

# St Vincent's School

CBI Building, St. Vincent's School, Yew Tree Lane, West Derby, Liverpool L12 9HN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

St Vincent's School, for children with 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 with all levels of visual impairment, as well as additional needs. The school is in a residential area, with the accommodation split into two separate areas on the same site. The school caters for pupils between the ages of five and 19 years. It provides residential places and extended days for up to 22 pupils on weekdays in term time. There are a wide range of residential options available, depending on the individual needs of the child.

There is a new head of care in post, who has worked with the children in another role for several years. She is working towards the required qualification.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

### Inspection dates: 27, 28 and 29 February 2024

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of previous inspection:** 31 January 2023

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement to be good

## **Inspection judgements**

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Children enjoy their residential experiences. They thrive because of the time they spend there. Many children said that they loved their stays and that it was like being with family. Children were seen to be happy and relaxed. There was a comfortable and warm atmosphere amongst the children and staff team.

The staff team provides nurturing care to the children. Staff support and encourage children in all aspects of their lives, which helps them to improve their life chances. Children are supported with their reading skills, their independence skills and socialisation with others. There are also a wide range of activities both on and off site that children enjoy during their stays. Children also engage well in a 'helping each other out hour' every night. This helps them to demonstrate acts of kindness, build social bonds and friendships.

Parents say that communication with the staff team is excellent and that children's transitions into residential and extended stays are seamless. This means that children are given the support that they require to settle in and feel welcome. Parents told inspectors that the staff team is creative in its approach to supporting and caring for their children.

Children make progress in areas such as their self-confidence, improved mobility, their personal hygiene and daily independent living skills. The head of care has made improvements to records in relation to how children's progress is captured and evidenced. As an example of this, key-work sessions demonstrate that children understand and are supported to achieve targets that are individualised to their needs and to help them develop their skills.

There are good arrangements in place to monitor children's health and well-being. When children have complex medical conditions, there is regular communication between parents, residential staff and the healthcare coordinator. Internal professionals work closely with the residential staff to meet the needs of the children and to contribute to care planning. This includes the mobility officer and the special education needs coordinator.

Children's views are prioritised. They are involved in decision-making about their care. The independent visitor and governors spend time with the children to obtain their views and to report about the quality of their care and experiences. Some of the children have also been elected to be part of the children's school council. This empowers children and it is another important forum for children's views to be heard.

An independent person who is separate from those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school is currently not in place for children to access. The independent person is intended to provide support and advocacy for children, and who is someone children can talk to about personal problems or concerns at the school. Leaders and managers took immediate action to explore this during the inspection.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: good**

Children are protected from harm. They all reported that they feel safe and secure in the residential provision. Parents say that the staff know their children well and that they are confident in the staff's ability to keep their children safe.

Staff have a good understanding of the individual needs of children's behavioural needs and have effective ways of supporting children to keep them safe from harm. The staff team's consistent practice and approach to safeguarding means that there have been no serious incidents, referrals to children's social care or occasions when children have been physically held.

Children's risk assessments and health plans are child focused, comprehensive and up to date. This means that staff are provided with clear strategies to support children with complex health needs and to support them to regulate their emotions. Staff were observed using these de-escalation strategies effectively with the children, to help them manage their emotions and to minimise risks.

A designated safeguarding officer supports the residential staff and shares his safeguarding knowledge well. The staff team understands its roles and responsibilities in terms of Keeping Children Safe in Education legislation. A new electronic system for recording safeguarding incidents and concerns has been introduced since the last inspection. The senior leadership team, governors and the staff team have all undertaken training relating to the system. This has improved the sharing of information school wide and the overall monitoring of safeguarding concerns and children's well-being.

Children are supported to understand how to keep themselves safe online. The school has implemented additional safeguards to strengthen internet security, in response to current filtering and monitoring legislation.

The safeguarding governor undertakes regular visits to the residential provision to monitor the safety and welfare of children. Their annual safeguarding audit provides additional insight into the safeguarding practices in residential and any improvements that can be made.

Children and their parents know how to make a complaint. They are confident that their concerns would be taken seriously. That said, there have been no complaints made by children or their parents about the residential provision. This reflects a stable and happy cohort of children.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

Leaders and managers do not demonstrate a thorough approach to the monitoring and oversight of some systems in place for the residential provision. This specifically relates to some safer recruitment procedures, staff training and induction. This has the potential to impact on children's safety and welfare. However, leaders and managers took immediate action during the inspection to resolve these concerns and to ensure that the children's safety is not compromised.

Leaders and managers have failed to adhere to regulatory requirements and guidance associated with safer recruitment. Those involved with the recruitment and the employment of staff have not received appropriate safer recruitment training. In addition to this, one staff member commenced their role in the residential provision prior to an essential reference relating to previous childcare work being received by the school.

Inspectors found that not all residential staff have undertaken first-aid training. This means that there are specific days in the week when children are supported by a combination of staff who are not first-aid qualified. Leaders and managers took immediate action to arrange first-aid training for the staff, which was undertaken during the inspection.

Leaders and managers have failed to ensure that all staff have or are working towards the required qualification for the residential role within suitable timescales. This relates to one staff member who has been in their care role for nearly two years. The rest of the residential staff are qualified or working towards the qualification.

Leaders and managers have not implemented a formal induction record for staff new to the role. This means that there is no documented evidence to demonstrate that new staff have been suitably inducted to their role to meet the range of needs of the children and to fully equip them to identify and safely manage safeguarding issues.

That said, a new head of care has offered stability and reassurance to the children and staff team. She has positive relationships with parents and promotes positive communication with them. She has spent time developing a relationship between the residential and education staff, so that they have a sense of shared ownership and they work closely together to support the children.

Leaders, managers and governors collectively have a shared ambitious vision for the residential provision and changing children's lives. There has been increased visibility of the senior leadership team and governors in the residential provision. Leaders and managers recognise the strengths of the provision and areas that require development. The head of care's residential self-assessment drives improvements in children's overall experiences of residential.

The governing board hold the school to account to ensure that there are quality standards of care. Residential is a standing agenda item at the governing board meetings. The independent visitor and governor's residential reports are discussed at the meetings. The chair of governors visits the residential provision regularly and undertakes an annual review of the residential provision. This provides a sole focus on the children's experiences in residential and an extra layer of scrutiny in relation to how the residential provision operates.

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

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools**

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools:

- 2.1 The school's governing body, trustees and/or proprietor monitor the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the residential and welfare provision in the school and take appropriate action when necessary. Specifically, leaders and managers demonstrate a robust approach to the monitoring and oversight of systems in place for the residential provision, such as safer recruitment, staff training and induction.
- 17.2 The school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. This person may be known as the 'independent person'. Children know who this person is, know how to contact them and feel comfortable talking to them. The person is easily accessible at all reasonable times, visits regularly (at least monthly) and knows the children. The person should have the necessary skills to interact and communicate effectively with the children and be able to recognise good/poor care and safeguarding concerns. Children who cannot communicate verbally are given the means to request individual support. Schools may need to make a range of arrangements for independent support, which might be provided by more than one person, to ensure that the needs of each child are met.

### **Recommendations**

- The school has and implements effectively appropriate policies for the care of children who have medical conditions and/or are unwell. These include first aid, care of those with chronic conditions and disabilities, administration of prescription and non-prescription medicines (including controlled drugs) and dealing with medical emergencies. Specifically, arrangements should be in place to ensure that staff undertake regular first-aid training.
- Schools operate safer recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Specifically, that those involved with the recruitment and employment of staff to work with children have received appropriate safer recruitment training.
- All existing care staff have attained a relevant minimum level 3 qualification or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies.
- The school ensures that new staff undertake an induction programme designed and delivered to enable them to meet the range of needs of children at the school and fully equip them to identify and safely manage safeguarding issues. The

programme should begin within seven working days of starting their employment and be completed within six months. Specifically, that there is a formal written induction in place to evidence the process having been undertaken and overseen by leaders and managers.

## **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:** Dr John Patterson

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

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## **Inspectors**

Cheryl Field, Social Care Inspector (Lead)

Judith Birchall, Social Care Inspector

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