

ST VINCENT'S SCHOOL

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

Inspection dates 15 March 2016 - 17 March 2016

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 Outstanding 1

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding 1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Young people demonstrate high levels of confidence and curiosity that underpin their continuous development. They act as advocates and educators to enhance society's understanding of visual impairment.
- They are supported by highly motivated care staff who foster a strong sense of safety and value through trusting and warm relationships. One young person said, 'Being here is the same as being in my family, except I get to do more stuff.' Young people say that they feel safe and happy in their overnight stays.
- Young people's needs and welfare are at the heart of staff practice. They are confident in using the regularly reviewed policies and procedures that protect young people from harm. Staff understand the importance of early intervention, and foster compatible and caring relationships that minimise bullying and antisocial behaviour in the residence.
- Staff work well with young people, parents and other professionals to provide integrated and individualised packages of care that promote continuous development. Keyworkers involve residential pupils in identifying goals and reviewing their care plans, so that they can participate in identifying ways to make and sustain progress.
- The senior leadership team, governors and staff are all committed to continuous improvement in young people's experiences and opportunities during their residential stays. Effective training and formal supervision enhance care practice so that staff ably and enthusiastically support young people's growth and development.

- Residential staff work well with parents, who say that they have high levels of trust and confidence in the quality of care provided. One parent said, 'My daughter feels secure, staff are brilliant at challenging her, and as a result she is making great strides in her sociability, and is doing astonishing things like going to Scouts.'

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?

- Enable staff to learn about the regulatory framework for looked after children.
- Review arrangements for the allocation and oversight of budgets to the residential service.
- Obtain specialist advice about protocols for the use of used sharps boxes, and improve guidance for the safekeeping of young people's inhalers.

Information about this inspection

This inspection was carried out with a minimal notice of two hours. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice over one evening; informal and formal meetings with residential pupils; face-to-face and telephone discussions with parents; meetings and discussion with the principal, head of care, family liaison officer, designated safeguarding lead, healthcare officer, and a number of residential staff. During the inspection, feedback was obtained from the local safeguarding authority. Both boarding houses were visited and there was scrutiny of a wide range of policies and records. Responses on Parent View and Point in Time surveys were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Denise Jolly

lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

St Vincent's, A Specialist School for Sensory Impairments and Other Needs is a non-maintained school that 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 located in a residential area, with the accommodation being split into two separate groups. The school caters for pupils between the ages of five and 18 years. There are currently 44 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 upon the individual needs of the child. The residential provision was last inspected on 27 February 2015.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Young people make and sustain personal and academic progress at the school. They grow in self-belief, and embrace many opportunities to try new experiences and improve their academic performance. They recognise that staff care for them and support them, but take responsibility for their own development and progress. One young person said, 'I have learned to do so much for myself that I couldn't do before.' Parents value the residential service, with one saying, 'This is the hardest, but the best, decision I ever made, because of the growth I see in my child that I never would have thought possible.'

Young people say they love staying in school, and those who do not have a full weekly place request an increase in their residential time. They are kept busy and occupied in a range of activities that help them to enjoy life and learn new skills, such as playing a musical instrument, making hot chocolate for friends or preparing and cooking a simple meal. Keyworkers set clear targets with young people, so that they make progress in areas that are important to them, such as personal care or completing their homework. These are regularly reviewed and modified, to ensure that targets keep pace with the progress that young people make.

The safety of young people is paramount. Staff use the school's excellent child protection procedures and trained personnel to promote and protect their welfare. Young people are empowered, with knowledge and independence, to contribute appropriately to their personal safety and happiness.

All staff work collaboratively across the school to provide good levels of consistency. Incidents requiring sanction or restraint in residential times are rare, and are monitored as part of whole-school behaviour reviews. Young people say that they are helped to confront and reduce the impact of poor relationships and bullying. They say that, within the residence, they value kindness and tolerance towards each other and have fun together.

Senior leaders recognise and celebrate the importance of the residential provision and are committed to its inclusion in whole-school development. The drive and inspiration of leaders has resulted in provision that is outstanding in all areas. Three points for improvement, regarding residential access to budgets, reviewing protocols for use of a sharps box, and improving staff knowledge of the regulations surrounding children looked after, have not limited the excellent progress that young people are making.

Young people receive high levels of support from staff who know them very well. They enjoy open, warm and trusting relationships. Because of the way they feel 'at home' in the residence, several young people describe staff as 'our other family'. Keyworkers are ambitious for young people, and work in partnership with them. Together they plan and work on important self-help, community and independence skills. This allows visually impaired young people to feel that they are active and valuable contributors to society, and are in charge of their daily lives.

Staff at the school work closely and collaboratively, with young people at the heart of all they do. Effective multi-disciplinary meetings and handovers ensure that relevant information is shared, enabling continuity of knowledge and understanding of young people's needs.

Young people and their families give outstanding feedback about the quality of care, support and guidance provided. One young person said, 'My life really began when I came here. At my other school I was isolated and bullied, but here I have fun, and really enjoy my friends.'

Healthcare arrangements are outstanding. One parent who was collecting her daughter said, 'Staff have a really good understanding of her health needs. They know when to call me, but are really capable to look after her when I can't get here quickly. She loves it here, so we are both happy.' The school's health officer oversees excellent systems to ensure that young people get the medication they need. She organises appropriate training, such as giving essential hormone injections, to be delivered by health professionals, although the protocol for use of the bin for used sharps is not clear enough to ensure that the bin is only used for this purpose.

The health officer circulates information about specific conditions and diagnoses, so that staff provide knowledgeable care that helps young people to stay well. When possible, young people learn to take responsibility for their own medication, such as inhalers. Staff and young people are clear that they need to report any loss immediately, although this is not specified in risk assessments for independent use. Obtaining advice from a pharmacist about these minor oversights is a point for improvement.

Accommodation is cheerful and well maintained, and set out to enable young people to move around confidently. Young people add personal touches to their bedrooms, such as favourite posters and pictures of family. They have recently chosen blinds as window coverings because they are easy to use and ensure privacy. When necessary, their furniture is labelled with Braille so that young people can access the right drawer or cupboard to find their belongings with ease. Alternatively, cupboards and drawers are fitted with an electronic button device that 'reads and speaks' their content. Audio is recorded by young people, so that if they are not proficient in Braille, they can still have independence in personal care. One of the two house units has en-suite bathrooms. In the other, staff carefully manage the shared bathroom to ensure that the dignity and privacy of young people are protected. Refurbishment is planned to modernise this area.

Young people enjoy many opportunities to make food and drink, and are enthusiastic

about the levels of skill they achieve. They said how happy they are to practise their skills in cooking as well as other household tasks, because they are learning to become independent, and this is why they like staying at school so much. They also enjoy fast-food cafés and coffee shops, and there is much lively conversation around the importance of healthy and balanced eating, with lunches eaten in the school dining room where fruit and salad is always on offer. Young people enjoy each other's company, and residential mealtimes are an opportunity to eat good food, and to talk about how their day is going, or to listen to lively conversation.

Young people describe the range of activity available to them as brilliant. Regular young people's meetings highlight when young people become bored with routine activities, such as football. Managers have reviewed their requests to use the fitness suite and swimming pool on site, to assess health and safety requirements and to ensure that staff are trained to oversee these activities safely. This takes time, but staff have negotiated other activities, such as trips to leisure centres and parks, to keep young people happily occupied.

Due to seamless planning between school and the residence, many enrichment opportunities cross all parts of the day. For example, young people spoke animatedly about a trip to Ypres. They enjoyed the holiday aspect of the trip, exploring the culture, food and language experiences. They reflected sensitively on what they had learned about the role of blind veterans and young soldiers who took part in the conflict. They are using this experience to contribute to a multi-media presentation about the battles, and are preparing to deliver the work in schools. Some of the young people have designed poppy jewellery that will be produced and sold in an enterprise partnership with a jewellery company. This approach empowers visually impaired young people to feel confident in their skills and abilities, to empathise with the needs of others, and enables positive and affirming interaction with local, national and international communities.

There are many other examples of how young people use activity to broaden their understanding of the world, to increase their skills and confidence and to prepare for productive adult lives. These include: the development of internal radio programmes where young people enhance their skills in verbal descriptions of their thoughts and feelings in short podcasts; a fully registered Scout group that meets weekly in the school, and is open to local young people; trampoline and climbing clubs where young people attain high levels of skill and qualification; a mobility and access assessment for a prestigious shopping and leisure precinct that young people are completing; and young people being part of working and presentation groups in order to educate and inform society about their lives. A visiting Scout Commissioner said, 'I was only meant to be here at the start, to get the group going, but it's hard to keep away from such a positive and lovely group of young people.' The school excels at engaging external role models and professionals, to enrich young people's lives through real examples of diversity and equal opportunity.

Staff use good knowledge of effective procedures to keep young people safe. Through warm and trusting relationships, they foster open and supportive communication that helps young people to feel confident in bringing their fears and anxieties to them. The inspector observed many examples, during time spent with them, of young people being confident to disagree with staff, recognise and praise the skills and qualities of others, and describe their emotions in detail without embarrassment or fear of ridicule. This demonstrates an open and accepting community where young people thrive.

All young people say that they feel safe in school, and that staff help them to 'get over' minor disagreements. Staff have high expectations about the residential group's approach to tolerance and acceptance. They prefer to use discussion and modelling to sanctions, and this helps young people to grow and mature into thoughtful teenagers who learn to take responsibility for their actions. Staff respond immediately to any complaints or concerns about young people's behaviour, although due to the positive environment, incidents are rare. There has been one situation that began during school holidays and continued into term, with young people taking sides about a relationship dispute. Although the problem is apparent mostly in the school day, staff have acted robustly to oversee and intervene in the way young people socialise and interact, as well as liaising with parents to promote reconciliation between young people. Effective communication between all disciplines has ensured that staff remain vigilant, and are informed about any emerging behaviour. Keyworkers use direct work sessions to help young people think about respecting and valuing those who have different opinions and to offer the young people care and support.

To extend young people's understanding of the impact of bullying and poor relationships, external facilitators who specialise in 'bully-busting' have visited the school and engaged with the young people. Young people are candid about their shortcomings, and are determined to make amends and resume happier relationships. One young person said, 'I don't want to be the person that makes other people sad... We get too much out of our friendships, and staff don't want us to waste our time arguing.' This level of insight and determination to improve is characteristic of the young people's high levels of resilience and the self-confidence that is nurtured by staff.

All staff undertake a comprehensive induction regarding safeguarding, and continue their understanding by further training opportunities. Since the last inspection, staff have completed refresher basic level training in protecting vulnerable young people, and have learned about e-safety, bullying, exploitation and radicalisation. Governors and leaders have undertaken safer recruitment training, and some have attended specific training on protecting children with disabilities. The safeguarding officer is reviewing how this important knowledge will be delivered to all staff to ensure that they are fully equipped with a clear understanding of this specialised area of protection. Staff participate in constructive discussion and reflection, so that managers can assess how training improves staff care practice.

The school operates appropriate recruitment practice to minimise the risk of unsuitable people gaining access to young people.

The school site and accommodation provides young people with a safe and secure environment. All visitors complete an electronic record that results in a photographic identification badge, which ensures that all visitors are easily identified. Health and safety is taken seriously, with comprehensive checks recorded and with clear actions to improve, such as reviewing the electrics for updating alarm systems. Young people are impressive in their understanding of fire safety: they are working with the Fire Cadets to create a programme for improving young people's understanding of how to evacuate safely that can be used in national training forums. One young person proudly educated the inspector in the safe evacuation from the residence at night, in case she wished to 'sleep over'. This reflects a strong commitment to including young people as valuable partners in their health, safety and protection.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers Outstanding

Senior leaders demonstrate highly collaborative relationships, and the residential service is valued and respected. Through regular multi-disciplinary senior meetings, governing body liaison and young people's council meetings, a positive cycle of review and communication is sustained that has young people's views, needs and development at its heart. This holistic approach ensures that all staff participate in planning, receive regular updates and remain committed to continuous improvement in the experiences, opportunities and integration of young people.

A whole-school development plan is ambitious in helping young people to demonstrate their skills and achievements to a wide audience. Leaders have set out steps that include all the contributions and roles of all disciplines. Examples of the breadth of vision and scope for development include carefully and safely coordinated projects and initiatives, such as a weekend sports club, preparing young people for further education, setting up apprenticeships and work experience, developing an on-site café and including young people in the public arena as advocates for their needs and wishes.

Keyworkers regularly meet with school staff and other professionals, such as the physiotherapist, to ensure that young people make continuous progress against their plans and targets. When young people are looked after by their local authority, keyworkers ensure that they write a clear progress and needs report for any review of their plans. Staff are less confident about the regulatory framework surrounding these young people. This is an area for improvement, although it has not impacted on the progress that the young people make.

Consistent and enthusiastic staff are on duty during the evenings and overnight. They foster a warm, family atmosphere, and demonstrate real affection for young people. Young people told the inspector the sad news that a member of staff had recently died. A mark of the excellent support provided by staff was demonstrated by how the young people had been included in bereavement processes. Leaders had been open about sharing the news, but had also provided strategies such as 'think of the happy times', and enabled this warm reflection to take place so that young people could put their

feelings into perspective.

New staff are fully integrated into the residential provision through well-established induction procedures, and ongoing supervision and appraisal. Residential staff feel valued and well supported in their work, and clearly enjoy spending time with young people. They are always interested in training and development opportunities, to equip them with the skills and knowledge they need to work effectively with young people with a visual impairment. For example, they are busy learning about a sensory and movement approach called 'Rebound' that maximises young people's mobility and processing. Some school and residential staff will be trained in this approach, to support all young people's progress.

Governors continue to be active in monitoring the residential provision, and providing clear feedback about their visits. The chair of the governing body has improved scrutiny of the residence by initiating unannounced visits, and is working with the head of care to consider how young people can educate the governing body about what they want from the visits. The head of care reports to the principal and governing body regularly, to highlight the strengths and development needs of the residential provision, and to secure funding for improvements. This is a point for improvement, because she does not have oversight of a budget that would enable her to implement fabric or activity improvements with immediate effect.

Parents, advocates, and young people consistently describe the benefits of residential placement. Parents and young people describe the service as 'excellent', 'couldn't be better', 'life-changing', and 'making a significant difference to my independence and quality of life'. Leaders and managers ensure that there is continuous improvement by qualitative and proactive monitoring and review of the whole-school provision. They respond promptly and transparently to any complaints that are raised with them, and involve external professionals in their efforts to reach a satisfactory outcome.

All staff model high expectations of justice, equality and safe relationships, and address shortfalls with timely and appropriate challenge and support. This is evident in their proactive, reverse-inclusion policy of bringing external bodies and organisations into the school, and in the way that young people represent themselves in educational materials for wide circulation, such as a 'Prevent' agenda learning resource, and online resources about visual impairment. Young people's qualities and achievements are celebrated and acknowledged within wider society. This provides a firm foundation for self-confidence and positive growth that enables them to develop into rounded and active citizens in the future.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will 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 exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact 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's 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 children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and 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	22
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	4 to 19
Headteacher	Dr J Patterson
Date of previous boarding inspection	27 February 2015
Telephone number	0151 2289968
Email address	office@stvin.com

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