

St Mary's School and 6th 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 five to 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. At the time of this inspection, 16 children were accessing the residential provision.

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

Inspection dates: 19 and 21 September 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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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: 1 February 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children are happy and confident in their surroundings. Children have positive relationships with each other and with the staff, who provide support, play games with the children and meet their individual needs. Relationships are warm, caring and nurturing. This enables children to flourish in the residential setting.

Children's views are central to planning the residential evenings. Their voice is heard through group meetings and one-to-one sessions. The school council listens to the children's views and makes changes that benefit pupils in the residential provision, with senior leaders and governors attending these meetings. Changes have been made as a result of these meetings, including what is for supper and the activities that children do.

A recently opened semi-independent home on the site has helped children to safely develop new independence skills. Children learn how to look after themselves, cook for each other and manage disagreements between themselves. This has had a positive impact on the children, allowing their confidence to develop and enabling them to help younger children.

A social worker said that one child is asking for another year at the school as he is enjoying the new residential experience so much. Parents said that their children love the school, with one suggesting it was going to be 'the making' of their son.

Promoting positive health and well-being is an integral part of the school day. Effective joint working between the nurse and therapy team supports the children's physical and emotional well-being. Collaborative working with parents means that children with complex health needs are supported well, and parents are confident in the care that their child receives. Meals are healthy and cooked on site. Children learn to make snacks for themselves, and some learn to cook whole meals for their housemates.

One-to-one sessions with staff help the children to progress and meet their targets. Successes are celebrated and children feel a sense of self-worth. A parent praised a key worker for working in collaboration with their child to set targets and working holistically to empower them to reach their goals.

Children participate in a range of physically and emotionally stimulating activities, including judo, boxing, swimming, football, arts and crafts, and baking. Children have enjoyed talent evenings, which include singing with a microphone in front of their friends.

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

Children's actions and demeanour show that they feel safe in the residential provision. Staff have an excellent understanding of each child's vulnerabilities and what may be a risk to them. Staff confidently follow clear processes should they be concerned for a child's welfare. Responses to safeguarding concerns are swift, with strong communication with safeguarding professionals in the local authority.

Staff support children to develop positive behaviour. They seek to understand what the children are trying to convey through their behaviour and actively support them to do this in more positive ways. Children learn from their mistakes. Because of the consistent support that children receive, there has been no need for physical interventions in the residential provision since the last inspection. Children know what is expected of them and respond well to staff praise.

Children are supported to understand healthy relationships and how to assert and protect themselves. Discussions regarding acceptable touch and consent are threaded throughout various activities and supported by other professionals, including speech and language therapists, the nurse and, during a recent visit, the local police officer. Children were seen to have a good understanding of what is appropriate and were thoroughly engaged in what the officer was saying.

Children learn how to be safe online. The therapy team, education team and residential team all offer a wealth of information on this subject. While most children have access to their phones and other devices, they are mostly protected by internet settings that restrict who they can contact and what they can view online. Those with more freedom approach staff to show them what they have seen online and are happy to share if they feel something is not right. When electronic monitoring is required to support the children's health and well-being, this is done in the least intrusive manner possible, with the children's (and their parents') consent.

Children are protected from avoidable risks through regular monitoring of safety equipment and taking part in practice fire evacuations. The residential areas are safe and well maintained, with any concerns quickly remedied.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers have extremely high aspirations for all the children. They create an inclusive environment where the children are helped to achieve to the best of their abilities. Staff reflect this in their support for all the residential students, working cohesively as a team to help the children become as independent as possible.

The quality of the provision, the care that children receive and the progress that they make are reviewed through a wide range of monitoring tools. Children's plans are up to date and reflect the goals that they are working towards. Plans are realistic, and

goals are split into achievable targets that are continuously reviewed to ensure that the children make constant progress. Joint working with partner agencies and effective challenge, when necessary, mean the children have access to the services and support that they require.

Staff are well supported by the managers in the residential provision and can approach them at any time. They feel valued by the senior leaders in the school for the essential role that they play in the children's development. Staff receive regular and supportive supervision sessions and have access to a wide range of training. The head of care is currently focusing on further developing staff training. This specifically relates to the needs of the children who are looked after and their transitions when they leave the school.

Leaders and managers continue to develop and improve the service through the high-quality reports produced by the independent visitor. Managers say that they find these a useful tool to assess the quality of the care provided. In addition, leaders carefully evaluate the quality of care that children receive and their experiences against the national minimum standards and other criteria. As a result, they reflect and act on any changes and developments that are required.

Staff have good relationships with parents. Initiatives such as inviting parents into the provision mean that parents get to meet each other and share their views with staff while enjoying the cakes and drinks that children make.

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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