

Inspection of St John's Catholic Specialist School, Boston Spa

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

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 February 2024

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

What is it like to attend this school?

The nurturing ethos and warm, caring relationships make this school a happy place to be. Pupils enjoy coming to school. Staff know pupils extremely well. All pupils are valued. Their individual needs are carefully considered. Well-established routines and clear expectations for behaviour help pupils to feel safe. The environment is calm and orderly. Pupils behave well. Staff provide effective support to pupils. They help them to understand and manage their emotions.

Leaders are aspirational for all pupils. Staff share leaders' high expectations for pupils. There is a strong focus on developing pupils' independence and preparing them for adulthood. The curriculum aligns with the school's mission to 'develop the entire potential of every person'. Pupils appreciate that they can access learning in ways that are comfortable and meet their sensory needs well. They learn a broad and ambitious range of subjects.

Pupils like holding positions of responsibility, such as school councillors. They work with staff to suggest ways to improve the school. They like taking part in a range of fundraising events. They enjoy the various lunchtime clubs and activities. The school nurtures pupils' musical talents. Pupils develop confidence through their musical performances. Sixth-form students appreciate attending local colleges and taking part in work experience.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Most pupils have experienced long periods of absence from their previous schools before joining St John's. Staff work hard to make school an enjoyable and meaningful place to be. They assess pupils' needs with precision when they arrive at the school. Outcomes from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans help to inform pupils' next steps. Staff plan learning, support and care with pupils' future aspirations in mind.

Since the last inspection, the school has grown. There is now a broader range of special educational needs. Leaders have responded positively to these changes. They have redesigned the curriculum to better meet the changing needs of pupils. Pupils learn in small group classes. Some pupils have one-to-one adult support and care.

Pupils' individual needs are well considered. Classrooms are fitted with specialist audio equipment to support pupils with hearing impairments. Sensory rooms and safe spaces are available for pupils with high anxiety. Pupils can use these facilities, when needed, to help them to feel calm and be ready to learn. Skilled staff help pupils with communication difficulties. When needed, pupils learn to use signs, symbols and electronic devices to communicate.

The curriculum is broad and ambitious. Sixth-form students access a range of vocational and academic courses. Staff have good knowledge of the subjects they

teach. The school works in partnership with other schools and colleges to develop the expertise of staff to improve pupils' outcomes. For example, staff are working with other special schools across the country to create a unique method to teach writing in special schools. This work is helping staff at St John's to improve their teaching. Pupils are learning to write with purpose and enthusiasm.

The knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn are clearly identified in most curriculum subjects. However, in a small number of subjects, leaders have yet to identify the important knowledge and skills. This makes it difficult for staff to check what pupils know and can remember in these subjects.

The school makes sure that reading is given high priority. Shortly after the last inspection, leaders implemented a new approach to the teaching of phonics. Staff teach phonics well. They provide extra reading and phonics support when needed. Pupils read every day. Themes of learning are sometimes linked to texts. Pupils enjoy listening to their teacher reading whole-class texts. They appreciate the wide choice of texts available in the school library.

Pupils are confident to talk to staff about their worries. Many parents feel that this school has changed their children's lives for the better. Pupils achieve well academically. All pupils go on to gain successful further education or employment placements.

Provision to support pupils' wider personal development is threaded through the curriculum. Pupils learn about gender identity. They celebrate diversity. They receive appropriate relationships and sex education and health education. They learn the importance of positive relationships and respect for others. The school fosters a vision that every pupil can learn to play a musical instrument and enjoy music for pleasure.

Leaders provide pupils, including sixth-form students, with independent careers guidance. Sixth-form students are supported with college placements. Many are successful in achieving qualifications to support their next steps. There is a strong programme in place to promote further education, employment and training options for pupils.

Staff enjoy working at the school. They feel very well supported by leaders for their workload and welfare.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Leaders are in the process of redesigning the curriculum in some curriculum subjects. This makes it difficult for staff to check what pupils know and can remember in these subjects. Leaders should ensure that the knowledge and skills that pupils need to know are clearly identified in all subjects so that staff can check exactly what pupils know and can remember to plan their next steps effectively.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	108120
Social care unique reference number	SC001535
Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	10297245
Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	3 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	74
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	15
Number of boarders on roll	13
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Clare Brooks
Headteacher	Ann Bradbury
Website	www.stjohns.org.uk
Dates of previous inspection	11 and 12 February 2020, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school provides for pupils with multi-sensory impairments and hearing impairments. Some pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, and some pupils have complex medical conditions. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- Since the last inspection, the number of pupils attending the school has increased. The school now caters for a broader range of special educational needs.
- There are currently no early years children attending the school.
- Sixth-form students receive some of their education at local colleges.

- The school has residential provision. This is also managed by the governing body. The provision was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2023.
- The school does not use any alternative education providers.
- The school has a Catholic religious character. The school last received a section 48 inspection in May 2017.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the residential provision.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, the assistant headteacher, the designated leaders for safeguarding, the business support manager, the human resources and payroll officer, leaders with responsibility for sixth-form provision and some curriculum leaders. They met with some members of staff and some pupils. The lead inspector held separate meetings by telephone with a foundation governor and a course leader for York College.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, including reading, food and nutrition, and personal, social and health education. Inspectors looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, spoke to teaching staff, and spoke to some pupils about their learning. Inspectors also looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects, including history, geography and music.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's surveys for parents and carers, pupils and staff.

Inspection team

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