Staff are fully supported by the head of care. They feel able to speak to her about any issues, including personal matters. Staff trust her and feel she will support them. She is visible in the residential provision. Staff are pleased that she knows something of the challenges of their role. Staff know that the head of care holds them in high esteem and, as a result, they perform consistently well.

Staff have regular and reflective supervision of their practice. Supervision sessions are prioritised and well recorded. They are used as the basis for helping staff to develop in their role. Regular team meetings allow staff to come together to discuss children's progress. This is important, given the shifts that staff work. It means that staff develop a common approach to the care of children. Team meetings are also used for staff to reflect on the experience of working in the residential provision. The

head of care listens to the views of staff, although retains the needs of children at the forefront of her thinking. Staff appreciate this, even if their wishes cannot be granted. The support offered by the head of care and other senior leaders gives staff a powerful message that their views matter. This means that children are cared for by staff who feel valued in their work.

Staff receive the training they need to perform well. Staff appreciate this, including those who have been in post for many years. Training is relevant and responsive when it needs to be. For example, staff completed updated training on self-harm following recent concerns for one child. The head of care evaluates training courses to assure herself that learning is appropriate. Important training is revisited in team meetings to ensure key messages are embedded. This elevates the impact of training and children benefit as a result.

The school is very well served by the governing body. Governors are skilled, knowledgeable and passionate about the school. They fully support the new initiatives taking place, including the expanded development of the residential provision. Governors visit the residence to speak to children. This means children are held in the minds of governors when they are considering the function of the school.

Governors recognise the value to the residential provision of the independent person who visits the school once every half term. His visits and reports are very useful. Governors insist that if any of his recommendations are not to be carried out, they are to be informed. This level of external oversight is invaluable and means that the needs of children remain at the highest level of priority.

## **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:** SC001535

**Headteacher:** Ann Bradbury

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## **Inspector**

Jane Titley, Social Care Inspector

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