

# 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

This is a non-maintained day and residential special school for children aged three to 19 years with 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 the children. The school has extensive grounds, which are enjoyed by children staying in the residential provision.

There is a significant emphasis on supporting the development of children's spoken language. The school has 56 children on roll. At the time of this inspection, 10 children were accessing the residential provision. Seven of these children were post-16 students, most of whom also attend local colleges to complete their education.

The head of care has appropriate experience and qualifications for this role.

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

### Inspection dates: 21 to 23 February 2023

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>good</b>
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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 previous inspection:** 15 March 2022

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

The staff know the children exceptionally well. They take time to find out about the children's experiences and how their individual needs affect how they feel. This in-depth work provides a strong base for trusting relationships to develop between children and staff. The individualised support that children receive helps them to get the best out of their time at the residential provision of this school.

Children make good progress because they are able to build on their confidence and self-esteem through the wide range of social opportunities available to them. In the residential provision, the children enjoy informal socialising, quiz nights and treasure hunts. Activities that the children enjoy in the community include bowling, swimming and ice skating. These experiences support children to improve their social skills, develop their hobbies and interests, and build lasting friendships.

Children benefit from the seamless approach between the school and the residential provision. The consistency and routine that staff provide to children helps them to thrive in education. For some children, this has had a significant and positive impact on their educational achievements, and they are enjoying school for the first time.

The school's working partnership with colleges helps to create educational pathways for children to move on to higher education and training. The confidence that children build from their time in the residential provision helps them to make the transition from the school to a further education setting. This enables children to fulfil their learning and employment aspirations. For example, one child who wants to work in hospitality, studies this subject at college, while also having a work placement at a local restaurant.

Staff help children to develop their independent travel skills. They talk to children about their travel plans to help them to visualise the day ahead and consider their options should a journey not go as planned. This improves the children's ability to cope with adversity as they become more independent.

Staff encourage children to use the on-site sports and leisure facilities. This promotes the importance of physical exercise and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Where children have additional medical needs, the school nurse provides strong advocacy and works closely with other professionals to ensure that the children's health needs are met.

The head of care prioritises children's mental health needs. Staff receive training and support around their own well-being as well as strategies about how to help children. This shared awareness means that children feel comfortable to speak to staff about their feelings and emotional well-being. This helps children to build emotional resilience.

The school's speech and language team ensures that children are always supported to be able to communicate. They offer children group sessions and bespoke individual support. The children use a range of communication systems and different methods to communicate. The staff use these systems effectively so that the children can actively voice their opinions. The children also make their feelings known through regular group meetings, one-to-one discussions, and an anonymous 'post box' where they can make suggestions. These systems help children to influence the care that they receive.

Staff promote equality and diversity. Individual differences are supported and celebrated. This approach helps children to feel comfortable and develop their own identity. The children are taught about tolerance and respect. Their learning about other cultures, religions and identities helps to develop the children's awareness about other beliefs and preferences.

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

Staff use their positive relationships with the children to help them to manage their anxieties and frustrations. Consequently, there have been no instances of physical restraint. Children are able to reflect on their behaviours and actions, and talk to staff about how they were feeling and what responses helped them to better control their emotions.

When children are worried or upset, they are comfortable and confident to share their concerns with staff. There is a strong and positive safeguarding culture across the residential provision and the wider school. This 'speak out' ethos helps children to develop a sense of safety. They recognise that staff want to protect them and keep them safe.

Staff follow safeguarding reporting procedures if they have any concerns about the practice of colleagues. This is further evidence of a strong safeguarding culture. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and the senior leadership team act in the children's best interests when concerns are brought to their attention. However, on one occasion, a concern was not referred to the local authority designated officer. This was immediately rectified during the inspection when brought to the DSL's attention. The absence of the referral did not result in children being at risk of harm.

A newly introduced system for recording safeguarding concerns provides a platform for the DSL and the senior leadership team to have greater oversight. It allows for a swifter response and promotes open lines of communication across the school's departments. Follow-up action is allocated to the most relevant person so that concerns can be explored in detail. This has enhanced staff's awareness about children's protection, safety and well-being.

The new system does not assist with the recording of low-level concerns about individual staff member's practice. It does not support the DSL to analyse information so that potential patterns of inappropriate, problematic, or concerning behaviour can

be identified. This may delay appropriate action being taken by the senior leadership team in response to collective concerns about a staff member.

The head of care liaises with other agencies and professionals as a way of helping children. For example, the police came to talk to a child to help them to consider the impact that a specific behaviour may have on their future prospects. A subsequent referral was made to an early help team that was local to the child's home, so that support could continue away from the school.

The fire safety improvements agreed prior to the last inspection have not yet been achieved. However, the fire authority has recently visited the school to confirm that the school's fire safety arrangements remain safe, and that risks are kept to a minimum. This means that children can continue to attend their school safely.

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

The head of care is ambitious for the children. She has excellent relationships with the children and is fully involved in their care. Her guidance and leadership to the staff team promotes a shared awareness of the children's needs. The head of care leads by example, setting clear expectations about the quality of care that children receive.

Leaders have a clear understanding of the progress that children are making. Children's progress is tracked through the 'Steps to Success' programme and shows the positive impact that staying in the residential provision has on their lives. Staff take pride in the children's journeys and celebrate their achievements.

All school departments have a good understanding of the children's needs. This means that children experience consistent care and support from a staff team who are knowledgeable, and motivated to make a lasting difference to children's lives.

The staff feel valued in their work. They said that they are very well supported by the head of care. One staff member said, 'Help is always available. If you need anything it's done straight away. Managers are open to new ideas and listen to us.' This ethos inspires staff to do the best they can for children.

The staff have regular and reflective supervision and development reviews. These provide them with the opportunity to reflect on their work and the children's needs. The development reviews also help staff to set future goals to further improve their practice.

The head of care's oversight is not always consistent. Some monitoring systems fail to identify shortfalls. For example, one staff member had not been registered for the required childcare qualification. Leaders addressed this during the inspection.

The children have access to an independent person, who comes into the setting and provides an extra person for the children to talk to, who is not associated with the school. However, the head of care has not ensured that this person visits at least

monthly, in line with the national minimum standards. This is a missed opportunity for children to voice their opinions.

The governing body actively monitors the effectiveness of the leadership of the residential provision. The safeguarding and residential committee also meets regularly. The head of this committee visits the residential provision and keeps up to date with developments. They provide challenge where necessary to make sure that the provision is meeting all of the children's needs. The outcomes from these meetings feature in every full governing body meeting. This ensures that there is always a strong focus on the residential provision and outcomes for the children.

## **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 standards for residential special schools:

- Leaders should ensure that the school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. This person may be known as the 'independent person'. Children know who this person is, know how to contact them and feel comfortable talking to them. The person is easily accessible at all reasonable times, visits regularly (at least monthly), and knows the children. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards, page 23, paragraph 17.2)
- Leaders should ensure that all low-level concerns should be recorded in writing. The record should include details of the concern, the context in which the concern arose, and action taken. The name of the individual sharing their concerns should also be noted; if the individual wishes to remain anonymous then that should be respected as far as reasonably possible. ('Keeping children safe in education', paragraph 437, page 102)
- Leaders should ensure that records are reviewed so that potential patterns of inappropriate, problematic or concerning behaviour can be identified. Where a pattern of such behaviour is identified, the school or college should decide on a course of action, either through its disciplinary procedures or where a pattern of behaviour moves from a low-level concern to meeting the harm threshold, in which case it should be referred to the local authority designated officer (as per Part four, Section one). ('Keeping children safe in education', paragraph 439, page 102)

### **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/teacher in charge:** Ann Bradbury

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

**Telephone number:** 01937 842144

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## **Inspectors**

Aaron Mcloughlin, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Jamie Richardson, Social Care Inspector



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