

# St Catherine's School

Inspection report for residential special school

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC012597
<b>Inspection date</b>	11 June 2007
<b>Inspector</b>	David Coulter
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	6 November 2006

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## About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

## The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

## **Service information**

### **Brief description of the service**

St Catherine's is a non-maintained residential special school approved by the DFES for the education of students aged between seven and 19 who have needs associated with language and speech disorders. The school is situated in Ventnor, a seaside town on the southern coast of the Isle of Wight. There is easy access into town with Ventnor being a short walking distance from the school campus. The residential accommodation is provided in a number of houses spread across the school campus. The children's accommodation is on the St Catherine's school site whilst accommodation for Further Education students is provided in a number of residential units within the local area.

### **Summary**

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors, Dr David Coulter and Lynda Mosling, over a three day period from the 11th to 13th June 2007. During the course of the inspection a number of staff and students were met and spoken with. Detailed discussions were held with Head Teacher, Head of Care and Chairman of the Governors. A tour of the residential facilities was undertaken and a range of records and documents examined. From the information received it was evident that the school has, in recent months, experienced a period of change due to reorganisation within the residential staff team. All the evidence indicated that this period of transition has now passed and life within the school has settled down again. The care needs of young people are clearly identified and are being met by an experienced and well motivated group of staff.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

The school has, since the last inspection, appointed a new Head of Care and a number of new Heads of Houses. These appointments resulted in some major reorganisation within residential staff teams. As these changes took place in the middle of an academic year, there was a possibility they could have caused major disruption amongst already well established house groups. Staff should be commended on the way they handled what was a potentially difficult situation and supported young people through a period of change and uncertainty.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

The health and well-being of each young person is monitored by teaching, care and nursing staff. A medical assessment forms part of the admissions process. The information obtained is used to develop a health plan that includes a medical history, health interventions, allergies and identifies any dental, hearing and optical needs. Each young person has a personal hygiene and toiletries check list. Staff are aware of respecting young people's dignity and any special support needs or intimate care needs are highlighted on their care plan. The school employs two nurses who, between them, provide medical cover during the week, liaise with parents regarding consent for medical interventions and arrange medical appointments. Evening and week-end cover is provided by residential staff with first aid training. Each residential unit has a medical communications book that is used to register any medical concerns. All young people are registered with a local General Practitioner. While medication is normally dispensed in each

of the residential units by staff who have undertaken specific training controlled medicines are only administered by nursing staff. Guidance and support is given in relation to health and social issues, including alcohol and substance misuse, sexual health, smoking, sex and relationship education, protecting oneself, and bullying and abuse. Young people are provided with opportunities for daily physical activities and the school has a gym, swimming pool, tennis court and play area. A fitness room has been recently created in the Further Education Centre. The school has, over the last year, adopted a healthy eating strategy. Catering staff use fresh produce to create a healthy and varied diet. The initiative has been very successful and has resulted in greater satisfaction amongst the young people and less waste. There are always a number of alternative choices on the menu and special dietary needs are catered for. Young people can access healthy snacks, such as fruit, in their residential units. As part of their independent living skills training young people are provided with opportunities to both purchase and prepare food. All the young people spoken with talked in positive terms about both the quantity and quality of food on offer. There appropriate dining areas in both the main school and residential units.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

The majority of young people are accommodated in their own rooms. Those that do share are involved in the matching process. Young people confirmed that staff always knock before entering their rooms. Toilets and showers were observed to have appropriate locks. Confidential information relating to each young person is kept in appropriate locked facilities. Young people also confirmed that staff would only discuss confidential matters with them in private. The school has a written complaints policy that all young people are made aware of on admission. Complaints can be registered at any time via staff or a complaints box that is located in the main school. All complaints are taken seriously, reported to the head of Care and Head Teacher and acted upon. A record is kept of how each complaint has been dealt with. Young people spoken with confirmed that they would have no difficulty in lodging their complaints/concerns with any of the staff or in the concerns box. By the use of one-to-one sessions and house meetings, staff are pro-active in seeking out the views and concerns of young people before they develop into complaints. The school has a child protection policy and clear guidelines for staff on the reporting of any concerns to the area child protection team. Staff records demonstrate that they receive regular child protection training. Residential staff spoken with were clearly aware of their personal responsibilities in regard to the reporting of child protection concerns. The phone number of the Childline helpline is situated in prominent positions around the residential units. The school operates a policy of zero tolerance toward bullying and all young people are made aware of it on admission. The school has had a bullying awareness week since the last inspection. The Head of Care reported that it had been very successful and had raised awareness about the different guises bullying can take. Young people spoken with said that bullying was not a problem in the school. However, staff pointed out that due to the communication problems experienced by many of the young people, problems can arise. For example, what might be intended to be innocent teasing by one young person, can often be misconstrued as an affront by another. Staff are clearly aware of this and act quickly to resolve such difficulties as they arise. The school has a policy and procedure for reporting young people who are absent without authority. As part of their independence training young people are provided with opportunities to undertake activities outside of the school on an incremental basis. All such activities are subject to a risk assessment process. Return times are agreed with staff and there is an expectation that young people will notify staff if they are going to be late.

Staff have not yet developed pen pictures and physical descriptions of each young person that could be relayed to police in the event of them absconding. Records examined indicate that all serious incidents are reported to the appropriate authorities. The Head of Care confirmed that serious incidents prompt some form of investigation involving interested parties such as placing authorities and social services. Staff within the school promote a behaviour management plan based on a principle of mutual respect. Staff respond positively to acceptable behaviour and reward good deeds. Compliments books in the residential units provide a mechanism for both young people and staff to convey their appreciation of an individual's behaviour. Young people spoken with feel that sanctions, are applied fairly. Specific training has recently been arranged for staff on dealing with the behaviour presented by one young person. Records noted all the restraints that had taken place, recorded those involved and the social context in which it took place. One-to-one sessions provide staff with opportunities to discuss issues or concerns relating to individual's behaviour. Minutes of staff meetings indicated that the behaviour of each young person is being monitored and discussed on a regular basis. The school operates within a risk management strategy that aims to ensure the health and safety of both the young people and staff. Risk assessments are extensively used to identify any potential hazards associated with the environment, equipment and activities. Records indicate that risk assessments are subject to regular review. The school is subject to a range of inspections from other bodies such as Environmental Health and Fire Safety. Residential accommodation within the school is provided in a number of different residential units. All the units are subject to separate risk assessments. Records demonstrate that each units fire alarm system is tested regularly and evacuation exercises carried out. Access to the residential units are restricted and all visitors are expected to report to staff on admission. Each young person is subject to a life skills/independence risk assessment that focuses on issues of personal safety. The school operates with a team of permanent residential staff. There is very low staff turnover. Staff records indicate that residential staff are subject to a comprehensive recruitment process that requires them to undertake a Criminal Record Bureau Check, complete a detailed application, provide the names of two referees and undertake a formal interview. It was good to note that young people at the school are involved in the staff recruitment process including interviews. All appointments are subject to the successful completion of a probationary period that includes a period of induction training. The school only use an approved Taxi firm that employs fully vetted staff.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Evidence indicates that life within the school and residential units is providing young people with opportunities to develop a range of social and life skills. While care staff do not follow a specific curriculum there is an expectation that each young person residing at the school will be assisted in developing independent living skills. Each young person's social and educational needs are identified through assessment and plans drawn up on how best they can be met. Key-workers are assigned to monitor the progress of each young person and ensure their care needs are being effectively met. While each young person is treated as an individual, there is an acknowledgement that they need to develop the skills necessary to operate effectively in a communal setting. All the young people are expected to contribute to the day-to-day running of their units by clearing up after themselves and tidying their rooms. Young people's records contain Personal Education Plans. Though residential care and teaching staff work at different times of the day, it is evident that good lines of communication have been established between both. Each of the residential units has facilities and equipment to support young people's

education and staff are pro-active in offering assistance with homework. Young people live full and active lives within the school and are encouraged to pursue their own interests and hobbies. Staff frequently provide transport to activities in the community. Residential staff engage young people in many forms of social education through play, discussion and recreational activities. Placement plans indicate that activities undertaken by young people are subject to a risk assessment process.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

The views of young people are regularly sought on both a formal and informal manner, formally through regular 'House Meetings' that take place within each of the units and informally through the social interaction between the young people and staff. Records indicate that decisions are made with, rather than for young people. As meals are eaten communally, they provide a regular forum for individuals to share their views and plan activities. Individuals can also raise issues of common interest through their representatives on the school council. All the issues raised are shared with both the Head of Care and Principal. The school has a comprehensive admissions policy and procedure. All prospective students are invited to visit the school prior to admission. Such visits can last a number of days during which the young person will reside in one of the residential units, attend classes and join in social and recreational activities. All new students are supplied with an information pack that contains a guide to life within the school. A separate guide has been produced for those attending post-sixteen provision. The school has also developed a policy and procedure for those leaving. Staff spoken with indicated that preparation for leaving starts well in advance of any date and includes close liaison with officers from placing authorities. The majority of St Catherine's student population have, due to their speech and language difficulties, received Statements of Educational Need. This process produces a comprehensive assessment of a young person's needs and normally forms the starting point for the development of a placement plan. On admission all young people are provided with a Progress File to assist them to document their achievements whilst at the school. Young people's files indicate that the aims and objectives of their placement are clearly identified and proposed strategies to effect change clearly stated. Young people are encouraged to young maintained regular contact with their parents and families. Those spoken with indicated they maintain contact with home via their mobile phones, the residential unit phones and e-mail. Parents are encouraged to visit and the Principal indicated that attendance at school events and young persons' reviews was good. The school has a written admission procedure that aimed at helping each young person settle in. Young people spoken with confirmed they had been provided with a guide on admission. Staff spoken with indicated that every effort was made to ensure that arrivals and departures were planned. While the school tries to avoid emergency placements, every effort is made to minimise their impact on the rare occasions they do arise. The social interaction between young people and staff within the residential units is based on the principle of mutual respect. All the young people encountered in the residential units during the course of the inspection appeared to be relaxed and at ease in their surroundings. Young people interacted freely with the staff and frequently initiated discussion. Conversations contained much humour and playful banter. Staff and young people addressed each other by their first names. Young people spoken with described staff as, 'nice', 'fair' and 'fun to be with'.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

There are normally two groups within the school who are working toward major transitions, those in their final year within the main school and those completing their education at the Further Education centre. Planning for transition starts early in the final year. While staff can assist young people prepare for life after St Catherine's detailed planning is often dependent on external factors such as the availability of funding and the support available from placing authorities. However, independent living programmes aim to equip each individual with a range of skills to assist them to successfully move on. For example, as part of their social and life skills training programme all young people receive training in budgeting, cooking, household duties, use of public transport, completing college and job applications, interview techniques and finding housing/accommodation. Transition plans are developed with the young people and involve school staff, parents, placing agencies and the Connexions Careers Service. The expansion of the Further Education Unit in recent years has clearly provided another option for young people leaving the main school and has proved a popular destination for a number of young people wishing to continue their education. The school has produced a guide for parents to assist them with the transition process. During the course of the inspection a tour of the school was undertaken which included visiting a number of the residential units, including those for Further Education students. All the areas visited were observed to be clean, tidy and in good decorative order. However, it is evident that the rapid expansion of Further Education, provision has created tremendous pressure on existing facilities and is taking its toll on the fabric of the buildings. This is clearly acknowledged by management within the school and has been factored into the schools development plan for the future. All the facilities are subject to regular maintenance. Security around the main school and residential units is appropriate. Due to the location of the school, on a steep site, access for individuals with mobility problems is not easy. However, a number of ramps have been installed in key areas to ensure the safe passage of any individual with mobility difficulties. Plans have been drawn up for a major redevelopment and it is hoped that this will provide an opportunity to address many of the difficulties inherent within the existing site.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The school has developed a range of information that includes a detailed prospectus and a handbook specifically for the Further Education Unit. The school prospectus contains a Statement of Purpose that accurately describes the nature of the current provision. The information produced by the school is clearly written and appropriately illustrated with photographs. An information pack is provided for all prospective students, that includes specific information for parents. Since the last inspection there has been a number of significant changes within the staff team including the appointment of a new Head of Care. A number of senior staff have also assumed new roles and responsibilities. The inevitable disruption created by such changes has been managed well by staff who have kept young people informed and worked with them to allay fears and apprehensions as they arose. The school benefits from a well motivated staff team that includes both youth and experience. Staffing rotas ensure that the majority of staff time is spent in direct contact with the young people. All staff have a job description and are made aware of their roles and responsibilities during induction. Working practices have developed with reference to the school's policies and best practice guidance. Continuity in the delivery of care is maintained by effective communication systems and clear lines of accountability. Staff receive regular individual supervision during which they can discuss, on an individual basis, any issues and concerns. Staff reported that both the Principal and Head of Care were very supportive and always made themselves available to discuss issues of concern.

Sufficient financial resources were available for staff to operate the units effectively and budgetary systems in place to ensure financial accountability. There is, within St Catherine's, a well established culture of training and professional development. All care staff are expected to attain an National Vocational Qualification level 3 qualifications in Child Care and Heads of Unit a National Vocational Qualification level 4. The Head of Care is an National Vocational Qualification Assessor. Staff undertake regular training in key areas such as First Aid, Child Protection, Team Teach, Fire Safety, Health and Nutrition and working with families. Specialised training is also arranged in response to an identified need and for example, staff within one of the residential units have recently undertaken behaviour management training in order that they could meet the care needs of one young person more effectively. Evidence obtained during the inspection indicated that residential provision within the school was being effectively managed and the physical, social and educational needs of the young people were being met by a dedicated team of staff. The school is subject to regular visits by a nominated school governor who provides, as required, a written report. The school has, through the governing bodies committee system, an effective way of monitoring performance across the school. Sub-committees also provide an effective forum for future development in key areas such as residential provision.

## What must be done to secure future improvement?

### Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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### Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- develop a profile on each young person that contains a photograph, physical description and significant information that can be used in the event of them ever going missing.

## Annex

## Annex A

### National Minimum Standards for residential special school

#### Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

**Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.**

#### Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

**Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

**Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.**

#### Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

**Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.**

## **Achieving economic well-being**

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

**Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.**

## **Organisation**

**The intended outcomes for these standards are:**

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

**Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.**