

St John's School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	114677
Local Authority	Brighton and Hove
Inspection number	326051
Inspection date	12 November 2008
Reporting inspector	Judi Bedawi

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Boarding provision	
Social care URN	
Social care inspector	Elaine Southall

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	7–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School (total)	40
Sixth form	8
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Farah Woosnam
Headteacher	Jane Molyneux
Date of previous school inspection	9 May 2006
School address	Firle Road Seaford BN25 2HU
Telephone number	01323 872940
Fax number	01323 872958

Age group	7–19
Inspection date	12 November 2008
Inspection number	326051

© Crown copyright 2008

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

Introduction

This streamlined inspection was undertaken by a team of two Additional Inspectors working with two Social Care Inspectors responsible for reporting on the quality of boarding provision.

Description of the school

St John's school is designated for learners with moderate learning difficulties and/or disabilities (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), behavioural, emotional and social difficulties (BESD) and many additional needs including communication, medical and autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). All have statements of special educational need. Almost all are White British and there are very few girls. Attainment on entry through the school is exceptionally low. Sixth form provision was initiated on the school site in September 2008, and is transferring provision from the linked further education (FE) college in Brighton. The principal and trustees oversee management across both the school and its linked college. The school is working towards the silver Eco award.

Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 2

St John's is a good school, providing its learners with good education and residential care. The school makes a real difference to learners' attitudes to education, so that their enjoyment in and outside lessons is excellent. This is largely due to the headteacher's good skills in building a dedicated senior management and staff team. In addition, her determination to ensure that learners have good school experiences enables them to make good gains in their personal and academic achievement.

Parents and carers express extremely positive views. They typically say: 'The school could not do more for our son, he has improved no end', and '...his self-esteem and confidence has soared and this impacts hugely on family life'. Another parent commented that, 'The school go out of their way to meet children's individual needs.'

Learners are increasingly prepared to work hard and take advantage of all opportunities on offer, from the early morning breakfast club to many after-school activities run by school and care staff. These are overseen well by the governing body. Attendance is satisfactory, but is adversely affected by illness and fixed term exclusion. However, challenging behaviour is managed very well because staff understand learners' needs, so that their behaviour is good. Consequently, learners feel safe, settled, free from bullying and make good friendships. They are successfully overcoming previous mistrust of education. Most eat sensibly and help to plan school meal menus. Sport, particularly swimming, has a high profile. A sense of community is well embedded, with success celebrated and effective support provided to overcome difficulties. The outcome is that learners' personal development is good so they thrive and gain confidence. Development of independence is noteworthy.

Good teaching and learning focus on developing learners' social interactions while addressing individual needs. Teachers and assistants work closely together, so that learners are fully included, whatever their ability. The 'blended', largely practical 24-hour curriculum is flexibly adapted to meet individual interests and this encourages participation of previously disaffected learners.

Pastoral care is excellent, including in the boarding provision. On-site medical support, counselling and various medical and holistic therapies are readily available to ensure that learners make good personal and academic progress, relative to their difficulties. Staff use assessment information well to check the progress of learners. Learners have good awareness of their targets for their personal development. However, they are not so sure about their academic targets, because they are not always reinforced in ways that help learners to remember them.

Governance and management are good and are well focused on raising achievement for learners. School performance, development and financial management are monitored and evaluated closely. Partnerships including those with external agencies and providers are excellent and have a positive impact on achievement. The school has moved on well since its last inspection, for example, by addressing previous report issues, so that its capacity to make further improvements is good.

Effectiveness of the sixth form

Grade: 2

In September, the sixth form started its move to the school. Its early establishment is good and learners feel secure and happy in their new environment. Standards are well below the national average, but learners' achievement and personal development is good. This is due to the staff and head teacher working well together, so that learners get high calibre care and good support. They are treated as young adults, fully involved in making decisions about their own learning and futures. Learners value this and respond very well, often accepting staff ideas to improve their work, so that enjoyment of learning is outstanding. Good maturity is seen in newly established friendships and tolerance towards those having a difficult day.

There is opportunity to gain life- and work-related skills through the good individualised vocational and practical curriculum. This allows learners to follow an increasing choice of activities and accreditation that reflects their interests and abilities, such as animal care, or catering. They take turns to prepare breakfast in their common room. Sport is very popular on and off-site. Leadership and management are good because staff regularly discuss, share and plan to improve learners' outcomes and further enhance provision and resources.

Effectiveness of boarding provision

Grade: 2

The quality of the boarding at St John's School is good. Judgement of the provision under the Every Child Matters outcomes is good in four areas and outstanding in two. Two recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection. They relate to records of physical restraint and defining the role of the independent visitor. Neither impact on the safety or well-being of the young people. The school has taken appropriate action to address the eight recommendations made at the last inspection of the boarding provision.

The senior management team provides leadership and stability and has established a culture that promotes good practice in all areas. A stable, skilled and committed team of care staff provides a consistently good quality of care and guidance to the young people. They work closely with the teaching and health staff to meet individual needs. Young people are fully involved and consulted about all aspects of their care.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding in the boarding provision, lying at the heart of their practice, in clear recognition of the varied and complex needs of the young people.

There is good provision for promoting the health and well-being of young people. Care plans show that individual medical, physical and emotional needs are carefully assessed and met, with plans regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. The food provided is of a good quality. Healthy eating is always promoted, menus are varied, offer a wide choice, and specific dietary needs are met.

Staff show respect for the privacy of young people at all times and information is securely stored. Young people are clearly confident in expressing their thoughts and feelings and the complaints procedure is displayed in the residential units in formats accessible to all. The number of complaints is very low. Records are kept of the action taken.

The school has a zero tolerance approach to bullying and any issues are promptly addressed. Bullying is not identified as a problem by young people. Child protection and safeguarding procedures are well structured and keep young people safe. Staff are well trained and clear

about their role and responsibilities in child protection. Young people are further protected by a robust recruitment procedure, with all necessary checks completed before new staff begin work.

The school's approach to managing behavioural issues is good. All staff follow guidelines set out in detailed individual behaviour management plans that are sensitive to each young person's specific issues. Targets are set for promoting positive behaviour, and rewards given when they are achieved. Sanctions given are appropriate and timely. All staff are trained in physical intervention, although management of episodes of challenging behaviour is focused upon containment and de-escalation. Staff provide a calm response, setting clear and consistent boundaries for the young people. Written records of incidents when restraint is used are not always satisfactory.

Individual risk assessments are completed to a good standard and are reviewed and updated. Robust health and safety procedures are in place, all necessary environmental safety checks are up-to-date, and young people are clearly aware of the fire evacuation procedures. Fire drills occur regularly.

The individual support provided for the young people is outstanding. Detailed care plans are sensitive to each young person's life story and specific needs. They are fully involved at every stage of the planning process. Their thoughts and feelings are also taken into account about their day-to-day life at the school. The school council meets regularly and minutes are made available to all young people in accessible formats. The school has an independent visitor; however, the role has yet to be clearly defined. Care staff work hard to ensure that regular contact is maintained with the parents and carers of boarders. Telephones are available and staff support young people in writing home.

Two boarding units are currently in use, one on the school premises and another just over a mile away in a residential part of Seaford. Both provide comfortable and well equipped accommodation. All young people have single bedrooms.

The school prospectus gives a good description of the service provided for boarders. There is a core of skilled and experienced care staff who provide consistency of care for the young people. The training programme ensures that they are equipped with the skills that they need to recognise and meet the needs of the young people. There is a thorough induction process for new staff, and regular supervision is provided. Communication between staff across all disciplines in the school is good.

Good practice is promoted through the use of robust monitoring procedures. Monthly Standard 33 reports are of a very high quality, and monitoring by care managers and team leaders ensures that care staff are supported in maintaining high standards of record keeping, written assessments and reflective practice.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure learners remember and become more aware of their individual learning targets through regular use in lessons, using the most appropriate means of communication, so that they know how to improve their own work.
- Meet the national minimum standards currently not met, as detailed below National minimum standards to be met:
- Ensure that records of any use of physical intervention are accurate (NMS 10).
- Ensure that the role of the independent visitor is clarified and appropriate training provided (NMS 22).

Achievement and standards

Grade: 2

From exceptionally low starting points and difficult prior learning experiences, almost all learners make good progress. This is attributable to good social grouping across years and needs, ensuring positive learner attitudes. Standards attained by learners are very low in relation to national averages due to their complex needs. Good computerised tracking shows trends in individual and group performance and a clear picture of good progress over time, for example, those who are looked after children (LAC). There are no significant differences in the progress of different learner groups. The school is developing effective systems to compare the progress of its pupils with those in other schools.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 2

Learners find that learning is quite challenging, but fun. They want to do well, so their enjoyment on discovering hidden talents is excellent. They love sharing pleasure in others' achievements in the weekly 'good work' assembly. When asked what they like best, they say 'their friends and the teachers'. Despite some unpredictable behaviour that can lead to short fixed term exclusion, overall behaviour is good in lessons, at play and when out in the local community. This is because learners increasingly understand and accept the clear boundaries for good conduct. They feel safe, emphatically stressing 'no bullying here'. Bullying is very rare and few racist incidents are recorded. Attendance is satisfactory given learners' complex needs. They are sensible when activities involve some risk such as preparing fruit and vegetables for healthy snacks or when riding bikes after school. They know how to stay healthy, enjoy many sports and are very aware that 'smoking can make you ill'. Learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Main faiths are celebrated and they enjoy finding out about other cultures, as well as their own. They are currently fundraising for Children in Need. Learners care about and support each other, for example, when work is hard or when their friends get upset. The community is well represented in school council ideas, for example using the school youth club at breaktimes. Learners visit the local community regularly. Older learners value the opportunity to engage in real life situations such as shopping and managing money. Some do community work experience. This influences future life choices.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 2

Teamwork among the staff is a significant strength, summed up in a parent's comment that 'Staff are worth their weight in gold!' Learners' involvement in lessons is achieved well through good reinforcement of listening and by using praise. One-to-one and small group work consolidate verbal language and number skills well. Some learners could improve more with wider use of teaching methods and resources, such as visual prompts, reflecting their preferred means of communication. Teachers' good subject knowledge and questioning allow learners to respond well so that lessons maintain a good pace. All staff are involved in good planning but review of learning and targets at the end of lessons is inconsistent.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 2

The broad learning, social and therapeutic provision of the 'blended' thematic curriculum is in process of review, especially developing further 14 to 19 provision and career pathways.

Nonetheless, the curriculum is flexibly adapted to meet learners' individual needs well, by filling many gaps in acquisition of vital basic skills. In addition, modern foreign languages introduce basic greetings, for example through work related to the recent Olympic Games. Reading, music, art, swimming and extended day activities are popular, although access for day learners is limited due to transport arrangements. A strong focus on social skills and personal development helps learners to learn well in both school and residential care. Work- related learning and college taster days give learners a good introduction to working life.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 2

Pastoral care and support for learners, their families and carers is excellent. As far as is possible, the school removes previous barriers to learning. Wide multi-agency and in-house support allows learners freedom to learn and offers parents a sense of security, knowing their children, including boarders, are safe. There is a good system for daily home/school information exchange. The needs of the most vulnerable LAC learners are very well met. Procedures for safeguarding the welfare of learners are robust. The school does all it can and liaises with social workers to ensure that learners attend regularly. Behaviour monitoring is a strength and regarded as fair by learners. Transition procedures including annual reviews are good, with parents and learners fully involved. Learners' awareness of their targets for personal development is good. They are less certain of academic targets or how to improve their work because targets are not always reinforced frequently enough. They derive well from identified needs in pupils' individual education and/or behaviour plans.

Leadership and management

Grade: 2

The headteacher ensures the wide involvement of the principal, senior management team, staff and governors in planning for improvement. Governors offer invaluable support led by a well organised chair. They are aware of the need to increase their monitoring role and to become more challenging of the school leaders. The school is moving forward well, particularly in improving learners' self-esteem and in developing the newly relocated sixth form.

The school's self-evaluation of its performance is accurate, including good analysis and use of achievement data, and monitoring and review of areas for improvement. The five-year whole-site strategy plan feeds into the school annual development plan, which could usefully be extended to focus further on school priorities. Staff professional development is good and readily undertaken. Inclusion is good with alternative strategies for reducing exclusion and a few learners fully reintegrated into mainstream schools. Partnership work, involving a growing number of special and mainstream schools and colleges, together with external welfare agencies, is excellent. The school's contribution to community cohesion is good, and it promotes effectively learners' involvement in and engagement with the school and wider community.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaints about school inspection', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall	16-19
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------	-------

Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	2	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	1	1
The effectiveness of boarding provision	2	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2	2

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	2	2
The standards ¹ reached by learners	4	4
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2	

¹Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2	
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	1	
The attendance of learners	3	
The behaviour of learners	2	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2	

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	2	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2	2

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	2	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No	

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

13 November 2008

Dear Learners,

Inspection of St John's School, Seaford, BN25 2HU

We all enjoyed meeting and talking to so many of you. Thank you for your views and comments. They helped us a lot. We think your school is doing a good job in helping you to become happy, independent learners and in helping you to make good progress. We can see how much you enjoy school as day and boarding learners. You have made good friends and we think your behaviour is good, too. Well done! We think that you need to remember and use your learning targets more. You know your targets for personal development well.

Apart from asking the school to meet a couple of national minimum standards, we have made one suggestion for improvement to your school:

- To make sure that you and your teachers remember your learning targets and use them in lessons so that you make even better progress in improving your work.

We are sure that you can do this.

We know that you will learn even more and be happy at St John's.

My best wishes

Judi Bedawi

Lead inspector