

St Catherine's School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	David Coulter
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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 close to the school.

Summary

During the course of this announced inspection a tour was undertaken of all the residential accommodation presently occupied. Information was gleaned from a variety of sources that included interviews with residential, teaching, therapeutic and support staff. A number of young people were also met and spoken with and a wide range of records and documents examined. From the information obtained it is evident that the school provides a unique educational experience to a particularly vulnerable group of young people with speech and language difficulties.

Each young person is treated as an individual with their own social, cultural, educational and health needs. Teaching, residential, nursing, therapeutic and support staff all support young people to meet achievable goals. Residential care plays an important role within the school and the well motivated staff team have created a safe and nurturing environment in which young people can develop a range of social and life skills. While each residential unit has its own distinct character, all were observed to be homely, well decorated and appropriately furnished. The school is situated on a steep slope that presents many challenges. However, it is a unique environment with dramatic views to the town below and the sea beyond. The location of the school is excellent and all the town's facilities, including the beach, are within walking distance.

One of the aims of the school is to help young people develop their speech and language abilities to a level where they will feel confident enough to engage fully in society. Staff are exceptionally good at exploiting the safety offered by an island environment to develop training programmes in social and life skills. Young people's self confidence is clearly boosted by mastering such skills. The views of young people are sought about many aspects of daily life including the choice of food and the development of weekly activity programmes.

Young people met during the course of the inspection appeared at ease in the school environment. Their interactions with staff were spontaneous and warm and relationships appeared to be based on mutual respect. All those spoken with talked in positive terms about their lives at school and special mention was made of the kindness of staff, the opportunities to experience new activities and the enjoyment they had with their friends. While there are three recommendations arising from the inspection, none are directly concerned with the quality of the residential provision in the school which is outstanding.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school is subject to a rolling programme of redecoration and refurbishment. Over the last year the electrical system in the school hall has been upgraded, many of the houses have had areas redecorated and the recreation area in Further Education has been refurbished. A significant improvement has been the increase in the number of social and recreational opportunities that have arisen as a result of the school's fund raising initiative. In recent times young people have been able to attend a music festival, visit theme parks and participate in a range of water sport activities. Young people have also benefited from the acquisition of bus passes that provide free travel around the island.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The concept of healthy living is promoted throughout the school and young people are encouraged to eat wisely and take regular exercise. The experienced catering staff use fresh produce to create nutritionally balanced meals. The six week rolling menu incorporates seasonal variations and individuals' specific dietary needs. The menu is displayed in pictorial form and an alternative choice is provided for all main courses. Young people can access healthy snacks in between meals. Young people are provided opportunities to develop their own culinary skills within their own houses. Young people talked in positive terms about both the quantity and quality of food on offer.

The health needs of each young person are identified as part of the admissions process and there are well established systems in place to ensure they are regularly monitored. On admission medical consents are obtained from parents and young people are registered with a local General Practice and undertake a health assessment. The school benefits from the expertise of two experienced nursing staff who provide on-site cover on a Monday to Friday basis. Evening and week-end cover is provided by residential staff who are first aid trained. Nursing staff monitor the well-being of young people, arrange medical appointments and deliver health education to both staff and young people. 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. Nursing staff will seek out specialist help from a range of services, including child and adolescent psychiatry, to address specific concerns.

While there are suitable arrangements for both the storage and administration of medication, the nursing staff said that on occasions they have had to remind some residential staff of the importance of recording appropriately. As a consequence, nursing staff now check administrative records each morning. Any requests from a young person to self administer their medication is dealt with on an individual basis and risk assessed. Nursing and care staff work closely to ensure that issues relating to personal hygiene and intimate care are treated sensitively. Each young person has a personal hygiene and toiletries check list. 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.

Young people are accommodated in a number of residential units, each with their own distinct character. Within these communal settings, young people are provided with a high degree of privacy. While the majority of young people have their own rooms, there is provision for those in the younger groups to share. Young people's rooms are designated as 'their space' and they are encouraged to personalise them with posters and pictures. Staff and young people respect each others' privacy and will only enter each others rooms if invited to do so. Staff respect young peoples right to confidentiality and keep information relating to each young person in appropriate locked facilities within each of the residential units.

While the school has a written complaints policy, one-to-one key worker sessions, house meetings, student councils and a complaints/concerns box have proved successful at identifying concerns before they develop into complaints. Young people confirmed that they would have no difficulty in lodging their complaints/concerns with staff. If a complaint is made it is logged, investigated and the actions taken by the head of care and head teacher noted. Young people and staff feel the present system works well and is an effective way of resolving issues of concern.

Staff are clearly aware of the vulnerability of the young people in their care and are pro-active in helping them develop strategies to keep them safe. Staff have developed a range of policies procedures and working practices to address areas of potential concern such as bullying or young people absconding. Risk assessments are extensively used to identify risks associated with the environment, activities or specific individual's behaviour. The school has also developed a child protection policy that includes clear guidelines for staff on the reporting of any concerns to the local safeguarding team. All new staff are introduced to the schools policy as part of their induction. Staff receive training in child protection issues and are aware of their personal responsibilities in regard to reporting child protection concerns.

One of the main aims of the school is to prepare young people for adult life. Young people are encouraged to develop their academic abilities while acquiring a range of social and life skills. Due to their communication difficulties, many of the young people referred to the school lack self confidence. Staff work closely with young people to develop individual programmes with achievable goals in areas such as cooking, personal hygiene, budgeting and independent travel. The way staff utilise the local community to provide learning opportunities is outstanding. For example, all young people are now provided with free bus passes so that they can, with initial staff assistance, travel independently around the island.

While the school has set procedures for reporting serious incidents, it was noted that an accident that involved the hospitalisation of one young person was reported to all the appropriate authorities except Ofsted. The head of care acknowledged this was an administrative oversight and has modified reporting procedures appropriately. Any serious incident prompts an internal investigation by staff and governors.

While there are a number of rules and expectations regarding behaviour, there is also an acknowledgement on the part of staff that due to their communication difficulties and levels of understanding young people need to be treated differently. The school's speech therapists highlight the communication difficulties each young person experiences and provide guidance for staff on effective strategies to enhance communication. On the rare occasions sanctions are used they normally consist of a withdrawal of a privilege. All sanctions are recorded in a bound book and counter signed by the head teacher. Since the last inspection staff have

completed training on behaviour management strategies and diversionary techniques. The composition of each house group is closely monitored to ensure that its members can live happily together.

Young people live full and active lives at the school and are encouraged to participate in a broad range of activities in both the school and community. Staff aim to ensure the safety of young people by implementing a risk assessment policy that requires individual activities to be risk assessed and strategies developed to address any identified concerns. Risk assessments are subject to regular review and updated in response to any incidents. 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 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 is operating with a stable group of residential staff and there have been no new appointments since the last inspection. A number of senior staff have undertaken 'safer recruitment training' and there is now a well developed recruitment policy and procedure. This process requires all prospective staff 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. Young people are often involved in the interviewing of prospective staff.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Each young person has a key worker who meets with them on a regular basis. While key-workers monitor the care needs of specific young people, they are also conversant with the social and emotional needs of the young people being accommodated in their units. Young people reside in house groups that are normally determined by age, sex and abilities. There is an expectation that young people will contribute to the running of their houses by undertaking communal tasks such as setting tables and keeping their rooms clean and tidy.

Learning is not restricted to classrooms or workshops and young people can access learning opportunities in a variety of settings including their residential units and the local community. The school operates with a group of experienced and specialised staff that includes special education teachers, speech therapists, occupational therapists and residential workers. Staff throughout the school contribute to the development of learning opportunities and for example, nursing, residential, catering, teaching and care staff have all contributed to a cross curricula programme on healthy living.

Young people are able to pursue an impressive range of social and recreational activities in both the school and local community. While young people can access sporting and recreational activities on site they are encouraged to access local clubs and uniformed organisations. The school's fundraising initiative has provided a significant number of new opportunities for young people including access to the Bestival music festival, visits to theme parks and sailing courses at a local sailing academy. House and student council meetings provide young people opportunities 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 and gain access throughout the island.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school has a good admissions process that is effective at identifying each individual's educational, health and social needs. From the information obtained staff develop placement plans that contain key information and guidance for staff on how each individual's specific needs can best be met. Placement plans also identify any specific cultural or religious needs a young person might have. All placement plans contains risk assessments relating to all aspects of the young persons life in the school. Placement plans are updated in line with changing circumstances and the progress each young person is making. Placement plans examined contained recent and relevant information that was presented in clear concise language.

Young people maintain regular contact with their parents/guardians via the phone and e-mail. While many young people have their own mobile phones, they still have access to phones in each of the residential units. Parents confirmed that staff were good at keeping them informed about activities within the school and appreciated the regular progress reports they received.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

During their placements staff aim to equip young people with a range of social and life skills to help them lead full and active lives. During their placements there is an expectation they will develop a range of skills such as travelling on public transport, budgeting and being able to cook. Young people work at their own pace and programmes are tailored to their particular needs and abilities. The acquisition of such skills clearly helps to develop their self-confidence. Young people are helped to acquire budgeting skills and many now have their own accounts in local banks that can be accessed via cash dispensers. Young people are also encouraged to look after their clothes and within Further Education there is an expectation that personal washing will be completed once a week.

The school is situated in a prominent position within Ventnor and is within walking distance of all the towns amenities. The school site though dramatic, with extensive sea views, has many drawbacks due to its location on a steep slope. While the site imposes clear strictures on development, it has created an interesting environment in which facilities are located on numerous levels. Movement around the school grounds necessitates negotiating steps and stairs both internally and externally. The current limitations have been recognised and planning permission has been obtained for the building of a new purpose built unit in another part of the grounds. The present accommodation is subject to on-going maintenance and redecoration. Records demonstrate that that the school is subject to regular health and safety risk assessments.

A tour of the school indicated that the house units are structurally sound and in good decorative order. Young people spoken with were happy with their accommodation and appreciated having ownership of their own rooms. While all young people have the option of single accommodation, the junior houses offer a facility for sharing. Sleeping-in staff in all units have their own dedicated accommodation. All residential units are appropriately furnished and have comfortable communal areas for socialising. The bursar acknowledged that the school has an on-going maintenance programme that includes remedial work on the woodwork and iron work on the south elevation of the main school building. While this area is unsightly it has been deemed structurally sound.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school provides a range of information for young people, their parents and placing authorities prior to their arrival. The aims and objectives of the school are clearly documented in a Statement of Purpose that is regularly updated to reflect changes and developments. The Statement of Purpose is made available to parents/guardians and officers from placing authorities. Young people have also helped develop guides for both the main school and further education.

The school operates with a group of experienced and well motivated residential staff. There have been no new appointments since the last inspection. Staff are provided with job descriptions that details their role and responsibilities. All new staff are subject to a comprehensive induction procedure that provides them with the opportunity to spend time with each of the schools departments. The school has a comprehensive range of policies and procedures that are accessible to all staff. There is a culture of training and development within the staff team and an expectation that individuals will regularly update their knowledge and skills. Training opportunities are provided throughout the year. While all residential staff receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal, it is felt that nursing staff would benefit from independent clinical supervision. There are regular staff meetings and minutes taken. 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 confirmed they were well supported by senior staff. The Head of Care operates an open door policy and makes herself accessible to all staff.

Staffing levels are determined by the needs of the young people in each house. The head of each house manages the composition of staff on each shift and there are suitable arrangements in place to cover staff illness. 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 subject to a risk assessment process to ensure appropriate staffing levels.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good and staff advocate strongly on the part of young people to ensure they are not discriminated against because of their disabilities. Young people are introduced to other cultures via different foods, festivals and social activities.

The school is efficiently run by an experienced senior management team that is led by an enthusiastic head teacher. The management team is supported by an active governing body. Two sub-committees of the governing body monitor all aspects of the school. A designated governor undertakes monitoring visits of the residential units twice a term. The school has well established recording and accounting systems. Discussions with staff confirmed there are sufficient resources available to meet the needs of young people effectively. While the school has ambitious development plans, the bursar confirmed that realistic budgets have been set in response to the uncertainty associated with the current economic climate. The school has a high profile on the island and has established good relations with neighbours and members of the local community.

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 written records of medication dispensed contain a legible signature of the dispenser. (Standard 14.20).
- ensure that Ofsted is included in the list of bodies to be informed of all serious incidents or accidents within the school (Standard 7.2).
- access a suitably qualified individual to provide clinical supervision for nursing staff (Standard 30.2).