

St Vincent's School

St Vincent's School, A Specialist School for Sensory Impairment and Other Needs, Yew Tree Lane, Liverpool L12 9HN

Inspection dates	16/01/2017 to 18/01/2017	
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

- Staff identify, celebrate and nurture young people's skills and interests to ensure their rounded development through an exceptional range of activities and opportunities.
- Young people are enthusiastic advocates and ambassadors, who show others that having sensory needs does not limit their aspirations and achievements.
- Young people make exceptional progress from their starting points, because staff support them to systematically address their individual needs and recognise each step that they take towards achieving their aspirations.
- Staff, leaders and managers have the safety and welfare of young people at the heart of all that they do, and use their extensive knowledge of safeguarding practice to continually enhance young people's understanding of how to keep themselves increasingly safe.
- Young people plan their individual contributions to the progress that they make, and use the support that they get from staff to achieve their goals. This builds confident and resilient young people who recover from life's setbacks and disappointments to make and sustain progress towards happy and settled futures.
- The highly experienced and well-qualified senior leadership team uses effective monitoring to identify specific and measurable targets that continually improve the quality of service offered to young people who have complex problems. Governors and the independent visitor provide robust challenge and support to drive improvement.
- Senior leaders respond effectively to improve identified shortfalls, and have already taken action to improve the recording and communication systems in response to the

findings from this inspection

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?

- Improvement planning would provide leaders and staff with a clearer view of key priorities for the residential provision, how they will be achieved, and what success will look like.
- Systems of communication between school and residence should be clarified and improved, to ensure that written plans and information are consistently transferred between departments.
- Leaders and governors should ensure that child protection policies are updated in a timely manner, to reflect staff knowledge of current statutory guidance, such as 'Keeping children safe in education 2016'.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors looked closely at the experiences and progress of young people over three days and two evenings. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of young people. They watched how professional staff work with young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of the help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to young people and their families and the professionals who support them. In addition, the inspectors 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 young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Inspection team

Denise Jolly

Lead social care inspector

Pam Nuckley

Social care inspector

Full report

Information about this 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 located in a residential area with the accommodation being split into two separate groups. The school caters for pupils between the ages of 5 and 18 years. There are currently 41 pupils on roll. 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 17 March 2016.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Young people make sustained academic and personal progress at the school. A recent inspection of education provision at the school confirmed that it continues to be outstanding. Young people express great pleasure in their time in residence. They told inspectors that they enjoy it because the staff are great, and they get to do lots of activities and spend time with friends, which is not possible when they are at home.

As well as ensuring that there are effective support programmes in place, staff identify, celebrate and nurture young people's skills and interests to ensure their rounded development. For example, young people enrich their lives with highly successful choral engagements; meet and share projects with successful professionals in their chosen field such as digital communication; or gain work experience in diverse roles such as becoming a coffee barista or developing sports programmes for those who have a visual impairment. Young people are confident to be advocates and ambassadors for the school and represent a 'can-do' attitude for those who have a visual impairment. This demonstrates and celebrates young people's skills and assets and reinforces the school slogan of 'we see things differently', to promote young people's long-term future success.

Parents value the trusted and secure relationships that they see their children have with staff. One parent described the school as 'enabling my child to grow in confidence, experience new activities and improve her health'. Professionals are positive about the collaborative and inclusive approach to multi-professional working that has children's health and happiness at its heart. Placing authorities praise the school for good communication and a 'can-do' attitude that means young people make progress against expectation.

Staff and young people enjoy each other's company and have fun together. Records such as care plans are generally well maintained, and clear targets are set and monitored through regular review. Residential staff are warm, committed and enthusiastic and are keen to develop new ideas in partnership with education colleagues, such as how best to monitor the progress and achievements of the young people.

The safety of children and young people is given high priority. Safeguarding procedures are effective. They highlight the importance of identifying signs of change in children's well-being and sharing information with the appropriate agencies. As a result, young people feel safe and valued, and see school as a place of respite from turbulent personal lives. There are effective responses to bullying and antisocial behaviour such that the minor issues that occur are resolved quickly.

All staff work collaboratively across the school to provide good levels of consistency regarding young people's care. Effective strategies are in place to meet their immediate and developing needs. Staff encourage young people to speak for themselves and to consider others; and are adept at listening and responding to their expressed views and wishes. Staff help them to identify their strengths and interests and nurture their talents, so that, for example, young people integrate into mainstream schools to take part in GCSE drama, go on to higher education to qualify in their chosen field, or develop their broadcasting skills through designing and operating their own radio show, which is available through the school radio station or downloadable podcasts. This helps young people to develop confidence and maturity that they would not otherwise have an opportunity to do. Their growing independence enables them to take vital steps towards successful adult life.

Senior leaders recognise the importance of the residential provision and are committed to improvement. They are acting to ensure that record audit trails are easier to follow and that there are tighter processes for information-sharing between care and education staff. Staff

continue to support young people's significant development, and therefore the minor errors in recording and written guidance noted in this inspection have not impacted on young people's safety and progress. There are some points for improvement identified, to ensure continuous improvement through the coming year.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Young people receive high levels of individual support from staff who know them well, have time to enjoy their company, and listen to them. Staff at the school work closely and collaboratively, and effective handover at the start and end of the school day ensures that relevant information is shared verbally. This ensures that young people receive consistent care.

Young people and parents give outstanding feedback about the quality of the care, support and guidance provided. One parent said, 'Due to [the] school working in partnership with me, my child has made progress well beyond expectations.' Another said, 'I can't think of a better place for her to be. She is happier, more interactive, and has started to tolerate new experiences. The staff go above and beyond.'

When young people are going through transition into residential placement, staff take great care to ensure that they have all the information they need, and pace introductions to suit the young person and their needs. Young people have a clear voice in deciding how their needs will be met, to ensure that they begin overnight stays with confidence and emotional security. For example, one young person wanted an opportunity to explain her particular medical equipment and the noises it made to her fellow boarders, so that they could make sense of what support she needed, and not be confused by unusual sounds. Staff facilitated this with sensitivity and a practical approach that ensured that the young person was able to educate others without feeling embarrassed. Her mum said that staff go the extra mile, to ensure that they provide holistic, safe and consistent care that enables her child, who has complex health needs, to be happy and comfortable, and to make progress in her social and personal independence.

Since the last inspection, considerable progress has been made in the way that care plans and targets are set out, evaluated and modified, to ensure that they accurately reflect progress and change. Most importantly, they are targets that young people want to achieve, such as learning about being healthy, increasing domestic independence and having fun. The small and very experienced staff team uses daily discussion and reflection to ensure that they are fully apprised of any challenges or developments that may impact on young people's well-being and safety. Celebrations of achievements take place with smiling acknowledgement and praise given freely. This means that young people grow in confidence, and make decisions for themselves about the help that they need, the activities that they learn and the meals that they cook and eat. Parents and young people say that the most valuable things about staying at the school are the opportunity staff give young people to be independent and the rich social programme that helps them to make friends, to explore new horizons and to feel that they are making a positive contribution to the wider world. One young person said, 'I was quite shy before going to the residential [school] and I did not socialise much, but I do now and I have a lot of friends. I am more confident.'

Young people's health needs are very well supported. There are effective procedures for safely managing medication, with well-established procedures for bringing medication in and out of school, which are carefully monitored. The healthcare assistant oversees any staff training needs arising from young people's healthcare plans, and has ensured that the recommendations from the last inspection have been met by improving risk assessments for the independent use of inhalers, and implementing advice from an external professional about the appropriate use of sharps boxes. When necessary, specialist nurses offer training and support to ensure that young people receive appropriate health support, such as hormone injections or epilepsy care. Staff

demonstrate a high level of commitment to promoting dignified and supportive healthcare. Young people and parents say that this helps them to feel comfortable and well cared for during their overnight stays.

Young people stay in spacious, good-quality accommodation that is comfortable and well maintained so that young people feel relaxed and safe. Recent improvements to kitchen areas mean that young people can more easily access the areas to make their own snacks, although they enjoy being looked after by staff when they return from school. A popular group is independent cookery. Together, young people choose menus, identify shopping lists, buy the ingredients and explore the various tasks involved in making a meal. Staff support promotes their experiential learning: young people work together to prepare and cook the food, set the table, serve each other and enjoy a highly social occasion. The inspector observed how young people encouraged and celebrated each other's efforts, leading to mutual enjoyment and pride in their achievements, as well as a tasty and well-balanced meal enhanced by lively conversation and laughter. One young person said, 'This is why I love being here. I get to do things I never can at home, because I don't have friends there.'

A variety of creative, active, social, physical and cultural activities are available on and off the school site such as singing, swimming, attending a scout group and playing musical instruments. Young people have identified that they would like to take part in more exercise in order to keep fit, and so they have organised two sessions in the gym and fitness suite. Using sighted support when necessary, all young people are enabled to participate in and enjoy each session. This familiarises them with a variety of equipment that is available in public gyms, and ensures that they can maintain a healthy lifestyle when they are not at school. Off-site trips include entering public competitions such as swimming galas or choral events. Young people grow in self-esteem and pride in their achievements, through activities such as singing in a large event arena, or engaging with a professional orchestra in a public auditorium, as well as representing their school in sporting events. One young person proudly talked about singing a solo at a music festival in her home area, due to the confidence she had gained from her singing lessons at school. Greater detail in activity records will help staff to highlight and evaluate the impact of activities on individual young people, and to provide more detailed accounts of their progress. This is a point for improvement.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Safeguarding procedures at the school are effective in ensuring that pupils are kept safe from harm. Staff working at the school use their understanding of pupils' specific needs and vulnerabilities well to ensure that their practice effectively promotes their safety. One young person said, 'I am going through a particularly bad time at the moment and staff have supported me well and listen when I need to talk.' This demonstrates a common approach that places young people's emotional welfare at the heart of the school.

All staff receive comprehensive information and training in how to keep young people safe. This is completed as part of whole school training and residential team reflection, to ensure that everybody knows and understands key messages emerging from best practice and changes in legislation and guidance. Although school policies have not yet been re-published to reflect recent changes in statutory guidance, the school's designated safeguarding lead has provided amended documents to the governing body for their approval, and has provided information to residential staff meetings so that they understand and can implement current guidance.

Recent training has included areas such as the protection of children who have disabilities, and staff say that this has helped them to recognise the importance of their characteristically rigorous approach to exploring mood and behaviour changes. Staff awareness of self-harm and emotional vulnerability has been a development point recently, in response to young people's

changing needs. Timely staff responses, coupled with well-recorded and persistent escalation of concerns, has resulted in appropriate support and planning being provided for those who need it. One professional said, 'It is solely due to the school's continual presentation of concerns that a social work assessment of pupil need has been achieved.'

Young people are involved in learning about the dangers that they could be exposed to as appropriate to their ages, and external agencies such as the fire authorities and cadets visit the school to provide opportunities for learning, which are thoroughly enjoyed by all. Young people use this knowledge to show visitors how to evacuate safely in an emergency, and work with staff to ensure that any hazards that may arise due to their visual impairment do not impede their safe exit from danger.

Staff ensure that visual impairment is not a barrier to varied activity such as rock climbing, taking a walk to a local café or learning how to operate a barista-style coffee machine as preparation for future employment. Careful planning of such activities, long-stick training to enhance independent mobility and assiduous staff supervision that encourages young people to be as independent as possible ensure that young people take appropriate risks that support their individual growth and development.

All young people say that they feel safe in school, and that staff help them to 'get over' minor disagreements. Staff demonstrate a high degree of compassion, understanding and care for all, and this approach is reflected in warm and supportive relationships within the residence. Inspectors observed many examples of pupils expressing their views, disagreeing with staff or each other, and reaching a compromise. This open and honest culture supports pupils to practise their emerging skills in respecting others, making positive choices and recognising when they need help or protection. Staff do not use sanctions, but instead take time to discuss the impact of hurtful or thoughtless comments and behaviour, and this helps young people to grow and mature into thoughtful teenagers, who learn to take responsibility for their actions.

A minority of parents have expressed anxiety about how well the school manages bullying. Records of the management of bullying incidents are dispersed through various records and this impairs the school's ability to track and evaluate the progress that is being made in supporting positive relationships within the school. Although there have been some incidents of bullying within education, staff and young people say that this is not a feature of residential life, and that being resident offers too good an opportunity to spend time with friends to spoil it with arguments. This was evident in numerous social groups that inspectors attended, where young people discussed how important it was to talk about frustration and hurt rather than to act harshly.

All young people were confident that getting staff involved was the best approach to solving problems. Extra help has been given to older teenagers through sessions run by an external professional about managing the tricky aspects of growing up. Key workers and social groups such as scouts use direct work sessions to help young people to think about respecting and valuing those who have different opinions, and offering care and support to them. This develops and nurtures young people's resilience and self-confidence, and is contributing towards their balanced development.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

Senior leaders are highly ambitious for young people. They demonstrate collaborative relationships within departments and towards external professionals, and the residential service is a valued and respected element of the school. Through multi-disciplinary senior meetings and governing body liaison, a positive cycle of review and communication is sustained that has young people's views, needs and development at its heart. Leaders plan to improve the systems in

place so that all staff participate in planning and contribute to continuous improvement in the experiences, opportunities and social integration of young people.

Young people are supported and motivated to make significant progress in key areas of their lives such as emotional well-being and life skills. Staff are clear about how their approaches support the significant individual progress young people make, and the positive impact of their lively contribution to the life of school. A wide range of feedback from parents, young people and external professionals confirms their positive views of the significant development that young people achieve. Professionals who support young people say that staff listen and respond to their ideas, and share good practice with them. This enables staff to advocate on behalf of young people, to ensure that their needs are recognised and met, such as contributing to education and healthcare plans that set out how young people will be helped to achieve their potential.

Young people additionally benefit from the school's policy of energetically pursuing and sustaining links with external professional organisations and social networks. Typical initiatives are the work being undertaken to enrol all local schools in supporting the school's partnership with an international charity to help distribute sight boxes to developing countries; the links being forged with the representatives of the Islamic faith to improve their understanding of the needs and potential of those who have visual and sensory needs; and the publication of a comic that young people have written, with themselves as 'super-heroes', to promote the education and enterprise project that underpins their vision of including young people in gaining and sharing skills and experience that lead to greater work opportunities and fulfilling lives.

Managers secure a clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses in the school, by using well-established monitoring systems and working hard to ensure continuous improvement. Some minor inefficiencies in recording systems, such as those in response to bullying and physical incidents, mean that not all information is easily available for review. However, leaders acknowledged this within the inspection and undertook to improve accounts to cross-reference them effectively. Changes arise from careful and frequent evaluation of the school's development plan against criteria that the leadership team set to ensure continuous improvement. Targets for the residential provision are embedded within a whole school document, but would benefit from separate review to support developments in financial viability, arising from reductions in residential placement from weekly to extended evenings and occasional overnights. This is a work in progress. It has not impacted upon the high quality of care provided, and young people continue to develop their life skills, emotional well-being and developmental potential. Staff continue to receive regular and high-quality support and supervision that enable reflective practice, and young people's needs are consistently met to a high standard.

Changes in the governing body are also in progress, with the resignation of the chair, and the subsequent change in her role as independent visitor to the residence. However, a replacement visitor has been identified, who is suitably experienced to undertake the role. A review of how reports are completed is being undertaken, to ensure that the visitor clearly records their opinion about the safety and welfare of young people. This information supplements the reports made by the principal and the residential manager to the governing body, to ensure that robust review and challenge of the residential service are being provided.

This provision is dedicated to transform the lives of children, to offer them better futures and to give them self-confidence and aspiration as they approach their adult lives. The highly professional and skilled care and education team complements this vision through providing a highly effective mix of enduring relationships, high-quality educational opportunity, exceptional care, consistent implementation of approaches and programmes and a well-established 'reverse-inclusion' policy that brings young people into direct and developmental contact with a diversity of opportunity and experience that enriches their lives and enhances their future prospects.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors 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 exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact that 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 that children and young people are not protected or that their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or that, if their care and experiences are poor, they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	104734
Social care unique reference number	SC040724
DfE registration number	

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	41
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	4 to19
Headteacher	
Date of previous boarding inspection	15/03/2016
Telephone number	0151 228 9968
Email address	office@stvin.com

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