

# St. John's School (Seaford)

Firle Road, Seaford, East Sussex BN25 2HU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

St. John's School (Seaford) is a non-maintained specialist school that works with children who have complex learning disabilities, including some children who may have difficulties resulting from autism spectrum disorder, Asperger syndrome and pathological demand avoidance syndrome.

Currently, there are 32 children on the school roll and of these, five stay overnight in the residential service.

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.

The inspector only inspected the social care provision at this school during this visit.

### Inspection dates: 22 to 24 February 2022

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **inadequate**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

There are serious failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor.

**Date of previous inspection:** 4 June 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

The overall inadequate inspection judgement is given because leaders and managers failed to act to protect a child's safety effectively following a safeguarding concern. The inspector also found numerous issues regarding the premises which had not been identified or addressed within appropriate timescales.

The staff help children to settle well, and most children that stay overnight make good progress. For example, a child said that the residential staff helped her to talk about her feelings whereas before, she could not.

Positive relationships are developed by staff with each child. For one child, this has significantly reduced the numbers of times he is anxious when at school. The staff know the children well and adapt their care to fit their differing ways of communicating. They try to find activities that children want to be involved with and have recently written a full activity programme for each child. One is unrealistic about the number of activities the child could participate in; this was reviewed during the inspection.

The organisation's review of the point of improvement for more outside activities to be available has been affected by the continued restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This point of improvement is repeated.

Children's views are used well to inform their care. For example, a child felt able to negotiate with the residential care manager about how she could work towards a goal she wanted to achieve. Nevertheless, plans to give a child feedback about a concern she raised were not acted on. This is a missed opportunity to ensure that children know that their views are respected and valued.

Children's health needs are generally met well. The school's specialist therapeutic staff recently began working directly with the residential staff and children when they stay overnight. Staff say that this is helping them to enhance their abilities to respond to children well. The staff understand children's health needs and there are well-organised and managed medication systems. There is guidance on how to support children to manage their own medication as they grow older when possible. This is not consistently used to make decisions about when a child may be ready to manage their own medication when they stay overnight.

Most parents are positive about how the staff keep them informed of their child's progress and needs. Where parents raise concerns, leaders and managers try to find ways of working more collaboratively with the parent. However, there is no training programme in place for staff about working with parents. This means that the staff are not provided with guidance about how leaders and managers expect them to support parents.

Children are helped to move on from the school well. A parent was very positive about how the school staff had helped her to look for another residential placement for her child and are preparing him for this change.

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

Leaders and managers failed to ensure that staff followed the school's safeguarding procedures regarding a child protection concern. Staff did not escalate the concerns in a timely manner. The concern was poorly managed after it became known. An investigation into staff practice did not clearly identify what occurred and failed to identify learning to improve practice.

Health and safety issues are not identified or managed well. As a result, the inspector found numerous issues which required attention. For example, a newly replaced fire door did not have the necessary expandable strips fitted. The strips seal the door if there is a fire, which reduces the speed a fire can spread. The strips were, however, fitted during the inspection. The garden area had not been checked for storm damage, and roofing felt had blown into the garden and not been removed.

Recruitment procedures are clear and well developed. Of the two records reviewed, one had all the necessary information. The other was missing the person's interview notes. Both files did not clearly ask referees whether they are able to give a reference on behalf of an organisation. Managers took immediate action to ensure that these issues were rectified during the inspection and commenced a review of recruitment practice across the school to ensure that no further omission will occur.

Staff adeptly find ways to help children keep themselves safe. As a result, children do not go missing and are almost never restrained by the staff when they stay overnight. For one child, the staff's well-considered and innovative plans have resulted in him being able to travel more safely in vehicles.

Social stories which help children to understand what is happening and give their views are used very effectively to introduce new people, such as the inspector, help reduce children's anxieties and develop children's skills. This is a very positive area of practice which is integral to the staff's approach to supporting children's needs.

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

Leaders and managers' monitoring systems are ineffective. Leaders and managers know that they need to improve the health and safety culture in the school. Nonetheless, they did not put a plan for better monitoring of the premises while they improve the health and safety culture.

The governing body meets regularly to review the school's operation. Its members regularly include detail about the residential provision in their discussions and a governor visited the residential accommodation at the end of last year. The minutes

of governors' meetings are brief and difficult to understand if the reader has no prior knowledge of what was discussed. For example, clear detail of the governor's visit to the residential provision was not provided and detail of any discussion about the visit was absent.

The recently appointed headteacher has an imaginative vision for the school. He is introducing systems that better integrate a child's education, care and home life. These positive changes are aimed at promoting collaborative partnerships which support children to thrive. The plans are currently in their infancy and have not yet had time to demonstrate a positive impact on the progress and experience of children.

Staff support is well organised and regular and helps the residential staff to reflect on their roles and responsibilities. The staff say that they feel well supported. They have regular meetings with their supervisor to discuss differing aspects of their roles and personal development. The residential staff have also all completed a relevant qualification within the given timescales. Training has mostly been online since the pandemic began, but more recently, where most useful there are plans for this to occur face to face.

The residential staff work well with the professionals who support children. Two professionals spoke positively about how the staff work with them, especially when there are issues which need addressing. The staff challenge professionals to provide the right support for children. For one child, this is resulting in a review of his health needs in order for his medical care to be based on up-to-date information.

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

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

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- The registered person should ensure that all staff understand their responsibilities in relation to health and safety and monitor that the staff are carrying these out appropriately. (NMS 6.2)
- The registered person should ensure 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. (NMS 11.1)
- The registered person should ensure that the school's leadership and management team demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role. (NMS 13.3)
- The registered person should ensure that the school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (NMS 13.4)

### **Recommendations**

- The registered person should review how and when they assess whether a child is able to self-medicate.
- The registered person should consider how the school governors' meeting minutes provide clear information on how they review residential care.
- The registered person should ensure that staff always give feedback to a child if the child makes a complaint.
- The registered person should ensure that the residential staff receive training about how to work with parents.
- Consider how to further develop outdoor activities in the garden and on the site. This point of improvement is repeated from the last inspection.

### **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:** SC050366

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Mr Anthony Carlo

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01323 872940

**Email address:** reception.sch@st-johns.co.uk

## **Inspector**

Ruth Coler, Social Care Inspector

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