

# 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.

There are 44 children on the school roll. The school caters for pupils between the ages of five and 19 years. It provides residential places and extended days for children on weekdays in term time. During this inspection, 6 children stayed in residential Monday to Thursday nights inclusively. Inspectors spoke to all children.

The head of care in post is suitably experienced and she is working towards the required qualification.

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

### Inspection dates: 13, 14 and 15 January 2025

**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      good

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

**Date of previous inspection:** 27 February 2024

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

Children enjoy their stays in residential because of the positive relationships that they have with the staff team. Children refer to residential as their second home. Children told inspectors that there is always someone who they can speak to in school, in residential or each other. They said, 'We 100% trust the staff and feel well supported.' One child has joined the group of children who stay in at the school this year. Their move into residential was child focused, well planned and enabled the child and their family to get to know the staff team and the structure of residential.

Staff help children to develop their independence skills, social skills and confidence through a wide variety of key-work sessions and direct support. This is a strength of the staff team. Consequently, children have made substantial progress in areas such as their mobility, orientation, road safety, accessing public transport and cooking. Children are also encouraged to engage positively with each other and to make friendships. They help each other with small tasks, they enjoy spending time in each other's company and going on activities together.

Children's placement plans are not consistently of good quality. They do not always provide staff with clear guidance in relation to children's day-to-day care needs. This caused confusion for some staff when they were spoken to by inspectors about their understanding of children's needs. That said, during the inspection inspectors observed staff following children's routines and delivering structured and child centred care. Parents equally reported that the staff team know their children well and they understand how to meet their children's needs.

Some children's health plans do not provide clear or accurate information about children's medical and health needs. For one child, this demonstrated a lack of joint working between the head of care and the school nurse in relation to implementing the child's health plan. Immediate action was taken during the inspection to amend the records to ensure that they accurately reflected the child's needs.

There is good collaboration between residential staff and health professionals to understand children's needs, such as child and adolescent mental health workers. The mobility support team and special educational needs workers from the school, also work closely with the residential staff to ensure that they understand children's progress. Staff ensure that any changes to children's care is done through full and effective consultation with the child's family.

House meetings provide children with the opportunity to share their views, wishes and feelings about their time in residential. This ensures that when staff are planning activities, meals and any changes to the residential, children's views are always central to this. An independent person has been a valuable introduction to the residential and to children's experiences. She has developed positive relationships with all the children, who feel comfortable talking to and spending time with her.

Children have opportunities to try new experiences. They have been involved in community projects such as the young person litter picking challenge, for which they won an award. Children have taken part in a mock style united nations conference, and they have also started horse riding. Recently, they secured a visit from the local news station where children spoke to reporters about their aspirations for their futures.

The residential provision has been improved to make children's bedrooms and communal areas more homely. Children are supported to personalise their bedrooms to their liking and pick new things for their rooms. A new business manager works closely with the head of care to agree priority areas to be refurbished.

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

Children feel safe and settled in residential. Children's families have confidence in the staff team to keep their children safe. Children's safety is prioritised. The staff team understands their roles and responsibilities in relation to safeguarding children.

A whole school approach is taken to educate children and staff on issues such as online safety, bullying and exploitation. The headteacher tests the knowledge of residential staff through discussion. Children also undertake work about staying safe online. This has helped children to develop their understanding of risk.

Staff are attuned to children's changing emotions and use de-escalation strategies to help children to manage their emotions. An example of this, staff talk calmly to children and encourage the use of deep breathing strategies to help children to reduce their anxiety. Consequently, there have been no serious incidents and restraint is not used by staff.

There have been no significant safeguarding concerns since the last inspection. However, the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) collaborates effectively with other members of the safeguarding team to ensure that all concerns are promptly responded to. Electronic recording systems are in place to record, share and monitor any potential safeguarding concerns.

The safeguarding governor position is currently vacant. The chair of governors is currently overseeing this role, as an interim measure. She has recently completed the safeguarding for governors training and meets weekly with the senior leadership team and DSL to ensure that she has good oversight of safeguarding practice in the residential provision.

Staff recruitment is carried out safely. Those responsible for safer recruitment have received training to ensure that they fully understand their roles and responsibilities. This ensures that all relevant checks are undertaken prior to staff commencing their role. Some children who access the residential provision have been involved in the interview process for a new member of staff. This means that children's views have been central to the recruitment of staff for the residential provision.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Leaders and managers work collectively together and have shared ambitious vision for changing children's lives. They understand children's individual plans, effectively monitor children's progress and can demonstrate progression because of children's access to residential. The headteacher spends time with children and stays overnight in residential every fortnight. This has provided him with improved oversight of the residential provision and how it operates.

The head of care continues to offer stability for children and the staff team. She is nurturing in her approach and because of this she has exceptionally good relationships with all children. She is an excellent role model to the staff team, by demonstrating effective communication and interaction with children. She has positive relationships with parents and ensures that they are fully involved in their child's care planning.

The head of care now attends weekly senior leadership team meetings with the rest of the school leaders. This ensures that effective joint working between the school and residential provision is in place and there is a shared ownership in promoting children's welfare and safety.

Leaders and managers recognise the strengths and areas of development of the provision. This has helped them to prioritise areas that have required developing over the last year. The head of care's residential self-assessment report details the action that has been taken to successfully address any areas of concern from the last inspection.

Improvements have been made to the oversight of staff training and development, to ensure that staff can safely support children in residential. The head of care ensures that staff are provided with the support and time they require to fulfil their learning and to complete any necessary qualifications. However, the staff team is yet to undertake training in autistic spectrum disorder. It was scheduled to take place but had to be postponed due to internal management issues. Leaders and managers recognise that this is to be made a priority.

Staff feel very well supported in their roles. They appreciate the head of care being present and available for guidance. Staff are provided with practice-related supervision and attend regular team meetings. Opportunities are identified to develop staff skills and to improve children's experiences in residential, such as staff accessing resources in school to support children's independence development during their stay in residential. All staff have their performance annually appraised. Their individual objectives support the development of the residential provision.

The independent visitor is a positive advocate for children who access the residential provision. He regularly visits and provides a report of his findings. The reports are made available at governor's meetings and the chair of governors provides a response to all reports. The headteacher also undertakes unannounced monitoring

visits to the residential provision. This adds an additional layer of scrutiny of the service and drives improvement in the quality of care provided to children.

The residential provision is routinely discussed at the governor's meetings. The head of care provides a comprehensive report for all governors, so that they are kept up to date with any changes and progress. The chair of governors visits the provision regularly, both formally and informally. She meets with the head of care, children and staff team. She has a good understanding of the operation of the residential, she participates in any key decision-making and is invested in the residential and enhancing children's experiences.

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

### **Points for improvement**

- School leaders should ensure that there is a written plan in place for each child resident in the school setting out how their day-to-day needs will be met, known as the placement plan. The plan is thorough and specific to the child and is agreed, as far as is practicable, with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child. Children have an opportunity to contribute to their plans. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet, assesses any risk and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day-to-day basis.
  
- School leaders should ensure that where necessary, a child has a clear plan covering their individual health and welfare needs. This contains relevant health and welfare information and records significant health and welfare needs and issues. The plan is child-centred, agreed by the child (where appropriate) and their parents/carers and includes:
  - records of developmental checks;
  - records of routine universal health checks (e.g. age appropriate immunisations, dental health, hearing and eyesight checks);
  - health monitoring required by staff;
  - intimate care or bodily functions requiring staff help;
  - any sensory needs; and
  - the involvement of a child's parents/carers or significant others in health and welfare issues.
  
- School leaders should ensure that staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children resident in the school.

### **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:** Mr David Swanston

**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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