

St Vincents School for the Blind

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Julia Toller
Type of inspection	Key

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Head/Principal	Stephen Roberts
Nominated person	Stephen Roberts
Date of last inspection	04/12/2008

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

- Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
- Good: this aspect of the provision is strong
- Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound
- Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

St Vincent's school for blind and partially sighted children is a registered charity governed by the Board of Trustees of the Catholic Blind Institute. St Vincent's has specialised school status and offers a curriculum for children with all levels of visual impairment, as well as additional needs, from many parts of England.

The residential accommodation is divided into three separate groups: Bridgman, Caulfield and Keller. The school is located in the West Derby about four miles from the centre of Liverpool. It is near to bus stops, leisure centres, shops and other schools.

During this visit a number of pupils were spoken with and all those staying at the school participated with the inspection process.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

At this unannounced full inspection, all key standards were inspected. This is an outstanding service overall.

Young people benefit from positive relationships with staff, they are afforded an excellent range of facilities and opportunities to encourage and support a healthy lifestyle, to develop their life skills and to reach good outcomes from education. Great emphasis is placed on the 24 hour curriculum at the school and this is used to achieve excellent outcomes for young people.

Staff at the school are highly motivated and professional, they benefit from an excellent range of training and support. They work well with other professionals to meet the complex and holistic needs of young people in areas such as education, and emotional and physical wellbeing.

Improvements since the last inspection

One recommendation was raised at the last inspection regarding health care plans.

Each young person now has an individual health care plan, that clearly outlines all health care needs including medications and a record of health care appointments. This helps staff to monitor and promote the health care needs of young people when staying in the residential units of the school.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

St Vincent's promotes healthy living through excellent systems and by exercise, education, nutrition and discussion. The school employs a health coordinator who has a responsibility for over seeing the individual health needs of all pupils, and making sure that all identified needs are met.

Health plans fully identify the physical and emotional health needs of young people. Records of medical appointments and key working sessions show that particular health needs are addressed by accessing other services that meet individual needs, such as speech and language therapy, mobility training and educational psychologists. This means young people are receiving expert support helping them lead a healthy lifestyle, and to educate them and inform them of ways to stay healthy both now and for their future.

St Vincent's school has achieved the healthy schools award and young people are proud of this, and help to maintain this status. Young people are aware of the impact choices they make with regard to health, diet and exercise will have on their health. Staff have varied and imaginative ways of supporting young people to become independent and learn new skills, such as cooking, shopping and budgeting. This means young people have opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge around identifying appropriate foods and maintaining a healthy diet.

Staff have attended medication training, their skills and knowledge are assessed by the health care coordinator. The school also has an appropriate medication policy, which staff are aware of and understand. The schools health care records provide excellent details regarding the management of medicines taken by young people, stating how and when they are to be given, and noting any side effects that staff must be mindful of. Therefore, staff are fully aware of the impact that medicines may have and how best to support young people and monitor their welfare.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff ensure that young people feel valued and that their privacy and dignity is maintained at all times. This is achieved by adopting a professional approach and through maintaining descriptive and accurate records that reflect the level of personal support afforded to young people, such as placement plans and risk assessments.

There is a fully accessible complaints procedure. Young people are able to make complaints, issues raised are given the highest regard and acted upon without delay. Young people also feel more than able to raise informal issues with staff and one said that the 'staff are more than fair'. Young people are confident that appropriate action will be taken, but are encouraged to find solutions to concerns themselves

where appropriate. In addition the head of care monitors records of complaints, analysing the information to improve standards within the school.

Young people feel safe and secure living at the school. They are fully involved in the development of all care records, such as health plans, placement plans and risk assessments. Staff have a clear and comprehensive understanding of individual needs and risks. Staff utilise their skills well to ascertain opinions and feelings with regard to the way in which support is provided to keep them safe. Records are extensive and explain in detail how the school keeps young people safe in line with their assessed needs in areas such as mobility.

All staff working at the school are appropriately vetted.

The school has excellent procedures for safeguarding children, including a safeguarding officer who is responsible for coordinating staff training, updating policies and procedures and dealing with any concerns if they arise. All staff have attended appropriate safeguarding training and they are able to demonstrate that they understand the importance of their role in making sure that young people are safe. Care records show individual issues regarding safeguarding are recorded, providing excellent details of how young people are supported. Young people who stay at St Vincent's are fully aware of the schools policies and procedures, which help to keep them safe during their time at the school.

The school's procedures for promoting positive behaviours shows a clear and professional commitment to developing individual and supportive strategies, for example, records fully demonstrate that staff have an excellent understanding of the diverse needs of young people and are consistent in their approach. Staff support young people to address behaviours and enjoy positive relationships with others. This is also achieved by employing systems and pro active practices which value and include young people, whilst improving their self confidence and allowing them to flourish within the school setting.

The overall standard of behaviour of the boarders at the school is excellent. The procedures for promoting positive behaviours shows a clear and professional commitment to developing individual, specific and supportive strategies for managing behaviours. Records demonstrate that staff have an excellent understanding of each individual and are consistent and respectful in their approach.

With the exception of fire safety emergency lighting checks, records are in place to show that the school is safe and effectively monitored and managed. The senior management team at the school ensure that regular and ongoing evaluations of the service take place. This means that young people are afforded the best possible care and support, in an environment that is assessed as safe and meets their needs fully. The school also has detailed environmental and fire risk assessments and all necessary checks, such as gas and electric certificates are in place.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

St Vincent's has attained specialist school status for blind and partially sighted children. This is an outstanding achievement for the staff and pupils of the school, and shows that they provide a high standard of education and care.

Young people are afforded a comprehensive and highly organised education provision that supports them well and meets their educational, physical and sensory needs fully. Young people are provided with good opportunities to complete homework and course work, and they have access to a wide range of resources to help with their studies, such as computers, specialised equipment and trained staff.

St Vincent's provides excellent support to young people. Key workers do well to identify individual needs, and the staff team work consistently with teaching staff, young people and their families to make sure they enjoy their stay and that their needs are met.

Some young people have additional needs, such as physical disabilities, learning disabilities and medical needs. The school is able to meet such needs through rigorous systems such as assessments and care planning, which ensures that staff regularly monitor and review individual needs and seek relevant training and professional support to provide appropriate and effective support.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are encouraged and supported to have a say in the planning of their care and what happens in the groups during their stays, this is achieved by regular group meetings and key working sessions. Young people are very well supported enabling them to communicate their wishes and feelings effectively, and to influence decisions made with regard to their day to day living and their future.

Placement plans provide accurate, up to date and comprehensive information about the education, care and support provided to each child. Young people are encouraged and supported to attain positive outcomes and achieve personal goals through good care planning processes. Staff are consistent in their approach and young people feel valued and well supported by the school.

Systems are in place to make sure that children are encouraged and able to maintain contact with friends and family while staying at St Vincent's, this includes e-mail, letters and access to a private phone.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people who attend St Vincent's have independent living plans, which are considered to be an important part of the school curriculum. They aim to encourage and develop independence skills and mobility. Young people are supported to move on from the school in a planned and positive manner, this is achieved by careful planning and forging links with other agencies such as Connexions and further education colleges.

St Vincent's has three residential groups, all of which are maintained to a very good standard. Young people have ample space to socialise and all the groups are homely and welcoming. Each unit is well equipped with specialist resources to help young people participate in the day to day running of the groups, this includes talking kitchen appliances, Braille instructions and aids to help young people access television and radio. Staff show an excellent understanding of the needs of young people who are blind and partially sighted, and each group is set out in a way that allows young people to feel safe, through familiarity of their surroundings.

Young people have their own rooms, which they are encouraged to decorate and personalise during their stays. Rooms are all decorated, maintained and furnished to a high standard. Young people are encouraged to keep their rooms tidy and free from clutter.

The exterior of the school is also in good order. Gardens have nice flowerbeds and established borders. Young people have ample space to play including a football pitch and a range of play and climbing frames.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Individual's rights are respected and promoted, young people benefit from a service that is able to meet their holistic and diverse needs. Staff demonstrate a professional approach to ensuring that young people feel valued and listened to.

Staff are provided with a high level of training, support and supervision to maintain professional practice and review their performance. They are fully motivated and demonstrate a commitment to meeting the diverse needs of individual's. The skills of the team compliment and contribute to the outstanding care provided.

Residential staff are extremely positive and proactive in their approach to supporting the education of boarders. Excellent resources are available to enhance and assist with educational and tasks, such as, independence, mobility, communication and social skills. The school provides a seamless service which promotes attainment and personal achievements.

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The school is staffed to meet the individual needs of young people. This is achieved by robust risk assessments and placement planning which clearly assesses the support needs of each individual and incorporates this into the schools staffing levels. All staff employed at the school are appropriately vetted and have attended an extensive induction and training programme. This encompasses all aspects of safeguarding vulnerable young people, including delivering and maintaining safe practices around bullying, dealing with complaints and reporting concerns.

The school is able to cater and meet all needs exceptionally well, by employing a staff team who are highly trained and skilled in delivering care and support to those with additional needs.

The school is safe and effectively monitored and managed. The school has detailed environmental and fire risk assessments. All parts of the building to which boarders have access are adapted, and facilities within the school are designed and positioned to ensure that all young people enjoy the full benefits of an inclusive service.

Young people have accessible care records that are dynamic, clear and reflect the standard of care and support delivered to each young person. Systems within the school ensure that all records are well maintained and regularly monitored and reviewed.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that fire records clearly identify when emergency lighting checks are completed. (NMS 26)