St Catherine's School & College

Specialists in Speech, Language and Communication Needs

Statement of Purpose and Function

September 2026

1. Vision and Mission

Vision

Our vision is to continue to be leaders in delivering integrated education, therapy and care for young people with Speech, Language and Communication Needs, empowering individuals to be happy, healthy and confident in their future lives.

Mission

Our mission is to provide personalised learning and care underpinned by onsite speech, language and occupational therapy so that every young person achieves their learning potential and maximises their communication and life skills. We will use our beautiful and vibrant coastal setting, supportive local community and dedicated staff to help us to develop happy, healthy and confident individuals.

2. What is St Catherine's School and College and who does it cater for?

St Catherine's is a national charity which is approved by the Department for Education to run a non-maintained residential special school for the education of students between the ages of 9 and 19 years who have a primary need of speech, language and communication. Our centre, in the heart of Ventnor on the Isle of Wight, provides specialist education, intensive speech and language therapy and occupational therapy and residential facilities. We are registered with the Department for Education to take up to 94 students.

All young people applying to St Catherine's School and Sixth Form College must have a significant language disorder detailed in their Education, Health and Care Plan paperwork to be considered for admission. Whilst we recognise the comorbidity of language disorders and other forms of neurodiversity such as Autism, a diagnosis or primary need of Autism alone cannot be considered by the admission panel. This is due to the school taking a neuro-affirming approach to social engagement and participation.

The school admits students on 38-week placements and operates on a normal three-term system. Residential placements are weekly boarding, term time only (School – Monday morning to Friday afternoon, Sixth Form - Sunday evening to Friday afternoon). It is imperative that all students have an alternative care base for these half terms, weekends and during holiday periods.

St Catherine's School and Sixth Form is a safe school but not a secure site.

3. Meeting the Needs of our Young People

Baseline assessments are carried out for each student on their entry to St Catherine's to establish their individual strengths and difficulties with respect to their educational, therapeutic and life skill needs.

Assessments of each student's progress happens on a day to day basis. This provides teachers and therapists with information and insight to improve their effectiveness. Every

lesson is planned to meet the individual needs of each student through differentiation and progress is recorded. Lesson observations take place termly for teachers and therapists. Where any student is not making the progress we would expect this is reviewed and strategies are put in place.

We hold review meetings for each student to review their Education, Health and Care Plan on an annual basis. As part of our partnership process, all professionals with an interest in the individual student are invited to contribute to and attend, together with parents/carers and the student themselves. A written report is produced and sent out to all concerned. In addition, termly Parent Liaison Aim Documents are sent home and contributions sought from parents and young people. Staff from each of St Catherine's specialist teams conduct liaison aim meetings at least three times a year with respect to each student to ensure an individualised and holistic approach is in place. There are also opportunities to discuss student progress at our parent/staff consultation sessions. Additional appointments with staff can be arranged throughout the term if parents and carers wish.

4. Referrals and Admissions

Prior to visiting, we ask that parents/carers (or their local authority, at parents/carers request) submit their son/daughter's documentation for review by our assessment team. Documentation should comprise of an Education, Health and Care Plan together with the most recent reports (Educational Psychology, Speech and Language Therapy, Occupational Therapy and School Annual Review as appropriate), along with the St Catherine's Admissions Form. As part of this form, we ask, if parents/carers are separated, that permission be sought from both parties to proceed with the Admissions Process.

In some cases, a member of the assessment panel may ask to visit your child/young person in their current education setting. This gives us the opportunity to learn more about the student and whether we can meet their needs.

If the assessment team thinks that St Catherine's may be a suitable placement, then a family visit, including the young person who is seeking the placement, will be arranged. St Catherine's does hold Open Days and parents/carers that attend the Open Day do not have to attend a separate informal visit.

During the visit, we will discuss the child/young person's needs to come to a considered opinion as to whether St Catherine's might be an appropriate placement.

The final stage of our admissions process is student trial days to ascertain whether St Catherine's is right for the young person and their family.

As part of the student trial days, the young person will join an appropriate class group and follow the usual timetable. Although no formal testing is carried out, observations will take place in all settings and assessments will be made.

Residential trial days at St Catherine's School are three days. The residential trial days for our Sixth Form College is four days in length. Students seeking a residential placement will be supported by our residential staff outside of school hours. Local young people usually attend on a non-residential basis and may attend one or more trial days, rather than a three-day trial day, with other local young people.

Following the trial days, we will inform parents/carers (and the local authority, as appropriate) of the outcome in writing.

5. The Environment

St Catherine's is located in Ventnor, a small seaside town on the south coast of the Isle of Wight. The location and supportive community are key to the success of the school, as it provides our students with opportunities to develop their independence and life skills.

St Catherine's has three residential houses. Students are in houses appropriate for their age and cohort.

6. Education

At St Catherine's we believe it is essential that all students receive as broad and balanced an education as possible. In our caring, friendly environment young people are given the structure and support necessary for them to learn effectively. Each student has an individual programme that fits within the specially written schemes of work, allowing individual needs to be met within a modified learning environment.

In order to meet the needs of language-impaired students, St Catherine's has a policy of maintaining high staff-to-student ratios that facilitate greater individual attention. Classes have no more than 10 students.

Each class has a teacher and a teaching assistant who work collaboratively with speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists to plan programmes and agree targets. Additionally, speech and language therapy assistants, and occupational therapy assistants work with students both within the classroom and on a one-to-one basis to deliver specific targeted intervention programmes.

Curriculum

Students are given access to the whole range of National Curriculum subjects (with the exception of Modern Foreign Languages) as well as vocational opportunities. Literacy and numeracy underpin all aspects of learning and are integral to personal development, therefore, a significant amount of time is devoted to them.

The aim in Key Stages 2 and 3 (Key Stage 2 for students aged 7 to 11, Key Stage 3 for students aged 11 to 14) is to build confidence and self-esteem in the young people by ensuring they achieve success in the classroom. A broad and balanced curriculum has been developed by teachers and therapists which is appropriate for our students' needs. Therapists work within the classrooms to ensure students can access the curriculum being delivered.

The aim in Key Stage 4 (students aged 14 to 16) is to prepare students for the next phase in their lives. The curriculum varies and the young people have certain privileges recognising their increasing maturity. Students follow academic courses appropriate to their individual levels which can lead to accreditation through Entry Pathway, Entry Level Certificates, AQA Unit Awards, BTEC qualifications and GCSE exams. Students start to gain work-related and enterprise skills. There are strong links with the local community and some of the older students attend the local college each term to try vocational taster courses which are not available at St Catherine's.

Sixth Form College Curriculum

The College's aim is for young people to make sufficient educational and functional linguistic progress in order to be successful in the completion of any future full-time vocational training, education or employment.

We provide students with opportunities to:

- improve their communicative abilities;
- strengthen their learning skills;
- raise their literacy and numeracy competences;
- enjoy a variety of work and vocational experiences; and
- grow in personal and social maturity.

A flexible combination of nationally-accredited courses provides the framework for the delivery of a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum individually tailored to meet each student's specific needs.

Qualifications available include Functional Skills English, Functional Skills Mathematics, BTECs and GCSE subjects.

7. Care

The residential team at St Catherine's provides much more than a welcoming and comfortable place to stay, they support students to further develop their life and independence skills in line with their Education, Health and Care Plan outcomes. The team also assists students to develop their interests and hobbies by accessing a range of leisure activities.

Our students' speech, language and communication needs are such that they are not always able to generalise skills from the classroom to other environments. Our skilled residential team supports students to embed the skills they have learnt during the school day, as well as achieve their EHCP outcomes. The team also supports students to develop their life skills through the delivery of our bespoke comprehensive life skills programme, which covers areas of independence such as budgeting, shopping, travel and managing medical conditions.

Each of our residential students has a keyworker within the residential team, who helps to identify the skills needed to develop the self-confidence and independence of the young person.
Alongside the young person, an Individual Care Action Plan is agreed and the keyworker helps the young person to work towards gaining these skills at an appropriate pace.

Our students' progress is tracked against our comprehensive independence programme which covers a range of essential life skills including shopping, budgeting, cooking, travel training and managing medical conditions. Each area of independence is broken up into small stages so we can assess students' progress step-by-step and in total there are around 500 steps that students can cover if they complete the entire programme.

Young people in residential units also have access to an Independent Person through half termly visits to access independent support and advocacy for any concerns they have.

8. Therapy

The therapy department consists of speech and language therapists, speech and language therapy assistants, occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, a movement psychotherapist, an art psychotherapist and our therapy dog, Dougal. The therapy team is an integral part of St Catherine's - working throughout the school, sixth form college and within the context of the residential houses.

Therapists work collaboratively with other staff groups within St Catherine's to ensure that students can access learning and training opportunities to help them develop skills which will support them through adolescence and into adulthood.

The high staff-to-student ratio ensures that therapy is a positive experience and is flexible to meet the needs of each individual. It means that the skills students develop during therapy are generalised across all aspects of St Catherine's activities and everyday living. The location of the school in the small town of Ventnor supplements these developments and supports the application of skills into the wider community.

The aims of the therapy team are to:

- assess and develop students' speech, language and communication skills and occupational therapy related skills;
- enable students to access the education curriculum more effectively, providing consistent support to maximise their capacity for learning;
- provide a Total Communication approach within the school environment including the use of sign-supported English to aid understanding;
- support the development of skills within the context of the wider community;
- empower the young people to manage their own sensory and self-regulation needs by providing them with strategies that they can apply on an 'as needed' basis as independently as possible;
- support students to gain the skills they need to integrate into their community and gain employment when they leave;

- guide students in setting aims and evaluating their own progress to develop independence and occupational skills; and
- liaise with families, carers, local authorities and other stakeholders as appropriate.

9. Behaviour Management

At St Catherine's, we recognise and understand that all behaviour is communication. As a dedicated and specialist communication friendly environment, our approach to managing behaviour is equally as positive and child centred. Our aim is to regularly commend, reward and celebrate both behaviour for learning and behaviour that reflects personal values and qualities. In incidences where behaviour falls below our expectations and/or becomes challenging, our staff will show understanding and empathy towards the communicative function this behaviour has, whilst preserving a safe and respectful learning environment for all students and staff.

At St Catherine's, we believe positive behaviour management is based on trust and building positive and respectful relationships with our learners. To understand their needs and how best to support them, we are fully committed to maintaining a holistic approach to every child by ensuring our strands of education, therapy and care work together to ensure our provision and collective approach meets the needs of every child; therefore, enabling them to achieve more than they ever thought possible.

10. Staff

Our Business, Maintenance, Housekeeping and Kitchen Teams support the education and care staff in the smooth running of the school.

In line with the statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (Department for Education, September 2026), all staff employed are checked through references and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). These checks are required of all staff prior to them taking up a position working at St Catherine's School. Relevant staff are trained in Safer Recruitment. The school's Single Central Record is overseen by the Principal.

Staff training and development is ongoing and opportunities are made available for staff to attend both in-house and external courses and conferences. Specialist training is offered in specific cases if a need arises.

There is a full programme of in-service and external staff training according to the requirements of the individual disciplines.

All of our residential team have an NVQ 3 qualification in health and social care or equivalent, or are working towards this qualification.

11. Child Protection

Child Protection and the Safeguarding of students is given the highest priority at St Catherine's. The school's Designated Safeguarding Lead is;

- Jenn Snaith (Lead DSL/Vice Principal)

St Catherine's Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads:

- Sarah Thompson, Principal
- Kat Cotton, Head of Residential
- Jo Elliott, Head of Sixth Form

The Designated Safeguarding Lead/s liaise with the relevant Local Authority Social Care departments and Hampshire LADO if and when appropriate. All procedures follow 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' (2018),'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (2026 and our local policy 'Child Protection and Safeguarding'

The parents/carers and placing authorities will be notified of safeguarding and child protection issues where appropriate.

12. Anti-bullying

We believe that all people at St Catherine's have the right to work and to learn in a supportive, caring and safe environment without fear of being bullied.

At St Catherine's we recognise that young people look towards staff for models of good behaviour in the way they treat colleagues, students and parents with respect and value the differences in each individual. All staff will behave in such a way as to reinforce the importance of appropriate behaviour and respect for others. Bullying and child on child abuse of any sort will not be tolerated and all staff will reinforce this message. Incidents are logged and appropriate sanctions imposed if necessary.

13. Complaints

We are committed to work with parents/carers to help their child to potential. One aspect of this commitment is reflected in the recognition that occasionally, things may occur which cause parents concern. St Catherine's School and Sixth Form College recognise it is important that parents, carers and students know the steps to take to ensure any problems are resolved. Our Complaints Policy can be found at www.stcatherines.org.uk.

14. Health

Speech, language and communication needs encompass a spectrum of challenges and impact individuals in different ways. Moreover, our children and young people may have difficulties that extend beyond primary speech, language and communication needs. No two children and young people are the same and our comprehensive medical and support services reflect this.

St Catherine's has a well-equipped Medical Room staffed during the school day by an experienced medical team, who work closely with Care, Education and Therapy staff to provide each student with optimum healthcare, health surveillance and health education. Parents have a key responsibility for their child's health and medical needs and the medical team will provide healthcare in partnership with parents, therefore, it is important that parents liaise with the school and the school liaise with parents. The medical team will engage with additional healthcare providers when appropriate. The medical team access support from, and work closely with, key healthcare providers as appropriate for our learners needs.

15. Inspections

The school is subject to inspections by Ofsted, the Fire Service and the Environmental Health Officers. Our residential care is independently monitored on a half-termly basis by National Youth Advocacy Service. St Catherine's also receives approval visits from local authorities who have students placed at the school and sixth form college and is subject to an annual Quality Assurance inspection from the Children's Cross Regional Arrangements Group (CCRAG).

16. Review

The Statement of Purpose and Function will be reviewed annually by the Senior Leadership Team.