

St Catherine's School

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector Brian Mcquoid

School address St. Catherines School, Grove Road, VENTNOR, Isle of Wight, PO38 1TT
Telephone number 01983 852722
Email general@stcatherines.org.uk
Headteacher Dr Brendan Carleton

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Piccadilly Gate
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

St Catherine's is a non-maintained residential special school for the education of students aged between seven and 19, who have speech, language and communication needs. 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 while accommodation for Further Education students is provided in a number of residential units close to the school. At the time of this inspection there were 54 children on role, of whom 40 were residential pupils.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for residential pupils	good
Quality of residential provision and care	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	good
Leadership and management of the residential provision	good

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the school's residential provision is good with some outstanding aspects. The quality of care is excellent and residential pupils clearly benefit both socially and educationally from the experience of boarding. A sensitive and thorough induction process ensures the school is an appropriate placement, and the rigorous implementation and review of individualised plans enables pupils to make continued progress during their time at the school.
- The school makes good provision for ensuring the safety and well-being of residential pupils. Boarding houses provide an environment where pupils feel safe and the school makes excellent arrangements for ensuring pupils are safe while out in the community. Safeguarding training is provided for all staff annually and the school has a good working relationship with the local safeguarding board. There have been no incidents relating to child protection or pupils absconding since the previous inspection.
- Residential provision at the school is inclusive with pupils feeling fairly treated, having a voice, and enjoying positive relationships with each other and with the staff caring for them. Developing confidence, acquiring new interests and learning important life-skills are all areas where pupils achieve positive outcomes as a result of their residential experience. Care staff contribute extremely effectively to an integrated approach across the school to working with individual pupils, and play an important role in supporting pupils to make progress.
- Leadership and management of the residential provision is good and there are well established systems which ensure things run smoothly on a day to day basis. The care staff group operate very well as a supportive team and are well qualified and suitably experienced to meet the needs of the pupils they care for.

Provision for their learning and development is good and there is excellent support available to them at all times. Overall monitoring has improved significantly since the previous inspection and is now being used very effectively as a tool for driving forward improvement, and improving outcomes for pupils.

- The school maintains excellent links with the local and wider community which benefit pupils. Residential pupils are actively engaged in fundraising activities for the school and other charitable causes, and enjoy a very wide range of recreational pursuits. Healthcare arrangements at the school are excellent with a qualified nurse liaising with external health professionals as necessary and also successfully supporting the promotion of healthy lifestyles across the school.
- The recommendations from the previous report have been satisfactorily addressed. There are significant strengths across the school and no weaknesses which have a direct impact on the outcomes for residential pupils. There is one national minimum standard that the school is not fully compliant with, but this does not impact on outcomes for boarders.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils at the school are good. Boarding houses provide an inclusive environment where pupils are comfortable and feel safe. Their social development is enhanced by the experience of boarding and they enjoy positive relationships with their peers and with the staff caring for them. Pupils demonstrate a tolerance and respect of others, and feel that they have a voice both within their boarding house and the wider school. Pupils make good progress relating to their individual aims devised from their special educational needs statement, and attend and contribute to the reviewing process. Developing individual pupil's independence levels, and supporting them to acquire life-skills is an area of strength within the residential provision from which pupils benefit greatly. Going into the local town, using public transport, and travelling home to the mainland independently are all examples of objectives successfully achieved by pupils. The life-skills programme is wide ranging and operates according to the needs of individual pupils, including topics such as personal hygiene, relationships, jobs, money, preparing meals, and using household appliances.

Pupils feel positive about the school's healthcare arrangements; they report being encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and being able to access emotional support when they need to. Residential pupils engage in a variety of physical activities on a regular basis, including swimming, football and ice skating. Some also attend a local gym where they are members while a new fitness room within the school is soon to become operational. The school continues to have very good relationships with the local community. The local rotary club are actively involved with the school and the school is the local council's nominated charity of the year. Pupils benefit from well-established links with local colleges where they attend and from the school's

vocational centre which helps prepare them for the next stage of their life after St Catherine's.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of care provided for residential pupils at St Catherine's is outstanding. Arrangements for assessing prospective pupils are extremely thorough and new pupils receive excellent support as part of a comprehensive induction programme. Highly individualised care and support is provided for pupils by an extremely experienced and well qualified team of care staff. Excellent communication and close working relationships with education staff, the therapy team, and the school nurse, successfully support a sensitive and co-ordinated approach to meeting the individual needs of residential pupils. High quality plans for individual pupils are regularly reviewed and there is close co-operation with external agencies to ensure the physical and emotional needs of pupils are being successfully addressed. Pupils attend and contribute to their annual reviews and are involved as much as possible in planning for their care and devising individual aims and objectives. Excellent support and information is provided for pupils during drop-in sessions held regularly by the school nurse and during the school's personal, social and health education programme. Health care arrangements are overseen by the nurse and make excellent provision for pupils who are unwell and for the management and administration of medication.

Boarding is central to the school's operation and is an area of excellence. Accommodation of a very high standard is provided throughout and creates a homely environment for residential pupils. Consultation with pupils is an integral aspect of how the school operates and residential pupils have a strong voice within the school. The school councils operate extremely effectively in representing the views of all pupils across the school and representatives have successfully delivered a presentation to the governing body on their work. House meetings are chaired by residential pupils, providing opportunities to take on responsibility and showing clearly that pupils are actively involved in the running of individual boarding houses. Care staff support a number of pupils who are participating in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme and which provides them with excellent opportunities to further their personal development. Residential pupils participate in a wide range of activities both within the school and in the community which help pupils to develop skills and acquire new interests. Street dancing, camera club, cooking, art club, and girl guides are examples of this. Supporting pupils to develop their levels of independence and acquire life-skills is an area of strength within the school and which has seen care staff being creative in developing new ways of working.

Residential pupils' safety

The school makes good provision for ensuring the safety and well-being of residential pupils, and they report feeling safe there. Several senior staff are trained

in safer recruitment and procedures are being effectively implemented to ensure only suitable people are employed at the school. The welfare of pupils is paramount within the school and staff have a very good understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and safe working practices. Child protection training is provided for all staff as part of their induction and is regularly refreshed. Designated and specifically trained senior staff assume responsibility for child protection and have a well-established working relationship with the local safeguarding board. There have been no child protection related incidents at the school since the previous inspection and no reports of any pupil absconding. All pupils receive good information about keeping themselves safe, and this includes advice on safe use of the internet. A workshop on this subject was also held at the school for interested parents.

The overall standard of pupil behaviour at the school is excellent with staff adopting a positive and pro-active approach to managing individual behaviours, and routinely celebrating pupils' achievements. Residential pupils feel fairly treated by staff and the use of sanctions is at an extremely low level. Physical intervention is very rarely used with just one incident since the previous inspection of a year ago. Peer relationships within the residential provision are positive with pupils displaying a tolerance of others, and bullying not being a problem anywhere within the school. Residential pupils reported having a variety of people they can talk to if they felt unsafe or had any personal problems, and parents and placing authorities are confident that young people are being safely cared for at the school. The school's residential provision provides a suitably safe and secure environment for pupils and issues relating to health and safety have been addressed since the previous inspection. There is however a need to complete the implementation of recommendations resulting from a fire risk assessment carried out by an external specialist since the previous inspection. This does not have a significant impact on the safety of residential pupils.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Leadership and management of the school's residential provision are good with some outstanding aspects. Boarding is central to the school's operation and there are clear aims and objectives for residential pupils which are being met successfully. Well established operational systems are being effectively implemented and the school runs extremely smoothly on a day-to-day basis, providing a well ordered and safe community for pupils. Independent monitoring visits are carried out rigorously and being used very effectively to inform the school's development and to improve outcomes for residential pupils.

Staffing is a strength of the school with well qualified and highly experienced teams in each boarding house providing excellent care and support to individual pupils. Care staff have close working relationships with education and therapy staff across the school and contribute highly effectively to an integrated approach to working with pupils. Developing independence and acquiring life-skills are areas where care staff achieve significant success with pupils. Staffing levels across the residential provision are very good at all times and care staff receive excellent support. A

comprehensive induction programme and on-going training provides well for their personal development and ensures they are able to meet the diverse needs of individual pupils.

Parents and placing authorities have good communication with the school and have a high regard for the service provided. 'Parents are very impressed with the school' and, 'the school are very professional' were comments received from one placing officer. The school carries out annual surveys of parents and pupils and demonstrates a clear commitment to self-evaluation and continuing improvement. Separate councils for the school and the further education provision provide pupils with a very clear 'voice' within the school and are considered by them to be effective in bringing about change. In addition, a new initiative has seen staff from across the school spending time with individual pupils during the day to elicit their views and use the information provided to improve outcomes for them. Policies and procedures are easily accessible to staff and effectively support and promote good practice across the school. Individual case records are stored securely with pupils being able to contribute to them and to see visually the progress they are making. The school's principal has a high profile within the care setting and very much values the work that care staff do. Recommendations have been satisfactorily addressed and there has been noticeable improvement since the previous inspection.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- Implement all recommendations arising from the fire risk assessment.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



09/10/2012

Dear Students,

Inspection of St Catherine's School

My name is Brian and I am the Ofsted inspector who came to inspect your school's boarding provision recently. I thoroughly enjoyed my visit and I would like to thank you for your hospitality and your assistance during the inspection. Your welfare was the most important aspect of my inspection and I was pleased to find that you are being extremely well cared for and that you feel safe while boarding at St Catherine's. Staff in all departments across the school work very closely together to help you achieve positive outcomes in different areas of your lives and you have excellent individual support available to you. It was good to see the school councils working well to provide you with a voice within the school and I was impressed with how the Eco council was contributing to the environment. It was good to see the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme growing in popularity and that you still have strong links with the local community. There are numerous recreational activities available for you to take advantage of and care staff continue to do an excellent job of helping you to acquire life-skills. Healthy lifestyles are promoted across the school and the nurse works closely with staff to make sure you are well looked after and that your health needs are being addressed.

I found that the school's residential provision is being very well managed and is continuing to provide you with an excellent quality of care, and being totally supportive of your education and preparation for the future. I have made one recommendation to the school which will be included in my report and which I am sure will be available to you in due course. Many thanks again and best wishes for the future, Brian McQuoid.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Mcquoid