

St Vincent's School

St Vincent's School, a specialist school for sensory impairment and other needs
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

St Vincent's school for children who have sensory impairments and other needs is a registered charity governed by the board of trustees of the Catholic Blind Institute. St Vincent's has specialist school status and offers a curriculum for children who have all levels of visual impairment, as well as additional needs. The school is in a residential area with the accommodation being split into two separate areas. The school caters for pupils between the ages of five and 18 years. The school provides residential places for up to 22 pupils on weekdays in term time, with a maximum of 18 staying per night. There is a large range of residential options available, depending on the individual needs of the child. The residential provision was last inspected on 21 February 2018.

Inspection dates: 27 to 29 November 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 21 February 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- All leaders and managers act as role models who promote an ambitious vision and have high expectations about what young people can achieve.
- Young people are not defined by their visual impairment, but by what they can and do achieve.
- Direct feedback from young people, parents and external professionals about the quality of care and the difference it makes to young people is overwhelmingly positive.
- Young people receive bespoke care packages that meet their diverse needs exceptionally well. As a result, they are flourishing and are making sustained progress across all areas of their development.
- Staff build and foster respectful and meaningful relationships with the parents and carers. Excellent communication between parents, carers, the school and the residential provision means that nothing is missed for the young people.
- A key strength of the provision is the emphasis on encouraging young people to be as independent as possible. This is significantly enhancing their future life opportunities and employability.
- The work undertaken to promote inclusion and to raise other people's awareness of visually impaired children, young people and adults is outstanding.
- Young people experience notable success. This significantly improves their self-esteem and emotional well-being and prepares them for positive and independent futures.
- Safeguarding practice is exemplary and is interwoven into everything that the school does.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Improve further the quality of the evaluation in the monitoring of the residential provision to assist leaders with the key priorities for improvement and development.
- Ensure that all records are recorded to the same high standard so that they tell the story of the young person's journey within the care provision.
- Further develop the new independence group's communal areas with regards to the carpeting and decor.

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

Recommendations

- Enhance the decor in the Caulfield group communal areas.
- Enhance further the monitoring by governors to ensure that their reports are evaluative and clearly identify any shortfalls.
- Ensure that all records are of consistently high quality and tell the story of the young person's journey.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

All young people thoroughly enjoy the residential experience. Most only stay for one night each week and they achieve much in that short time. Staff help them to build on the excellent progress they make in school. Young people make outstanding progress in learning social and practical independence skills. They explore how to be independent of their families in a safe and nurturing environment. This prepares them well for their future adult lives.

Direct feedback from young people, parents and external professionals about the quality of care and the difference it makes to young people is overwhelmingly positive. Young people referred to the staff as being 'amazing', 'brilliant', and that they are 'good to be with'.

Young people enjoy extremely trusting relationships with the staff. A young person said, 'I don't think I could find anyone better to look after me, even if I searched all of Liverpool'.

Parents universally reported that their children make great progress in developing confidence and skills in looking after themselves. A parent said: 'It really highlighted the need for my child to change schools, as in four short stays their confidence has gone through the roof. They have smiled non-stop and felt empowered to be the best they can. We have found the perfect place for our child.' Another parent said: 'It's been brilliant since he started. [My son] is now more sociable and he has friends. He now has his independence. He loves it and the staff are brilliant with him.'

A holistic approach to learning underpins the excellent progress young people are making in their education, social and emotional development and their practical independence. This is supported exceptionally well, by staff who have an excellent understanding of each young person's diverse needs. Young people relish the opportunities to try new things and take pride in their achievements, no matter how small. A young person said, 'I don't have to fit into school, they fit around me.'

Young people learn coping strategies and build emotional resilience. Staff are highly skilled in offering just the right amount of support to allow young people to overcome their difficulties and to have time to learn from their experience. A young person said, 'Staff have helped me to get it right, and it doesn't matter how many times I try.' As a result, young people have a strong 'can do' ethos and do not let their disability define them.

Staff have high expectations for what young people can achieve. Throughout their limited time in the residential service, young people learn new skills, including: understanding the local community; developing independence skills such as personal care, shopping and cooking; as well as building their confidence to travel

independently and to participate in a wide range of activities, such as Scouting. These considerable achievements help them to demonstrate their potential and improve their positive reputation and chances of success when applying for college or internships.

Young people said that the new independence group in the Caulfield accommodation is helping them to develop the skills that they need to be able to live successfully away from home. Young people were instrumental in reopening the group ahead of schedule, as they recognised the importance of this for their ongoing development. Consequently, they are thriving here and are becoming increasingly confident in their abilities, such as cooking their evening meals, planning and budgeting. Young people said that this was an excellent opportunity and a safe place to practise their skills, to make mistakes and to learn from them.

Staff are very creative in how they organise the young people's stays so that they can stay with their friends. Extended day activities are meticulously planned so that all young people gain the most from them. A day pupil said that their main goal, given that they were now settled in school, was to be able to stay over, because they now had 'real friends' and wanted to spend more time with them. The care staff are working with the family and young person to try to make this happen.

Inclusion is a key strength of the school. Staff are highly skilled at enabling children and young people to overcome barriers to their participation in events and activities. The school encourages people to step into the young people's world and experience things through their eyes. To this end, the school takes every opportunity to educate others about the school and what the young people are achieving here. An excellent example of this is the work being undertaken with Scouting groups in the local area. Inspectors observed an innovative and interactive evening whereby young people showed young scouts what it was like to have a visual impairment. This led to many interesting discussions among the group and gave the scouts a valuable insight into the lives and experiences of young people who have a visual impairment.

Staff are highly skilled in adapting their communication style as they talk and engage with different young people. They seamlessly change their interactions based on the needs of the young person. This means that the young person's 'voice' is heard and their wishes are acted on. Staff understand the subtle nuances that a smile or look from a young person can mean and respond appropriately. One young person said, 'I think I get more opportunities here to express myself than I do at home.'

Young people are well prepared for the next stages in their lives, whether this is preparing for employment or further education. Excellent links with a variety of organisations successfully open the world of employment to young people. This enables them to secure internships with companies and to progress in their chosen field. An example of excellent practice is the young people's work to create ceramic poppies and art installations, which are being placed in some of Liverpool's historic buildings.

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

Exemplary safeguarding practice means that young people have a strong sense of safety and well-being. A young person said, 'I am happy, safe and looked after well. This is my second home'. The setting is not risk-averse, as staff actively encourage young people to take a chance on trying new things safely.

Staff are adept at identifying young people's talents and utilising these effectively to build on the young person's confidence and skills. For example, one young person carefully directed the group around the city of Berlin. Others planned the routes on the London Underground during a trip to Westminster to meet ministers. This significantly enhanced the young people's confidence and skills. Young people said that because of the trip they felt 'special' and 'important'. Parents and staff are extremely proud of the young people's achievements. Parents commented on how their children had spoken to ministers and how excited they had been to relay this information to their families.

Staff understand the increased vulnerability of disabled young people. The training that they receive contributes to this knowledge. They act quickly to report any concerns that they may have, and these are escalated promptly to external professionals when necessary. Parents confirmed that they are routinely informed of any incidents. All staff can articulate clearly the factors that contribute to an increased risk of abuse.

Excellent work is being carried out with the young people in school that is being fully supported during care time. This includes work on anti-bullying and learning about the dangers of knife crime. One young person has written a song about knife crime, highlighting the dangers associated with this.

Young people do not go missing from the residence. This is because of the excellent levels of sensitive supervision by staff. Young people are very aware of the dangers that they may face if they were to get lost from staff. Staff are also fully aware of the action to take if this occurred. Young people's risk assessments do not reflect the specific risks for individual young people as they are a generic document. However, this is a recording issue and the risk is minimised because staff have an excellent understanding of the diverse and individual needs of each young person.

Young people know how to keep themselves and their friends safe. They talk knowledgeably about bullying, the forms this can take and what to do if they are worried about anything. Young people confirmed that they have trusted adults who they can talk to and that they would not hesitate to tell the staff, a friend or their family if they were worried. Their understanding was further enhanced as they have all worked towards their 'friendship badge' during their Scouting activities. This collaborative working increased young people's awareness of the world around them and how to navigate it safely.

Staff want young people to experience exciting and new situations safely. They are highly skilled in promoting positive choices and sharing techniques that young people can use to help them to stay calm. A young person said that the staff are very good at recognising when he is becoming anxious; staff talk to him about it and offer other things for him to do. This helps the young person to relax and take stock of the situation. As a result, the young person is learning to control their anxieties. Because of the consistent messages that young people hear from staff, they can reflect on past experiences and move on from them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

All leaders and managers are inspirational and enthusiastic. They all want the very best for young people and no problem is insurmountable. The school is a beacon for success.

Leaders and managers have high expectations of their staff to change, challenge and improve the lives of the children and young people they are caring for. They have created a dynamic and inspirational environment where young people can grow and gain an extensive range of new skills. Ultimately, young people receive the highest quality of care and support and enjoy a seamless journey through school and residence.

The governing body continues to see the residence as an integral part of the school. It values the opportunities that young people experience here and is committed to driving forward improvements. Many new governors have come on board since the last inspection and they are coming to terms with their roles. Consequently, their monitoring of the care provisions is not yet secure. This is because their reports lack evaluation and they are not yet providing that critical oversight and review of documentation. The school is aware of this and new formats and training are being implemented to address this. This was raised at the last inspection. However, due to the limited time frame between the last inspection and the appointment of new governors, this has not yet been embedded into practice.

The head of care has devised a comprehensive self-evaluation document for the care setting. This document sets out the progress of the setting, the barriers to success and how they are overcoming these to move forward. This is being shared with governors at the upcoming meeting. The self-evaluation document reflects the aspirations and the aims for young people to be better equipped to be ready for the next phase of their life after school. This leads to a continually improving service.

There are some shortfalls in records and documentation. This is because they are not all recorded to the same high standard. The head of care is fully aware of this and further training and support are being offered to address this.

Equality and diversity are interwoven seamlessly into everything that the school does. For example, the school is working closely with an Imam to support the arrival of Muslim children into school. Effective collaborative working has meant that the

young people's cultural and religious needs continue to be exceptionally well met and supported in school.

The principle and head of care are unswerving in their dedication to share their knowledge with other schools and improve the life chances for young people. The young people visit other schools and organisations to talk to people. This enhances the other pupils' understanding of disability and increases their tolerance of others.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: Dr John Patterson

School Address: Yew Tree Lane, Liverpool L12 9HN

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Chris Scully, social care inspector (lead)
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