

# St Mary's School and Sixth Form College (part of the Talking Trust)

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 seven and 19.

The school provides education for pupils who have communication and interaction difficulties associated with autism. There are currently 56 children on the school roll, and 28 children attend the residential provision.

The residential provision was last inspected on 12 February 2019. This was a monitoring visit to consider how the school was responding to breaches of regulation made at the last full inspection, which occurred on 30 October 2019.

**Inspection dates:** 9 to 11 July 2019

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **requires improvement to be good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **inadequate**

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

**Date of previous inspection:** 30 October 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** inadequate

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good**

Children generally make progress at the school. Where children's progress is limited, or has deteriorated, staff identify this quickly and respond appropriately.

The judgement of requires improvement is given because there are significant weaknesses in the way that the school has been led and monitored.

There have been no new admissions to the residential provision since the last inspection. Leaders and managers have clear plans to develop the assessment of potential placements prior to admitting any new children.

Care staff develop good relationships with children. The staff consider creatively how to provide children with a supportive environment in which their ability to communicate improves. For example, a social lunchtime supported children to work together to overcome the communication barriers they had. This builds children's confidence and helps with their independence.

Staff value children's views and promote various ways to hear them. An example is the use of a pictorial format for children to report concerns such as bullying. Meetings of the school council are held regularly, and children's views are used to inform developments, including policies and procedures. However, staff do not feed back to children the ways in which their views have influenced the school's development. This is a missed opportunity to show children that staff value their views and act on them.

Staff promote and support children's personal interests and hobbies. Children have many opportunities to take part in group and individual activities, in and outside of the school. When children identify new things they want to do, staff make every effort to find activities that meet their wishes.

Children's mental health and emotional well-being are integral to the whole school. A wide range of staff, such as a psychologist and occupational therapist, provide good individual support to children and advice to staff. These services have a positive impact on children's development and well-being. Several parents praised the therapeutic staff for the support their child receives.

The recently appointed nurse has made improvements to the medication and healthcare support at the school. Medication audits are now regular so any shortfalls in practice are identified quickly and acted on. Staff are trained in delegated healthcare tasks by qualified health professionals. However, the frequency of refresher training is not identified in accordance with Ofsted/Care Quality Commission guidance.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Safeguarding practice has improved, but the changes are not yet fully embedded in practice. Improvements are recognised by others. Two local authorities have noted positive change since the new interim executive board (IEB) has been in place.

Leaders and managers are now prioritising safeguarding training. They have increased the staffing structure to support better practice. They have arranged in-service training days covering safeguarding matters, such as child sexual exploitation. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) now has additional support. Managers recognise the need for her to complete a local authority DSL course.

Some risk assessments lack clearly recorded detail to guide staff. Although staff identify and plan for known risk, they do not record the control measures in detail. Information about how the local area benefits children and poses risks to them is not logged or consistently shared with other staff.

The use of physical restraint has significantly decreased. No child has been restrained or excluded since the last inspection. Senior staff have implemented a debrief record for children to fill out after an incident so that managers can monitor incidents more thoroughly.

Throughout the inspection, staff managed children's behaviour well, quickly planning changes to their responses if necessary. In one instance, the staff recognised an increase in a child's challenging behaviour. They considered the reasons this occurred and reviewed the support the child was receiving. These changes resulted in positive improvements for the child.

A coordinated and organised approach has successfully reduced bullying behaviours in the residential houses. Staff know the children well and plan their support to account for their behaviours appropriately. A review of historical bullying records has not been completed. Senior managers have clear plans to complete this by the end of August 2019. This will provide leaders and managers with a better view of whether any additional action or changes to care plans are necessary.

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

There have been significant changes to the leadership and management of the school. New leadership and governance arrangements began 14 weeks prior to the date of this inspection and the IEB met for the first time 8 weeks prior to the inspection. Prior to this, there had been several changes of headteacher of the school.

Oversight of the school, however, remains inadequate. Actions, prior to the IEB being

in place, were not timely and too little progress was made to support appropriate change. There has been too much confidence in and reliance on external services. Their work has not been properly monitored and evaluated by leaders and managers.

The approach to monitoring health and safety matters is not adequate. In one house, a report from an independent consultant in February 2019 confirmed that some fire doors required adjustments. Senior leaders were not clear whether this work had been completed. A safety plan was immediately put in place to cover the end of term. Staff did not record some weekly fire checks. Managers did not identify this shortfall.

Care staff are positive about the changes which the IEB is making. They said that they are supervised more regularly, and this is helpful. The quality of supervision records demonstrates that if there are concerns about a person's practice these are managed sensitively.

Parents' views about the school remain very mixed. Parents' answers on Ofsted's Parent View site were generally positive. However, a significant number of parents are dissatisfied with the school. One parent said, 'My son is refusing to go. Anxiety is huge as [there is] far too much change and no kindness [is] shown [to] anyone.'

The IEB's aims to increase transparency and consultation and to develop an open culture are beginning to take root. For example, one parent said, 'There have been enormous improvements in the school/college in the last few months.'

The IEB has prioritised improving relationships with parents and responding appropriately to their concerns. The complaints procedure has been reissued and provides clear guidance on how and by whom complaints will be dealt with. A new parent consultation forum occurs termly, and a weekly newsletter is sent to all parents and stakeholders.

Leaders, managers and staff are working effectively with other agencies. Staff provide appropriate support for professionals that assist them in making decisions. In one instance, staff's interventions resulted in a child's behaviour improving at home.

The IEB and school leadership team said that they are on 'a journey of improvement'. They continue to uncover issues which require attention and are having to prioritise improvements in line with any additional concerns. School plans show that further improvements are planned.

Overall, inspectors agree with the IEB. The improvements are having a positive impact on children's safety and welfare. Nevertheless, it remains too soon to see the full impact of their changes.

## **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 standard(s) for residential special schools:

- The school ensures compliance with relevant health and safety laws by drawing up and implementing effectively a written health and safety policy. The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of children are ensured. (Residential special schools, National minimum standards (NMS, 6.2)

In particular, leaders and managers must ensure that adequate numbers of health and safety checks are consistently undertaken and recorded in a timely manner and that records of any remedial action taken are readily available.

- The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and takes appropriate action where necessary. (NMS, 13.1)

### **Recommendations**

- Where necessary, a child has a clear individual health and welfare plan or similar record, containing relevant health and welfare information provided by parents/carers and recording significant health and welfare needs and issues. This record should be agreed by parents/carers and include:
  - records of developmental checks;
  - health monitoring required by staff;
  - intimate care or bodily functions requiring staff help; and
  - the involvement of a child's parents/carers or significant others in health and welfare issues. (NMS, 3.12)

In particular, leaders and managers should ensure that clear timescales for retraining staff who undertake particular healthcare tasks for children are always recorded.

- Active steps are taken to enable all children to make their views known, to make everyday choices and to maximise their opportunities to develop independence. The school should not assume that any child is unable to communicate their views and should support children to participate in important decisions about their lives

using means appropriate to the child's level of understanding. (NMS, 17.2)

In particular, leaders and managers should ensure that information about the school council is readily available in appropriate communication formats to all children.

■ The school ensures that:

- arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school. (NMS, 11.1)

In particular, leaders and managers should ensure that:

- a child's written risk assessments are always reviewed appropriately when new information comes to light
- information they are collecting about facilities and risks in the local area is collated, disseminated to all staff and kept up to date.

## **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:** Sue Cheshire (Acting Headteacher)

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01424 730740

**Email address:** smunn@stmarysbexhill.org

## **Inspectors**

Ruth Coler, social care inspector (lead)

Daniel Healy, social care inspector

Keith Riley, social care inspector



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