

St Catherine's School

St Catherine's School, Grove Road, VENTNOR, Isle of Wight PO38 1TT

Inspection dates

27/03/2017 to 29/03/2017

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding **1**

The quality of care and support

Outstanding 1

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Young people are at the centre of all practice within the school. They make outstanding progress through accessing the residential provision. Individualised plans ensure that social, emotional and educational needs are consistently supported. Young people make measurable progress in their independent social and living skills as well as in their speech and language, while using the residential provision.
- Young people's actions and demeanour demonstrate that they feel safe in the residential provision. Staff have an excellent understanding of each young person's vulnerabilities and do all they can to ensure that young people are safe. The school allows young people to take well-assessed and appropriate risks, for example young people are able to participate fully in activities within the school and community. Policies and procedures are robust and are updated in response to changes in national or local guidance, or incidents and concerns within the school.
- Disability is not a barrier to achievement. The school, in particular the residential provision, is a fully inclusive environment. All young people are able to make their views, wishes and feelings known. Staff are responsive to young people's ideas and make changes wherever feasible.
- Young people make outstanding progress while in the residential provision. They learn tolerance and respect for each other, and often make friends for the first time. Staff are positive role models and have extremely high aspirations for all young people in their care.
- The genuinely whole-school approach towards meeting the needs of young people is the main strength of the school. Staff communicate and work effectively with therapists and health professionals within the school in addition to external professionals and parents and carers. This ensures consistency and understanding of the changing needs of young people.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

Ensure that residential accommodation continues to be maintained and decorated to an acceptable standard.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was announced via telephone, to the head of school on the morning of the first day. On arrival, an initial meeting was held with the headteacher, head of care and business support manager. The inspector held discussions with residential care staff, the maintenance manager, therapists (occupational, and speech and language), a school nurse and a trustee. All residential areas were observed and visited during the inspection. The inspector also observed, and when appropriate took part in, activities with residential students in addition to meeting with them as a group and individually. The inspector held telephone discussions with the local authority designated officer and received emails from social workers. A range of documents and records were also examined during the inspection.

Inspection team

Jennie Christopher

Social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

St Catherine's School is a non-maintained residential special school for the education of students who have speech, language and communication needs and associated conditions, such as autistic spectrum disorders and attention deficit 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 a short walking distance from the school. The residential accommodation is currently provided in four houses on the St Catherine's school site with accommodation for sixth form students in a residential unit close to the school. An additional two-bedroomed cottage is utilised by students who are following post-19 programmes at local colleges. At the time of this visit there were 33 residential and 26 day pupils.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Young people make significant progress in relation to both their education, and social and emotional skills as a result of accessing the residential service. Staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of each young person's needs, and observed relationships were nurturing and respectful of each young person's skills, ability and understanding. A social worker commented on a child placed: 'I have seen first-hand how he is developing into a more rounded individual. He has become more confident and he is able to articulate more fully. This is in complete contrast to when I first worked with him.' The progress that young people have made varies from being able to use a toaster to travelling independently on public transport, including ferries to the mainland.

The extremely comprehensive life skills programme results in young people having better life chances and improved ability to manage as an adult. Residential staff are key to ensuring that young people have the skills and opportunities to progress in this area, and staff continually develop the programme to ensure that it allows for changes in culture and society. Additions to the programme include using online banking and different social media apps and platforms. Post-19 students, who are not yet ready to live independently, have the opportunity to prepare for this step through living in the offsite cottage. In this environment they experience a greater level of independence alongside support. They use public transport and attend college and clubs independently. A parent commented of their son that, 'In the post-19 provision he is progressing incredibly well. When he started sixth form he needed help to safely cross the road. Now he is independent around the Island, travelling alone on buses. He's even just started travelling alone on the ferries.'

The senior leaders within the school have ensured that robust procedures are in place to monitor the quality of the residential provision. They continually seek to improve the service and use a variety of monitoring tools to do this. For example, they assess their practice against the National Minimum Standards (NMS) and produce action plans in response to the probing and evaluative visits undertaken in line with NMS 20. This helps to ensure that young people's safety and positive wellbeing is central to all practice.

Young people have the opportunity to build strong friendships with their peers and trusting relationships with adults. They develop skills to tolerate and accept those they do not class as friends and are supported to understand how to be a good friend and form equitable relationships. Behaviour management is a key strength of the school and robust evaluation of patterns and trends allows for the prompt revision of behaviour management plans and strategies where appropriate. A multi-dimensional approach is in place across all school departments.

Young people's views are sought through a range of means. Young people have the opportunity to share their ideas on activities for the week in Monday meetings, and they have access to the student council and to periodic questionnaires initiated by the senior leadership management team. Most importantly, young people are confident in approaching staff to share ideas and raise any concerns that they may have.

The vast majority of young people are enthusiastic about the boarding provision and take part in the wide range of activities on offer. They relish the opportunity to spend time with their peers, especially when they have found relationships troubling or confusing in the past.

The residential provision affords young people privacy as they all have their own bedrooms and space to keep their possessions safe. While there is an ongoing programme of improvement and repair across the school, there are still residential areas which require some modernisation and redecoration.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Staff understand each young person's individual needs and consider these in all aspects of their care and support. Staff discuss young people's needs with them to ensure that assumptions are not made about their care requirements, skills and abilities. Young people who are new to the service have a comprehensive three-day assessment prior to being accepted, to ensure that the young person is sure that they would like to attend the school, and for the school to arrange to meet their needs. Those who move into the residential provision have a personalised induction, including identifying their current skills and areas for development, ensuring that they know their way around the unusual layout of the school and that they have items to personalise their bedrooms with. Young people say they like their rooms and that they can bring items from home to make them their space. Young people say that they are able to relax in their rooms or other areas of the residential provision, and are enthusiastic about the games and leisure equipment available to them. A parent commented that, 'My son has thrived at this school and has made more progress than we ever could have hoped for.'

Young people have access to governors and trustees if they do not feel that the staff in the school can help them. There are several displays identifying who they can contact, including national helplines and listening services.

Joint working across the school is outstanding. Young people benefit from comprehensive, bespoke packages of care which reach across all aspects of school, their learning and life skills. The school provides a genuine 24-hour curriculum. Programmes are devised in close liaison with speech and language therapists (SALT), the occupational therapists, and other key staff in education and residential areas of the school. Residential staff are key to implementing programmes and packages of support for young people, and for assessing their baselines to identify the progress that young people have made. Residential staff are confident in approaching the therapies team with questions about how to better support or empower young people who may struggle with various aspects of their lives. Weekly multi-disciplinary team meetings ensure that everyone who is supporting the young person across the school day are aware of current plans, any progress that the young person has made, and any difficulties that the young person may be experiencing. Parents acknowledge the result of joint working, with one commenting, 'Boarding is invaluable for developing our daughter's life skills. Much attention is given by the teaching staff, the care staff and therapists, all working in tandem.' Post-19 students benefit from occupational therapy and speech and language therapists working directly with them, alongside the staff who support them and the local college they attend to enhance their independence and life skills. An example

includes breaking down the task of cleaning paintbrushes for a young person who is undertaking a painting and decorating course. Goals are set and monitored through termly reviews, but they can be modified at any time if it is deemed to be in the young person's best interests.

Young people's plans are comprehensive and they are separated into areas they need to develop or work on. The overall care plan is basic, but it links to other plans such as medical, speech and language, and occupational therapies and behaviour management plans. This provides staff with all the information they need to support young people effectively and consistently. As far as possible, young people are involved in devising their own plans and in considering their next goals and targets. Plans are reviewed at least termly, but also in line with statutory reviews or changes in their presenting needs.

In addition to joint working across all school departments, staff have excellent relationship with parents, who are welcome to visit at any time. Their views and comments are welcomed and staff always seek to make improvements where necessary and to work in cooperation with parents and carers. Plans to manage specific behaviours are shared, and successes are celebrated with families, including invites to ceremonies and assemblies where awards and certificates are presented for academic progress alongside acts of kindness and demonstrations of community spirit. There are signed displays around the school and residential areas which assist young people to express how they are feeling. They set the arrow and staff direct them to an activity that will assist them to regulate themselves. With guidance from occupational and speech therapists, individuals have programmes for the use of weighted blankets or scarves, access to pull up bars, running and other physical activities, or the use of quiet spaces to withdraw and relax.

Young people are encouraged to understand healthy lifestyles and what this means for them. Various displays around the school and residential areas identify what is healthy eating. Some young people are involved in the sugar swap challenge and were observed discussing what they could buy instead of doughnuts. All meals are freshly prepared in school and those who are cooking independently are taught about what a healthy option is, but also to have treats in moderation. The range of activities on offer promotes physical and emotional wellbeing through engagement. Young people access a range of clubs on and off site, such as sea cadets and Scouts, with a group within school. Speech and language therapists have engaged staff and young people in learning the Scout promise in sign language so that they found it easier to join in the group. Other activities include football, swimming, and arts and crafts. Those who are assessed to have met the accepted level of independence can visit the local town to access shops or the beach and, when deemed able, to swim in the sea. They may take the bus to other parts of the island to access clubs and activities or socialise with friends. Parents enthuse about the progress that their children have made, with one stating, 'Our son is thriving and growing in confidence, learning strategies for life that are totally appropriate to his individual needs.'

Medication is stored safely within the residential areas and administered according to protocols. The school nurses monitor medication ordering, storage and administration through weekly audits. The nursing team are currently devising a new system to improve the procedures and monitoring of the process, including new record sheets and easier-

to-access health plans and consents for treatment. The nursing team effectively liaises with other professionals, including supporting young people and their parents or carers to attend specialist appointments, in addition to arranging routine appointments for those who are registered with local doctors and dentists. Staff have the necessary skills to meet specific medical and health needs for young people, and their competency is regularly reviewed by the nursing team.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Young people live in a safe and supportive environment with an open and honest culture. Staff are acutely aware of each young person's vulnerabilities and work effectively to protect them from harm, particularly in relation to risks posed in the community or online, without restricting their ability to function as an adolescent and progress to independence. Staff receive regular supervision where they agree any concerns, although all say that they would not wait until a supervision session to do this. All safeguarding concerns are reported to the local authority designated officer or children's services as required. The designated officer is confident in the school's processes and feels that they will report all concerns as needed. The school is swift to act if it is concerned about the welfare and/or protection of a young person.

Staff have benefitted from training in sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and radicalisation in addition to their annual safeguarding training. They are confident about the procedures to follow should they be concerned about a young person, including who to contact outside of the school should they feel that the response is not sufficiently robust. The policy in relation to safeguarding is constantly reviewed and is currently in the process of being updated to make access to information on sexual exploitation easier; previously it was via a separate hyperlink. Close liaison with the local authority designated officer also means that staff are provided with training to inform them about his role, and to ensure that they have a clear understanding of safeguarding and child protection from the local authority perspective. The local specialist police officer for public protection is also in close contact with the school, and has held sessions with young people regarding e-safety and keeping safe online.

All young people identified adults who they would go to if they were worried or upset, and they also know that there are others who they can contact, such as any trustee or governor. The independent listener has recently moved out of area, and the school is seeking to appoint a replacement. In the meantime, the NMS 20 visitor has made herself available for this role, and her contact details are displayed in the residential areas. The governor who is charged with safeguarding monitoring works closely with the designated safeguarding lead, and monitors her actions and processes. Additionally, the governor advocates and supports her in the case of serious incidents.

Young people rarely go missing from the school. In the only instance since the last inspection, a coordinated response meant that staff were searching for the young person as soon as it was noted that they had gone missing from the school site. The school have reviewed their processes and procedures with advice from the local police, and have updated their policy further in light of this advice.

Bullying is not tolerated within the school. Although many students raise it as a concern,

they also say that staff manage it really well and do not allow it to continue. Joint working with SALT and occupational therapy results in specific plans to support young people with friendships and relationships, and to understand how their interactions are read by others. With regards to sexual relationship advice, bespoke packages are devised in conjunction with the therapies team to be used by key residential staff to prompt discussion about what positive relationships are and how to keep safe and be respectful to each other.

Young people do not have specific risk assessments for day-to-day tasks. However, the life skills programme is implicitly clear on what young people are able to do and what protective factors are still required. Risk assessments for trips and activities are robust and are completed prior to any new activity. The school is not risk averse, and with careful consideration appropriately allows young people various freedoms, including being able to go into the sea under supervision and travel around the island. Young people say that they really like this.

Young people know what is expected of them and that boundaries are clear. Staff are consistent in their approach and responses to unwanted behaviour and sanctions are fair and proportionate. Young people have the opportunity to reflect on their behaviour and consider what could be done differently next time. Young people's views are reflected in their plans.

Safer recruitment is practised within the school, including a range of pre-employment checks and verifications of identity and references. There is no policy on how regularly to check disclosure and barring checks, which would be beneficial, although the process followed is in line with national guidance. Governors actively scrutinise safer recruitment practices in line with their standard monitoring.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The residential provision is well managed and led by a head of care with many years' experience in residential special schools. Staff say that they can contact her at any time, and that senior leaders are available and visible for them to approach with any questions, queries or concerns. Staff across the residential team feel that they are listened to, including night staff who are invited to join meetings, activities and trips out with young people. A parent commented that 'Staff have a fantastic 'can do' attitude, working out what they need to do to make things happen.'

All staff have high aspirations for young people. They are fully aware of the ethos and aims of the residential provision, and ensure that these are translated into the day-to-day practice and quality service that young people receive. Through the consistent application of this ethos, young people are helped to reach their goals, and often exceed expectations. There is a high ratio of staff, ensuring safety and ensuring that young people have access to an adult if they need to. The team is stable, with many members of staff having been in post for several years. Staff are well trained and most hold or are working towards level 3 qualifications, with senior staff having achieved level 5 qualifications.

Leaders inspire staff to work effectively as a team and to develop their skills in order to

improve the experiences for young people. The leadership team is visible in the residential setting and leads by example. Staff are enthusiastic in their roles and are encouraged to think creatively in their care for young people. Staff benefit from challenging supervision which develops their thinking and skills. Shortfalls are challenged effectively and annual appraisals identify areas for continued development. Appraisal is a shared process that staff feel part of. Training needs are routinely identified and the needs of young people are central to decisions about which training will be undertaken. Staff have an excellent understanding of young people's needs and are supported by the therapies team and external training providers to develop the right skills to meet young people's needs. Training undertaken in the last year includes understanding obsessive compulsive disorder and anxiety, epilepsy, sexual health, e-safety, and understanding mental health.

The leadership team constantly monitors the quality of care provided within the residential service. The head of care has made wide ranging changes since her appointment. She liaises with others in similar roles and keeps up to date with changes in the field. All staff with specialist roles are afforded the time to continue to develop their skills and share developments in practice with the whole team. Improvements are rolled out in a clear and measured way, enabling staff to adapt to changes in care or recording practices, and to understand why changes are being made. The team continually reviews and improves practice to ensure that young people are helped to be as independent as possible.

Feedback from young people is key to changes within the school, and their ideas and complaints are taken very seriously. Where possible and feasible, changes are made in response to their views. All young people's complaints are responded to individually and the process is clear and young person friendly. The head of care actively monitors how well the process is working and the ease of use for young people. She adjusts the forms and process accordingly, taking careful account of advice from the therapies team. Policies and procedures are unambiguous and direct staff clearly. They are regularly reviewed and updated in line with new initiatives or local and national guidance.

Monitoring in line with NMS 20 is robust. Reports are appropriately critical and challenging, when necessary. Any shortfalls or areas for improvement are followed up at the next visit. The trustee who undertakes these visits and produces the reports also engages other trustees and governors in the visits. This ensures that different perspectives and views about the residential areas inform the reports. For the academic year ending July 2016, an action plan was put in place to address any areas that required improvement as a result of the visits. Records confirm that actions have been completed. An ongoing action plan for this academic year identifies what tasks have already been undertaken and what is yet to be completed.

Leaders within the school ensure close liaison within the school, and also engage well with parents, social workers and other health professionals as needed. Leaders are eager to learn from joint working and from what has worked well, to enable them to further improve. The school provides a warm community experience for young people where they are part of the local town and parents are welcomed. A parent said, 'The partnership between school, college, parents and young people has been total and continues to go beyond the professional in the enthusiasm shown for supporting our

son's needs.'

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	118226
Social care unique reference number	SC012597
DfE registration number	921/7000

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.

Type of school	Residential special school
Number of boarders on roll	33
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 19
Headteacher	Rachel Weldon
Date of previous boarding inspection	30/11/2015
Telephone number	01983 852 722
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