

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

A safe, nurturing and caring environment means that young people's needs are holistically met and they are flourishing at this school. Staff ensure that, where possible, young people's aspirations can be fulfilled. For example, one young person aspired to play football for England. He is now part of the Paralympic team and has travelled abroad to represent his country. Another young person wants to be a musician and has recently released his first music track. Staff regularly discuss young people's ambitions and how they can work together to make sure that every opportunity is explored to achieve their goals. A young person said, 'It is instilled throughout the school and the residential setting that we can do anything. There is no such word as can't.'

Young people thoroughly enjoy their stays in the residential setting because they have time to spend with friends, to try different activities and to challenge themselves to become more independent. Parents value greatly the caring and trusting relationships that their children have with staff. Parents said that the progress of their children is 'fantastic'. They see their children grow in confidence, build their self-esteem and become increasingly independent. Compliments from parents and carers about how well the residential setting cares for and supports their children include:

- 'His progress is wonderful to see. It is all the things we wanted for him and more. He is thriving. He will be able to be independent in years to come.'
- 'He wants to live with his friends when he goes to university and then to live independently in his own home. We now believe this can happen because he is increasing in confidence and self-esteem. He knows that the staff will catch him if he falls and will help him to overcome problems.'
- 'My son has achieved so much and is making excellent progress in so many ways. I am so proud as a parent to see my son so happy. He has grown up to be a kind and confident young man.'
- 'He has blossomed and the change in his confidence is startling. To send him here was the best decision we have made.'

Young people's enjoyment and sense of belonging are reflected in the requests that they make to increase their time in the residential setting. Overnight stays are flexible and are tailored to individual needs. This includes additional overnight stays on a weekend for young people to attend choir concerts and music exams. This is extremely important, especially for the young people who live a long distance away.

The young people enjoy varied enrichment opportunities. They have a reverse inclusion afternoon and a scouts evening. This is when other young people who do not attend the school come into the school and the residential setting to join in

activities and projects. This is used as an excellent opportunity to work with children from other backgrounds so that residential pupils can share their skills and expertise and challenge others' attitudes to visually impaired young people or those with a disability. A young person said, 'We give them an understanding of our world and what we can achieve.' The reverse inclusion project has been recognised nationally for its innovative approach and the school is to receive an award from a member of the royal family.

A key strength of the school is the commitment to working with other schools locally as well as across the United Kingdom and around the world to improve outcomes for young people with a visual impairment. The school draws on its knowledge to empower others and is seen as a centre for excellence. Currently, a group of visually impaired young people are visiting from another country and are staying in the residential accommodation. These young people are learning new ideas and skills from the residential pupils that they will be able to implement when they return home to their own country. A young person from the residence said, 'It is good that the other children are here. Things are very different for them in their country. They don't all have all the support that we do.' This indicates that young people have empathy and an understanding of the challenges that other young people face in the wider world.

Several young people have a keen interest in music. Some young people have successfully sat music exams and have advanced through the exam grades for playing instruments such as the piano. Many of the young people are proud of their choir and regularly sing at events across the city. In addition to this, the choir has given several performances that have been televised. Young people told the inspectors how this enriches their lives, helps them to interact with the public and helps them with their confidence and independence.

Young people's culture and diversity are celebrated. For example, one young person was unable to go home to celebrate a religious occasion so the staff and the residential young people celebrated this with him. Another young person had previously experienced racial discrimination outside of the school setting. He was supported to put his story into a comic book format. This has been printed. It shows his experience and raises awareness for others. He has also been asked to speak at several professional conferences to raise awareness about hate crime. One young person said, 'It is good to be different and what would the world be like if we were all the same.' There is a zero acceptance of bullying and staff strongly challenge any form of discrimination.

Young people are exceptionally well supported to be as independent as possible. This includes learning to manage their personal care needs and other activities of daily life such as doing their own laundry, ironing and preparing meals and snacks. One young person selects her own clothes by feeling the different fabrics. The young person said that this has helped her to be ready in the mornings. This was something she had previously struggled with. Young people learn to travel independently on buses, taxis and trains. This is designed to their individual needs and takes account of

where they live and what public transport is available to them in order to encourage their mobility in their home communities. Since the last inspection, the residential setting has improved the living areas. One group area is now for young people who are more independent and preparing to move on. The young people are still supported by staff but from a distance. Accordingly, the staff sensitively help when necessary while providing the autonomy for young people to take control and to make decisions for themselves. One young person said, 'My confidence has grown because staff don't fuss around me, as family do, but let me try and say it's OK to make a mistake.'

The excellent work undertaken with young people regarding their independence skills has opened a wide range of career opportunities to them. Some young people are looking forward to going to college, higher education or into apprenticeships. The young people aspire to be musicians, actors, to work with animals or to work within social media.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

Young people told the inspectors that they feel safe and that they understand what to do if they have any concerns. Excellent safeguarding practice means nothing is missed. This allows the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) to take effective action to support young people and their families. There is excellent communication between parents and carers to ensure that staff have the most up-to-date information on all young people.

The DSL is a very reflective practitioner and knows that there are emerging concerns in the wider communities from where young people come and to which they may be exposed. As such, she has identified that the residential care staff need more training regarding issues such as county lines and child criminal exploitation. This is planned in the next few months. In the short term, staff have been proactive in accessing information from the intranet to support their learning and understanding in these areas.

All staff, regardless of their individual roles, undertake safeguarding training to enable them to identify and report concerns. Safeguarding practice is an intrinsic part of the school life. However, the school leaders and staff are not risk-averse and want their young people to explore and take part in the same opportunities as any other young person. This means that young people get to explore and to participate in an extensive range of opportunities that they would not be able to access at home or in mainstream school, such as free running.

Young people gain a greater understanding of the world around them. There has been some outstanding work completed on knife crime and e-safety by two young people who have collaborated, with staff support, to produce a song and a comic book based on challenging and responding to hate crime in a positive way. This work has been exceptionally well received and has significantly raised awareness of these

issues among young people inside and outside of the school, as well as with the wider public and professionals. This initiative has empowered young people to share their experiences and is helping them to take control of as many aspects of their lives as possible.

Young people are taking more responsibility for their medication. The nurse completes individual sessions with the young people to equip them with the skills necessary to competently self-medicate. In addition to this, staff have completed training about young people's emotional well-being. This will enhance current work being completed around safe relationships, gender identity and self-esteem.

Risk assessments identify the times when young people are likely to struggle emotionally, behaviourally or with their mobility. However, these are generic, for example all young people are assessed for physical or verbal aggression. Most of the young people do not display these behaviours. Therefore, some assessments are not sufficiently individualised to fully reflect specific issues. This is a relatively minor recording issue as it is offset by the staff's in-depth knowledge of each young person. There has been no use of physical intervention or incidents of young people being missing from the residential setting. There are clear protocols to follow that are fully understood by all staff, in the event that either should occur.

Health and safety are managed exceptionally well in the residential setting. The young people take part in fire evacuation drills, so that they know what action to take if a fire occurs. Recruitment procedures are exceedingly thorough and meet the required standard. In addition, all visitors to the residential setting must provide photographic identification and are fully supervised while there.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The leadership team has created an environment in which every young person matters and can achieve to their full potential. The residential staff provide excellent levels of bespoke care and guidance so that young people can succeed and flourish. The residence continues to be a crucial part of school life. It is valued by young people, their parents, governors and teachers alike.

The residential staff are suitably experienced. Most of the staff have a recognised childcare qualification or equivalent. However, two members of staff have not registered for the relevant qualification. Mandatory training is completed before new staff start working and this is refreshed regularly. As a result, staff have the skills and knowledge to care for the young people exceptionally well. Staff report that they are fully supported through regular reflective supervision and team meetings.

The young people's files and information have improved. The files have been revamped to only include relevant information. Young people now complete a social story that allows the reader to get a sense of their family life, strengths, as well as their developmental objectives and aspirations. Young people set their own targets

for improvement. However, these could be further improved by including smaller steps to attain their targets.

The governing body plays a vital role in the monitoring of the residential setting. Previously, its reports were based mainly on observation. However, a new format has been implemented, so that governors interact and ask young people pertinent questions about their care. This approach is now reflected in the governors' report, which offers increased scrutiny of the care provided and which has given the governors a clearer insight into the care planning, interaction and progress of the young people. The governors are knowledgeable about the issues affecting visually impaired young people and are enthusiastic and dedicated advocates for the ongoing development of the service. They listen to the young people and respond appropriately, for example in sourcing additional play equipment, such as a summer house and swings.

The headteacher and head of care share their knowledge and practice with other schools and more widely. Their vision is to improve the life chances of all young people with a visual impairment. They have high expectations for both young people and staff and are open to new ideas and innovation.

The head of care's accurate self-evaluation clearly demonstrates a continuous drive for improvement. She understands the areas of strength and future areas that she would like to develop. The independent visitor provides a thorough oversight that challenges the head of care to continually look at how they can develop the service. This constructive approach allows the head of care to monitor progress and to make continued improvements in practice.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure that all staff have attained a minimum level three qualification or have a qualification that demonstrates the same competencies. (National minimum standard 19.2)
- Ensure that young people's placement plans are regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. (National minimum standard 21.1)

This is specifically in relation to showing the young person's starting point and the steps taken to ensure positive outcomes.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC040724

Headteacher/teacher in charge: John Patterson

Type of school: Residential Special School

Telephone number: 0151 2289968

Email address: office@stvin.com

Inspectors

Pam Nuckley, social care regulatory inspector (lead)

Chris Scully, social care regulatory inspector



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
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W: <http://www.gov.uk/ofsted>

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