

St Mary's School and Sixth Form College

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

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

St Mary's School and Sixth Form College is a non-maintained special school which currently provides day and residential placements for children and young people between the ages of seven and 19.

The school provides education for pupils who have communication and interaction difficulties associated with autism spectrum disorder. The residential provision can accommodate up to 40 children. Eleven children were accessing the residential provision at the time of this inspection.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 February 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 8 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children benefit from the nurturing care and support they receive from the consistent staff team. They make progress through thoughtful care and the consistent approach to meeting their needs. Children are clearly happy to be in the residential provision and talk positively about spending time with their friends. Parents talk warmly about the care and support their children receive and the progress they make socially through their time staying in residence. Some children enjoy short stays in residence. Parents said how much their children look forward to this each week and one commented on the remarkable progress their child has made in socialising and spending time with others.

Joint working between the education and residential provisions means children have consistency throughout the day. The move between school and residential time is supported through daily reading time at the end of the school day, when children reflect on their day while practising their reading. This allows children to reset their day between education and residential time, meaning they are calm and ready for the next part of their day.

Children's views are central to their plans and the organisation of the residential area. Group meetings, individual sessions and general discussion provide varied opportunities for children to share their views. Staff are well versed in each child's communication style to ensure all are listened to. Activities and menu choices are among topics discussed, as well as friendships and how to live alongside each other. The regular visits from both the independent visitor and an advocate mean children have several people they can share their ideas with. Displays show the actions from these meetings. Staff also explain when something has not been possible.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities, from clubs in the community to learning independence at the local shops. Youth club and judo are firm favourites with the more adventurous and those who like to stay in the residential area enjoy baking, arts, crafts and relaxing to music. The on-site therapy teams support children in the evenings with various life skills, including helping with independence in the community and personal care skills such as learning to brush their teeth. Children are rightly proud of their achievements and progress. Children enjoy helping each other and keeping the residential area clean and tidy, with shared roles such as filling the dishwasher. They congratulate each other on their achievements and there is a friendly atmosphere in the communal areas.

Children's individual health needs are well understood. Children learn what a healthy lifestyle is and what this means for them. Children try new foods or physical activities to improve their physical and emotional health. Staff are well trained in how to respond to specific medical needs and are confident in their roles. The use of listening devices in children's bedrooms has not been reassessed for a significant time to ensure they are still necessary.

Children find the school nurse friendly and approachable. She helps children with both general education and specific individual support. Her role is essential in ensuring children's personal and statutory health needs are met. However, it has not always been recorded effectively that she has chased missing health assessment reports for children who are looked after. Medication is stored securely in the residential provision. Processes for the monitoring and administration of medication in the school and residential provision are secure.

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

Children are confident around staff and readily approach them with any worries or concerns they may have. Staff have an understanding of all children and their individual vulnerabilities. Staff know the procedures to follow should they be concerned for a child's well-being and to report to partner agencies if needed. Strong joint working with external partner agencies and suitable challenge when necessary lead to highly effective safeguarding practice and oversight. The school's electronic safeguarding reporting system ensures there is a clear understanding of children's safeguarding needs and responses to concerns.

Risk assessments are clear, allowing children to take age- and stage-appropriate risk, including staged independence in the community. Children's risk and vulnerabilities are well known. Recognising children's different communication styles means that concerns around friendships are swiftly noted and children helped to express their feelings and repair relationships. Bullying is not tolerated and children do not raise this as an issue.

Children learn about healthy friendships and relationships through bespoke sessions provided by the school nurse alongside the general curriculum. Staff reinforce positive relationships and self-esteem through general discussion and supporting children's relationships while in the residential provision. Sexual health and relationships are explored with each child's understanding in mind, ensuring they have a strong understanding of their body and their rights.

Staff recognise behaviour as a form of communication. They help children to manage their emotions and bespoke communication tools and debriefs help children think about how to respond when they are overwhelmed. Children have clear plans to help them calm and physical intervention is very rarely used.

Children are protected from avoidable risk through strong safer recruitment practice. The residential building is well maintained, with any maintenance concerns being quickly remedied.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The senior leaders in the school have extremely high aspirations for all children. They recognise each child's individuality and encourage them to succeed to the best of their abilities. This is reflected in the culture across the school. Leaders are continually seeking to improve the service for children and seek out new and innovative approaches to meeting children's needs.

Leaders know the progress children make through close working with the residential provision, education and the therapy teams. Progress is monitored effectively to ensure that children are meeting their goals and targets and wherever possible exceeding these. Children know who the senior leaders are and approach them as they would other staff in the school. This further demonstrates the inclusive nature of the school.

Staff are well supported by the senior leaders and feel able to approach them with their views or ideas. They benefit from regular one-to-one meetings to review their progress against the goals set in their appraisals. Residential staff know they are essential to the progress and development of the children they care for and are recognised as such across the school. They have the training they require to meet the children's needs and develop their own understanding and skills.

The leaders in the school are supported by proactive and challenging governors. They provide a high level of scrutiny of all aspects of the school, recognising the residential provision as key to the positive experiences and outcomes for those who stay there. Comprehensive reports by the independent visitor provide an extra layer of oversight to ensure the residential provision continues to develop and provide a supportive environment for children. The change in the leadership team in the residential provision has led to significant improvements to the environment and therefore the experiences of children who stay there.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should regularly review the use of listening devices and video monitors in children's bedrooms to ensure the medical need for their use outweighs the child's right to privacy.
- School leaders should evidence that leaders have followed up when children who are looked after have not had their statutory health assessment and/or the record of the assessment has not been received.

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: SC050390

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Natalie Edwards

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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