

# Inspection of an outstanding school: St Vincent's School – A Specialist School for Sensory Impairment and Other Needs

Yew Tree Lane, West Derby, Liverpool, Merseyside L12 9HN

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Inspection dates:

31 January to 2 February 2023

## Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

## What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils very much enjoy coming to St Vincent's School. They like being with their friends and they enjoy the warm relationships that they have with teachers and leaders. Pupils feel safe in the school. They told inspectors that if anything is worrying them, they can tell an adult and they know that they will get the help that they need. Staff care for pupils well.

Leaders and other members of staff expect pupils always to do their best in their work. Pupils respond positively to these high expectations. They work hard and typically achieve well, successfully overcoming the barriers that their needs present with the strong support that staff provide.

Staff at the school have equally high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils understand how they should behave in class and around the school. Most pupils show strong self-control and good manners. Occasionally, some pupils' needs can result in lapses in their behaviour. However, staff respond calmly and skilfully to manage these rare occurrences. There are few incidents of bullying, but, when they happen, leaders deal with them promptly and effectively.

Pupils have access to a broad range of experiences beyond their formal learning. For example, they take part in activities related to climate issues, including cultivating and distributing their own wildflower seeds. They have links with schools in other countries, such as Ethiopia.

## **What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?**

There is a broad range of subjects and themes which make up the school's curriculum. Leaders have a clear focus on equipping pupils and students in the sixth form with the knowledge and experiences that they need to be as successful as possible when they leave the school for the next stage in their life journey. Most subjects are well designed. Leaders are certain about what pupils should learn and in what order. However, in a few subjects, the content of the learning and the order in which it will be taught to pupils in the primary phase are not as clear as they should be. This prevents pupils in these subjects building up their knowledge over time as strongly as they could.

Most teachers have a strong knowledge of the subjects that they teach and have specific qualifications to teach pupils who are visually impaired. There is effective support for the small number of teachers who are developing their knowledge. All teachers have effective ways to assess how much pupils know and understand. Leaders carry out checks on pupils' knowledge when they first join the school. This enables teachers to pinpoint the gaps in what pupils can do, and work out how best to address them. Teachers are skilful at using a variety of resources to adapt the learning to match pupils' needs. They keep a constant check on pupils in lessons to make sure that they understand what they are learning.

Pupils and students in the sixth form achieve well. The support that leaders and other staff provide ensures that pupils develop increasing independence in their time at the school. By the time pupils leave the school, usually all of them have useful qualifications and go on to further education, employment or training which matches their needs and interests. Sometimes, students in the sixth form go on to study at university.

Reading is well organised and of high priority in the school. Leaders check pupils' reading ability when they start at the school, including their phonics knowledge. Pupils in key stage 1 start to learn phonics quickly. Leaders also ensure that older pupils, including students in the sixth form, receive phonics lessons if they need them. Teachers deftly adapt the teaching of phonics to incorporate the use of Braille or enlarged print to enable pupils to access reading. Pupils develop strong fluency and accuracy as they progress through the school.

There are effective methods to identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders help pupils quickly. They use a range of means to support pupils, including commissioning services such as educational psychology or occupational therapy. The support that leaders provide contributes effectively to pupils with SEND achieving well.

There are few examples of pupils' misbehaviour leading to learning being disturbed. A small number of pupils with more-complex needs sometimes become distracted from their learning. However, teachers and support staff are highly skilled in managing these situations. Most pupils show strong self-control, which contributes well to how effectively they are able to learn.

Leaders provide high-quality careers guidance, which is tailored to the needs and interests of pupils. Leaders are keenly aware of the particular barriers that pupils with a visual impairment meet, so they provide information about career paths that pupils will find most appropriate to their needs. Pupils also benefit from a wide range of activities that go beyond their academic learning. These include taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and visits to the Palace of Westminster. There are also opportunities to visit organisations such as the United Nations.

The governing body has a secure knowledge of the purpose and ethos of the school. Governors understand their roles and responsibilities. Minutes from meetings show that they discuss matters to hold school leaders to account. However, the depth of challenge to leaders is not recorded as clearly as it could be.

Staff told inspectors that school leaders are thoughtful about their welfare. Leaders are approachable and supportive. Staff said that leaders will listen to any concerns that they may have and act upon them.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There are comprehensive policies in place which inform the safeguarding processes in the school. Staff have been well trained and are knowledgeable about how to report and record any safeguarding concerns. Staff know pupils well. Leaders respond promptly and give pupils the help that they need. Leaders know which external services to consult, such as the local children's social care team, if required, although there are no instances in school where this has been necessary.

Leaders provide pupils with valuable information about how to stay safe. For example, pupils learn how to avoid harm when using the internet. They also find out about healthy relationships.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- In a few subjects in key stage 1 and key stage 2, the knowledge that leaders want pupils to gain and the order in which it will be taught are not clear enough. This means that in these subjects pupils do not develop a secure enough knowledge on which they can build their future learning. Leaders should make sure that, in all subjects, they carefully design the content and the order of the curriculum, so that pupils can build their learning as effectively as possible.

## Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in June 2012.

## How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

## Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	104734
<b>Local authority</b>	Liverpool
<b>Inspection number</b>	10211003
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Non-maintained special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	5 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	48
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	14
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Bernadette Buckle
<b>Principal</b>	John Patterson
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.stvin.com">www.stvin.com</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	9 November 2016, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- St Vincent's School is a non-maintained residential special school for pupils and students with visual impairment and other sensory needs. Some pupils have additional needs, such as autism spectrum disorder.
- Leaders do not use any alternative providers.
- A new chair of the governing body has recently been appointed.

## Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the residential provision.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in these subjects: English, including early reading, mathematics and food technology. In each subject, they met with the subject leader and teachers. They visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about their learning. The lead inspector listened to pupils reading to members of staff. He also spoke with subject leaders about the curriculum in other subjects.
- Inspectors spoke with the principal, other school leaders, the chair of the governing body and a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors scrutinised the school's safeguarding policy and related policies and documentation. They looked at a range of other documents linked to pupils' welfare and their education. They talked with leaders, staff and pupils about safeguarding and about pupils' wider experiences of school. Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- Inspectors analysed responses to Ofsted Parent View. There were no responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys.

### **Inspection team**

Mark Quinn, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Dawn Platt

Ofsted Inspector

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