

# St. Marys Bexhill

Special School & College



## St Mary's School and College, Bexhill

Residential and day non-maintained special school and college for pupils and students aged 7-19 who have a range of special educational needs and disabilities including speech language and communication difficulties, autism, learning difficulties and associated complex needs.

# Welcome to St Mary's

St Mary's School and College is a safe and supportive environment in which pupils and students live and learn together. Our focus is on ensuring all of our students leave us well prepared for life beyond school and college.

We are working closely in partnership with other local special schools to ensure that our provision is excellent and that it reflects the requirements of our students

“At St Mary's, we promote working towards independence in every aspect of our provision. This means our school pupils and college students are well supported to become as independent as possible in their learning and personal development. St Mary's provides a fantastic opportunity for residential and day pupils and students– everyone involved in the school is ambitious for all of our learners!”

***Natalie Edwards, Acting Principal***



St Mary's School and College is unique in the provision it makes as a residential and day special school: We provide personalised education, care and therapy for pupils aged 7-19 that is flexible and responsive to pupils and students's differing needs. Our pupils and students have speech, language and communication needs and many also have associated physical and learning difficulties, learning difficulties, autism and other special educational needs.

Our approach recognises that every child will need a programme specific to their needs which is delivered in an age appropriate and accessible way. We aim to promote independence within a supportive environment. We have a very high standard of specialist facilities and a unique offer of onsite specialist therapy and medical staff.

Bexhill is a beautiful location on the Sussex coast and one that provides many learning and leisure opportunities such as: local youth clubs, museums and art galleries, opportunities for learning outdoors including nearby beaches, the South Downs and places of interest which are both exciting and enriching.

Our Vocational Centre provides opportunities for young people to develop employability skills and experiences. It offers a range of work-related learning opportunities such as a café and design and printing facilities, through which our young people build on their work and life skills whilst gaining relevant qualifications.

We are very proud of our pupils' achievements, our relationships with parents and the hard work of our staff which creates a wonderful atmosphere in which to live and learn. The best way to understand what we can offer is to come and meet us and experience St Mary's for yourself: We are always please to arrange visits for prospective students and their families.



# St Mary's School

The school at St Mary's is for pupils in Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. We follow the National Curriculum and adapt it according to a child's needs. We are sometimes able to admit pupils in KS1, depending on the arrangements made with the placing Local Authority and the Department for Education.

Key Stage 2 is delivered through a recognisable junior school approach, meaning that there is a small consistent team within each class and that core learning is delivered within a KS2 classroom to avoid transitions and unnecessary movement around the school. We make use of the school's specialist areas such as Art, Food Technology and Computing in order to support teaching and learning.

We are able to offer flexibility in supporting children's development of learning and communication. Our aim is to ensure that as pupils leave KS2 they have the independence, communication and learning skills to fully access the secondary curriculum as they move onwards through the school.

The Key Stage 3 curriculum is delivered through a mixed junior and secondary style approach. Although a number of lessons are offered within their own classroom, pupils move with their class and their teaching assistants to specialist teachers who deliver the curriculum. Pupils are encouraged to take greater ownership of their own learning and they are supported to develop the organisational skills and flexibility which they need to be able to be independent young adults.

At Key Stage 4 students follow accredited courses which meet their ability levels and are matched to their future aspirations. Students build on their prior experiences at KS3 and continue to consider what future employment and leisure activities they might wish to explore or follow in adult life, so that they can develop the skills they need to pursue these ambitions. Pupils in Key Stage 4 experience a working environment either through using our vocational centre or in real life work place experiences and learn about employability when exploring work related learning.

We believe an important part of the curriculum is for all pupils and students to develop their creative skills, interests and abilities in sport, culture and art. We also support pupils' personal social and moral learning and development through our curriculum opportunities. This helps all of our pupils and students to develop their sense of self and their wellbeing, as well as to broaden their horizons and opportunities.

Fundamentally, there is an emphasis on developing communication, literacy and mathematical skills in a functional way as well as to enable students to achieve formal accreditation. Developing our pupils' social and communication skills enables them to learn how to make and sustain friendships and form positive relationships. This is central to our work at St Mary's. Our Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and life skills programmes are planned in order to meet all of our learners needs, taking into account their age and stage of development.

## What St Mary's offers

St Mary's School and College has a number of onsite buildings and facilities for school and college students. We provide modern, adapted classrooms which include adjustable desks, specialist seating where needed, interactive whiteboards, sound field systems, technology and appropriate software to support learning.

Specialist teaching facilities within the school include classrooms for Food Technology, Science, Music and Design & Technology, a computing suite, a well-resourced library, specialist physiotherapy gym, warm water therapy swimming pool and outdoor sports and learning areas such as our forest school development. We also have a sensory integration suite and a sensory room.

St Mary's offers a truly integrated approach that brings together education, therapy and care. Our on-site team includes speech and language therapists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. We have a qualified school nurse, an educational psychologist and therapy support assistants. We also have a child and family intervention lead, designated safeguarding lead and an experienced, multidisciplinary senior leadership team. Our trustees and governors all have significant and relevant expertise and in many cases are practicing professionals or have held senior positions within education and local authority SEND services.

Residential pupils live on the school site in separate houses. Our residential offer is an integral part of our programme for building and extending independence skills. A dedicated and skilled care team provide support to our residential pupils. We are proud of the waking day offer we can make for all residential students that includes access to therapy programmes and facilities outside of the school day as well as opportunities to reinforce learning between school and residential settings.

All of our staff work in partnership with families and their pupils and students to ensure they achieve the very best outcomes.

*"He is happy and relaxed in your care and we would like this to continue as long as possible to enable him to fulfill his potential...20 months ago he was virtually non-verbal. Today one can converse with him and he is able to make his wishes known."*

Parent of residential pupil.

# St Mary's 6<sup>th</sup> Form College

The 6th Form College at St Mary's Bexhill is housed in a dedicated building adjacent to the Aspire Vocational Centre and separate from the school building. This gives college students their own age appropriate, dedicated space whilst still being able to access to the full range of facilities and services available across the school site.

In college, students become increasingly independent and confident whilst continuing to develop communication, literacy and maths skills. Students have the opportunity to choose subjects they wish to study from a broad selection, including GCSE, BTEC, Entry Level and other relevant Level 1 and 2 awards. The courses are reviewed each year so that we can best match our curriculum to the students' needs and interests. An important part of our curriculum in Key Stage 5 is developing employability and work-related learning skills. We use a combination of our Aspire Vocational Centre, school facilities (such as the school kitchens) and offsite work experience placements to support this. We attend local events such as careers fairs and wherever possible we aim to offer all students work experience opportunities in Year 12 and 13. We are also hoping to introduce supported internships or additional work experience placements in Year 14.



## St Mary's Vocational Centre

**The Aspire Vocational Centre offers our students a flexible learning facility that can provide work related learning experiences and enables some students to follow vocational aspects of their accreditation routes while on the college site**

Our Vocational Centre offers our students a flexible learning facility that can provide work related learning experiences and enables some students to follow vocational aspects of their accreditation routes while on the college site. The centre has a range of spaces that can support formal learning and work-based activities. For example, there is a café facility that can be opened to the public or invited guests for events, a working car washing facility and a print workshop. Other activities available include a hairdressing salon, shop and a vocational centre reception area.

As well as gaining valuable workplace experience, the Aspire Vocational Centre helps pupils to develop independent living skills, self-esteem, communication skills and functional numeracy and literacy.



# Supporting speech, language and communication

**Our onsite Speech and Language team support pupils' communication so they can achieve their potential**

St Mary's School and College is specialist school for children with speech, language and communication needs. We take a Total Communication approach to enabling our pupils to communicate.

## Speech and Language at St Mary's

The Speech and Language Therapy team consists of Speech and Language Therapists and Speech and language therapy assistants. All of our Speech and Language Therapists are HCPC and RCSLT registered and offer a high level of expertise in working with pupils and students with communication disorders within the context of a complex range of needs. The team supports the assessment, diagnosis and management of speech, language and communication needs; social skills and pragmatic language development, and eating and drinking difficulties. The Speech and Language Therapy team is based on site and interdisciplinary working is a core part of our provision. We provide advice and work collaboratively with colleagues including teachers, residential staff, and Occupational Therapists. This allows us to support and extend speech, language and social communication skills in the classroom, community, and other settings.

The Speech and Language Therapy team have a range of specialist qualifications, knowledge and experience in areas and approaches including: Autistic Spectrum Disorders; Developmental Verbal Dyspraxia; Hearing Impairment; Developmental Language Disorder (Specific Language Impairment); Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC); Talking Mats; transition; software and apps; building language through Lego; Social Stories; social language use; Dysfluency; and Dysphagia. We also have specific experience of working with pupils with Worster Drought, Di George Syndrome, Down's syndrome, Tuberous sclerosis, Prader-Willi and Pathological Demand Avoidance.



**"Communication is the key to success for our pupils and students. Our aim is to support every pupil and student to be as independent as possible and to do this we especially focus on developing effective communication skills"**

**Natalie Edwards, Acting Principal**

## Total Communication

St Mary's advocates a Total Communication approach. This involves the use of a combination of verbal and non-verbal strategies to support expressive and receptive communication. A range of methods can be employed as part of a Total Communication approach, including: facial expression, gesture and pantomime; voice and speech; drawing and writing; signing (at St Mary's all staff and pupils are taught Sign Supported English); low technology aids e.g. Symbol books/PECS; high technology aids including tablets and speech apps.

Our Speech & Language Therapists and Specialist Speech & Language Therapy assistants are able to offer ongoing support to pupils, staff and parents. Specialisms held by our Speech and Language Assistants include Signing and AAC. Signing is used to reinforce concepts and vocabulary, and to support processing, learning and retention. For those pupils who require (AAC) systems to support our stand in place of speech we are able to offer specialist assessment and ongoing support. Systems used may range from personalised communication books to hi-tech voice-output technology. A wide range of resources using picture communication symbols are also used throughout the day to support communication, learning and independence.

We have created 20 Sign Language videos for you to view on our YouTube channel.

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)



## Therapy, Health and Personal Development

**Our onsite therapy and health professionals work in partnership with our education and residential staff to provide integrated support and intervention to the pupils and students at St Mary's.**

This allows us to ensure that their Health and personal development is exceptionally well supported. Our therapists work throughout the school and college and within the residential houses and they also support pupils and students in the community to facilitate learning, develop their social and emotional skills and to promote independence and build resilience. Therapists provide in-depth assessment, individual therapy programmes, small group therapy sessions, assistance in the classroom to support access to learning and also residential support. The Therapy teams work collaboratively with staff and parents and carers to develop our pupils and students's skills which will support them in adulthood.

All therapists are registered with the Health Care Professional Council (HCPC)

### Onsite Therapy services and facilities at St Mary's

- Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)
- Sign Supported English (SSE) trained staff
- Occupational Therapy (OT)
- Physiotherapy (PT)
- Educational Psychology
- School Nurse
- Child and Family Intervention Lead
- Hydrotherapy pool
- Physiotherapy gym
- Sensory integration suite
- Sensory Room



# The Residential Experience

St Mary's has excellent residential facilities onsite. Currently we operate two houses that are organised to take account of individual needs. St Mary's provides a 'waking day curriculum' for residential pupils. Providing a consistent programme during and outside of school hours. Therapy staff work with pupils and students, both before and after school on the residential areas and in the community, to promote the development of independence and life skills.

There is capacity onsite to offer additional provision and we also offer extended day, overnight respite or short stay opportunities for students, who are placed with us as day pupils. We create warm, caring and supportive environments for our pupils and students, so that they feel comfortable and 'at home' during their time with us. Our living areas have communal space for everyone to spend time together as well as shared or individual bedrooms and bathrooms.



*"Moving to St Mary's has been positive for her in so many ways and to our family as a whole."*

Parent of residential pupil.

We create exciting and appropriate opportunities to take part in activities in the community, as well as on site. Pupils work with residential staff to create their activity plans, which will enable them to enjoy and learn. Our ethos of promoting independence continues through the living areas, where pupils are supported and nurtured to build on life skills and learn how to care for themselves. We can offer a range of residential opportunities from weekly boarding to 42 week boarding.

We offer a number of exciting and stimulating evening and weekend trips and events. St Mary's takes every opportunity to celebrate key events and dates in the calendar, which means that our pupils have a very rich schedule. Current and recent activities include: football, horse riding, arts and crafts, baking, tennis; uniformed groups such as music lessons, judo, running / sports clubs, aromatherapy and many more. If a child has a particular interest, staff at St Mary's will do their very best to help them explore that interest.

We understand and value the opportunities we provide to pupils to take part in community activities when they are in residence, but we also understand that often they enjoy spending quiet time in the house and in their own space. We pride ourselves on getting this balance right for our pupils and students.



*"We are extremely pleased that he continues to thrive at St Mary's and continues to benefit from the environment St Mary's provides...thank you for all your support and commitment at St Mary's."*

Parent of residential pupil.



# Admission Process

The best way to find out if St Mary's is right for you and your child is to come and visit us. This way you can see for yourself pupils engaged in their learning, the facilities we have to offer and meet the people who will be working with you and your child.

Call us on 01424 730740, email our administration team at: [admin@stmarysbexhill.org](mailto:admin@stmarysbexhill.org) and once we have taken some initial details, one of our senior leaders will call you back to find out a little more about your situation and to arrange a visit.

Our admissions process:

**Stage 1** = Initial Enquiry: Please call Administration on 01424 730 740, or email us [admin@stmarysbexhill.org](mailto:admin@stmarysbexhill.org)

**Stage 2** = Our Administration staff will contact you and confirm a mutually convenient date to visit the School and College.

**Stage 3** = Informal visit. This is an opportunity for you to see what St Mary's can offer

**Stage 4** = A Taster visit. These sessions will be bespoke to your child and may involve a day, a series of sessions or a number of day visits. Where appropriate it may include an extended day or overnight stay in our residential facility.

**Stage 5** = If we feel that we can meet your child's needs we will inform you and your Local Authority.

## What can you expect on your visit?

You may decide to come as parents / carers or you may decide to bring your child, as well on an initial visit. You will be met by our SENCO and Admissions Lead, who is a senior member of staff and who will accompany you during your visit. Our Admissions Lead will help you find all the information that you need to be able to make the important decision about whether the school is right for your child. During your visit, you will have an opportunity to talk to a variety of staff and to see first-hand what we can offer.

## What next?

After your visit, if it is appropriate, the Admission Lead will discuss and arrange a Taster visit for your child.

## The Taster Visit / Day:

Your child will be placed in the most appropriate class and if required, a residential setting. During the day your child will follow the timetable for their identified group and attend all lessons. Their presentation will help inform everyone in their decision making. We will be making assessments and gathering information to inform our decision in relation to how appropriate a placement at St Mary's would be.

A decision based on the child's EHCP and any supporting reports as well as the Taster Day will be made by the Senior Team as to whether we feel that St Mary's can meet the needs of your child. This decision is communicated to yourself and where appropriate, your Local Authority.

If you wish to take up a placement, your Local Authority may also need to make a decision as to whether they feel that the school is an appropriate placement. We will of course be able to discuss this process with you further during your initial visit

# Transitions

We recognise that any transitions, including starting a new school, a new key stage, a new class or a new provision, can often be very challenging for our pupils and students and sometimes also for their families. By listening to you and your child together, we are able to provide the support needed to move to the next stage of their lives with the confidence that they are ready and equipped. We plan transitions carefully so that our pupils and students are as well-equipped and supported as possible for their next steps in education, training, employment, independence or onward placement. Transitions are planned on an individual basis to support each pupil and their family. Examples of our transition support include:

- Individual planned transition plans for pupils and students joining or leaving St Mary's School and College. •Our curriculum and support is designed to reflect the changes from primary school, to secondary school and then to college.
- Pupils transitioning within school and between school and college participate in both planned taster visits and a full transition week, which includes opportunities to get to know the staff who will be working with them, experience their new timetables and any rooms or areas within the school or college they are not yet familiar with and take part in focussed transition activities.
- Transition meetings and career support helps parents and pupils to plan their destinations post St Mary's. Many of our pupils go from St Mary's to further their education elsewhere and some move into residential environments with differing levels of support.



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