

St Catherine's School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	David Coulter / Lynda Mosling
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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

During the announced inspection information was gathered from a range of sources including parents, young people, residential staff and members of the school's senior management team. From the information obtained it is apparent that residential provision provides an important part of young people's experience at St Catherine's. Young people are accommodated in house groups with dedicated residential staff. During the course of the inspection each residential unit was visited and the young people living there spoken with. Residential units are located on the main site, within the Further Education unit and in a nearby residential area. Each of the units have their own distinct character. Young people spoken with talked in positive terms about their accommodation and the support they received from unit staff. All appeared at ease in their surroundings and relaxed in the company of the staff on duty. Staff and young people addressed each other by their first names and the interaction between both was spontaneous and frequently laced with humour. It is evident that young people at the school are living full and active lives that involve them in a range of social and recreational activities in both the school and local community. Since the last inspection a new residential unit has become fully operational and now offers a number of young people the opportunity to develop a wide range of independent living skills within a supportive domestic environment. Evidence collected during the course of the inspection indicates that the school is operating effectively and the care needs of the young people are being met by an experienced and well qualified group of staff. Though development within the units on the main site are somewhat curtailed by the layout of the building and the limitation of the site, this does not impact on the quality of the care young people receive, which remains of a high standard. While a number of recommendations arise from the inspection, none are directly concerned with the quality of care that has continued to improve.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

A number of significant improvements have been made to the school's residential provision including the redecoration and refurbishment of Chapel Landing and the opening of 'The Verne', the new independent living facility. Residential staff have continued to increase their knowledge and skills by undertaking training in a range of areas including: nutrition, first aid, manual handling, behaviour management, sexual health, risk assessment and equality and diversity. The WORX (the new training workshop) has become operational and now offers young people a range of new work-related experiences. Staff across a range of departments have become

involved in delivering joint initiatives such as that relating to healthy living. Young people are being introduced to the religious festivals of the world's major religions. Young people have undertaken a number of exciting overseas trips to both Sweden and Italy.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Young people in St Catherine's are encouraged to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Staff from across the school including catering, residential and nursing staff are pro-active in encouraging young people to eat appropriately and take regular exercise. This integrated approach is clearly illustrated in the school's healthy eating initiative which has resulted in a more extensive use of fresh produce. While the school operates a six week rolling menu it incorporates seasonal variations and individual's specific dietary needs. An alternative choice is provided for all main courses. Within each residential unit staff provide a range of healthy snacks including fresh fruit. Food is produced in the school's well equipped kitchens by a group of enthusiastic staff who are intent in providing good quality food. Since the last inspection the kitchen has achieved a 5 star rating from the Isle of Wight Council for cleanliness. Young people within Further Education are provided with opportunities to both plan and cook meals. Meals are social events and staff and young people eat together in the well appointed dining areas. There was a general consensus amongst the young people spoken with that the quality of the food has greatly improved in recent times. There are well established policies, procedures to ensure that the health and well being of each young person are closely monitored during their time at St Catherine's. The health needs of each young person are identified as part of the admissions process. From the information obtained health strategies are developed. The school has two nursing staff who provide on-site cover on a Monday to Friday basis. Nursing staff have a wide remit that includes monitoring the well-being of young people, liaising with residential staff to ensure young people access health appointments and delivering health education on a one-to-one and group basis. There are well established lines of communication between nursing and care staff. While nursing staff have a dedicated office and sick bay in the main school they also provide regular drop-in clinics within the Further Education Centre. Young people in the school have access to the school Doctor who is a General Practitioner in the town. Consent from parents and guardians is obtained for all forms of medical intervention including the administration of medication. Specialist support is sought when required from allied professionals including psychologists and therapists. Nursing and care staff work closely to ensure that any young person requiring intimate care needs are treated sensitively. Each young person has a personal hygiene and toiletries check list. Arrangements for both the storage and dispensing of medication are appropriate and there is a well established recording system. Any requests from a young person to self administer their medication are dealt with on an individual basis and risk assessed. Young people are encouraged by staff to be physically active and are provided with opportunities on a daily basis to undertake exercise. Young people can access sporting and recreational facilities both within the school and the local community.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Within St Catherine's, staff promote the concept of respect for people, places and things. Most young people are accommodated in their own rooms which is designated 'their space'. Both staff and other young people are expected to respect each others' privacy and only enter if they knock the door and are invited to enter. While one young person complained that a member

of staff had entered his room to collect towels for washing without his knowledge, all others spoken with felt that staff respected their privacy. Confidential information relating to each young person is kept in appropriate locked facilities within each of the residential units. Young people confirmed that staff only spoke to them about confidential matters in private. 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. Young people confirmed that they would have no difficulty in lodging their complaints/concerns with any of the staff or in the concerns box. The school has a written complaints policy that all young people are made aware of on admission. If a complaint is made it is logged, investigated and the actions taken by the head of care and head teacher noted. If any complainant is unhappy with the outcome of their complaint the school's policy provides redress to the school governors. There have been very few complaints registered since the last inspection. Both young people and staff feel the complaints system works well and is an effective way of resolving issues of concern to young people. Young people attending St Catherine's are, due to their communication difficulties, extremely vulnerable. Staff are clearly aware of this and are pro-active in helping them develop strategies to keep them safe. The school has a child protection policy and clear guidelines for staff on the reporting of any concerns to the area child protection team. All staff are introduced to the school's policy on child protection during their induction. Since the last inspection all staff have undertaken child protection training with members of the area child protection team. While the school operates a zero-tolerance of bullying there is an acknowledgement on the part of staff that due to their communication difficulties misunderstandings can arise that will, if left unchecked, lead to friction. Staff are extremely vigilant to ensure that any incidents that could be construed as bullying are identified early and appropriate measures implemented to ensure they do not reoccur. Young people in both the main school and further education confirmed that they felt safe and that bullying was not a problem. Staff were observed operating behaviour management programmes that minimised the opportunities for bullying to occur. Young people at St Catherine's are encouraged to develop independent living skills. As part of this training young people are provided with opportunities to undertake activities in the local community and eventually around the island. Before any young person undertakes activities outside of the school they are subject to a risk assessment process aimed at identifying any potential difficulties that might arise. Before leaving the premises all young people are expected to inform staff and agree a return time. If, for any reason, a young person can not return at the agreed time they are expected to inform staff. Most young people carry mobile phones with which they can contact staff. Failure to return can result in staff implementing the school's missing person's policy. Staff have, over the last year, developed pen pictures and physical descriptions of each young person that can be relayed to police in the event of them absconding. The pen pictures are taken by staff on all external activity trips. The school has set procedures for reporting serious incidents to the appropriate authorities including Ofsted. All serious incidents prompt internal investigations that involve all interested parties. There have been no serious incidents since the last inspection. All young people at St Catherine's are treated as individuals with their own specific communication difficulties and social and educational needs. While the school has a number of rules and expectations regarding behaviour, staff employ specifically designed behaviour strategies to manage each individual. It is evident that many young people experience difficulties in understanding the behaviours of others and as a consequence do not always respond accordingly. Specialist speech and language therapists within the school help each young person develop their communication skills. Staff rarely use sanctions to manage behaviour. If a young person displays inappropriate or anti-social behaviour staff will immediately discuss it with

them at that time. On the rare occasions sanctions are used they normally consist of a withdrawal of a privilege, such as access to computer games. All sanctions are recorded in a bound book. Observations indicated that there was open dialogue between staff and young people about life within each of the residential units and that house meetings provide opportunities to discuss any issues around group behaviour. The school utilise risk assessments to ensure the safety of both young people and staff. Risk assessments are subject to regular review and updated in response to any incidents. Each young person is subject to a life skills/independence risk assessment that focuses on: personal safety, night time independence in the community, banking, shopping, personal care, danger awareness, safety in the external environment and medical issues. School governors are involved in checking the safety and security of the school's residential units during their regular monitoring visits. The school is subject to a range of inspections from other bodies such as Environmental Health and Fire Safety. The fire alarm systems in each of the residential units is tested regularly and evacuation exercises carried out. Access to the school's buildings is restricted and all visitors have to report to staff on admission. The school has established safe recruiting practices. All prospective staff are subject to a comprehensive recruitment process that requires them to complete a detailed application form, provide the names of two referees, undertake a Criminal Record Bureau check and attend the school for an interview. The head teacher and head of care have undertaken 'safer recruitment training' since the last inspection. Young people are involved in the interviewing of prospective staff.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

St Catherine's operates a key-worker system and each young person is assigned a residential staff member who meets with them on a regular basis. While key-workers monitor the care needs of specific young people staff are conversant with the social and emotional needs of the young people being accommodated in their units. While it is evident that each young person in St Catherine's is treated as an individual, with their own specific care needs, there is also an acceptance that the school operates as a residential community and as a consequence requires individuals to contribute to its effectiveness. For example, there is an expectation that young people will undertake some communal tasks such as clearing tables after meals and tidying their rooms. Most of the young people attending St Catherine's are in receipt of Statements of Educational need. Teaching takes place in a range of settings including the school, the further education unit, the Isle of Wight College and the new WORXS unit. The school has facilities, equipment and experienced staff, including teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists and project workers to support their education. The school has in recent times embarked on a more integrated approach to both the development and delivery of the curriculum. This is illustrated in the joint approach taken by nursing, residential, catering, teaching and care staff to deliver a healthy living initiative. Staff should be commended on their willingness to incorporate social and life skills training into their own specific areas of work. The development of the new WORXS workshop is providing opportunities for young people to gain a range of knowledge and skills that will better prepare them for their working lives. Young people are able to pursue a range of social and recreational activities in both the school and local community. At the time of the inspection young people were accessing, amongst other things, scouts and guides, soccer, mountain biking, trampolining, orienteering, swimming and horse riding. House meetings provide a forum for planning social activities. While the school has its own transport, the school has secured free transport for young people on island buses. This initiative has greatly helped young people pursue personal interests. For example, one

young person travels to athletics by himself each week. Since the last inspection students have been able to access a wide range of activities. Since the last inspection groups of students have undertaken trips to Sweden and Italy and attended a music festival on the island.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Each young person has a placement plan that provides key information and guidance for staff on how their care needs can best be met. Placement plans also identify any specific cultural or religious needs a young person might have. Staff aim to ensure that young people can follow their own religious practices. Placement plans contain risk assessments specific to all aspects of life at the school. All plans are updated in line with changing circumstances and the progress each young person is making. The placement plans examined contained concise information that was presented in an accessible format for the reader. St Catherine's accommodates both weekly and termly boarders. All young people are encouraged to maintain regular contact with their families and guardians and via the phone and e-mail. Young people have access to phones in each of the residential units. There is clear guidance for staff on family contact. Each young person has a home liaison book that accompanies them on their trips home and provides information on their progress at school. Likewise information from parents can be conveyed via the books to school on home visit. Parental questionnaires indicated that school staff were extremely good at keeping them informed.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school has a policy to assist young people make the transition into adulthood, that includes social and life skills training. One of the main aims of the further education centre is to equip young people with the knowledge and skills to help them lead full and active lives once they leave. With the purchase of, 'The Verne', young people in further education can now progress on to a specially designed independent living unit in which they have to assume many domestic chores including shopping and cooking. While records demonstrate that transitional planning is implemented in advance of proposed departures, staff feel that a dedicated member of staff responsible for transitional planning would be of great benefit to students. Young people in the main school are expected to wear school uniform during the school day. Young people can wear clothes of their choice out of school hours. There is no uniform for those attending further education centre. Young people are encouraged to look after their clothes and those in further education are expected to undertake their own washing once a week. As part of their life skills training young people are also encouraged to budget and many have opened their own bank accounts that they can access via cash machines in the town. Young people confirmed they had access to toiletries and cosmetics etc. While the school occupies a spectacular site overlooking Ventnor and the sea beyond, its location has many limitations. For example, the configuration of the present site would present major difficulties to any young person with mobility difficulties. Though the main school building has numerous limitations, it is situated in a prominent position within Ventnor and is accessible to all the town's amenities. Though the residential facilities in the main school are fit for purpose, the governing body have plans to redevelop the whole school site. Planning permission has already been granted for the development of a new accommodation block in another part of the grounds. Since the last inspection a number of improvements have been made to existing facilities and the girls unit, Chapel Landing, has been completely redecorated. The new independent living unit, 'The Verne',

which is located within walking distance of the school is now fully operational. This facility provides good quality accommodation in a domestic setting. All young people are accommodated in large well appointed rooms with en-suite facilities. All the school's residential units are subject to regular health and safety risk assessments and have certification relating to gas, electrical and fire equipment. Given the heavy traffic in both the further education and school residential units there is a need for on-going repair and maintenance. The back of the main school building faces south and is subject to a regular bombardment by salt laden winds from the sea. This has clearly impacted on both the wood and iron work on that aspect. The whole elevation on the south side now requires making good and repainting. A tour of all the residential facilities indicated that two bedrooms within Chapel Landing had unsightly wooden bars on their external windows. As they unnecessarily restrict the view they should be replaced by more suitable window closures. Young people commented positively about their accommodation and felt they had ownership of their own rooms. However, one young person in further education reported a lack of ventilation within a top floor landing and poor water pressure in a shower unit. These were reported to the head of care and bursar. All residential units have communal areas and rooms that can be used for young people to meet with their families and other visitors.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a Statement Purpose that accurately reflects current provision within the school. There are young persons' guides for both the main school and further education. Young people are involved in the production of the guides. The school provides a range of information for young people, their parents and placing authorities prior to their arrival. The Statement of Purpose is subject to an annual review. On appointment all staff are provided with a job description that details their main roles and responsibilities. There are clear lines of accountability within the staff teams in each unit. Staff receive regular supervision and confirmed they were well supported by senior staff and the Head of Care. The school has a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that are accessible to all staff. Policies and procedures are subject to regular review. The views of staff are regularly sought about proposed changes and developments. Residential staff meet both within their own units and as a whole team. Staff are expected to contribute to the agendas in such meetings. The Head of Care operates an open door policy and is available to staff most days. St Catherine's operates with a group of experienced and well motivated group of residential staff. The present staff team have the necessary skills, qualifications and experience to meet the needs of all the young people presently accommodated. All shifts are managed by experienced senior staff all of whom are aged over 21 years. There are no staff employed under 18 years of age. There are suitable arrangements in place to cover staff absences. The school does not employ agency staff. While the current team is stable, a likely increase in the school roll has prompted the recruitment of a number of new staff. Staff work split shifts to ensure they are available when the young people are out of school. Night and day shifts overlap so that staff can hand-over key information. All external activities are risk assessed to ensure adequate staff are deployed. There is a culture of training and professional development within St Catherine's. Staff can access regular training opportunities both within the school and through outside agencies. Staff have, since the last inspection, accessed courses in child protection, nutrition, first aid, manual handling, behaviour management, sexual health, risk assessment and equality and diversity. While staff have accessed a range of training a number still have to complete their National Vocational Training courses. The delay is, according to the head of care, due to the difficulty in obtaining an appropriate external verifier. A record is kept on staff files of all

courses attended. All new staff are subject to a comprehensive induction procedure. Staff confirmed they received regular supervision and an annual appraisal. Evidence indicates the school is run effectively by an experienced senior management team that is led by an enthusiastic head teacher. The management team is supported by an active governing body. A committee system is used to monitor specific areas of the school's activities. A designated governor undertakes monitoring visits of the residential units. The school has well established recording and accounting systems. Sufficient resources are available to meet the needs of young people including activities outside of the school. The school is well known on the island and has established good relations with neighbours and members of the local community. The school has an ambitious development plan that has both short and long term goals. A fund raising team has been commissioned and is in the process of raising funds for the proposed developments.

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):

- ensure that the wood and iron work on the external elevation on the south side of the main school are made good and repainted (NMS 24).
- ensure that staff have the opportunity to complete their National Vocational Qualification training (NMS 29).
- remove the window bars from the external windows in Chapel Landing and introduce new window fastners (NMS 24).