

St Catherine's School

St. Catherines School, Grove Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 1TT

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is a non-maintained residential special school for the education of students between the ages of nine and 19 years who have a primary need relating to speech, language and communication.

The residential accommodation is provided in four houses on the school site. At the time of the inspection, there were 89 students, of whom 16 were accessing the residential houses.

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

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 February 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected outstanding

The effectiveness of leaders and managers outstanding

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 30 January 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students flourish in the residential provision of this school. They make exceptional progress in their educational, personal, and social development. Staff have a deep affection for, and a commitment to, the students in their care. Leaders have created an environment in which staff feel valued. This has given the team significant stability and consistency and has enabled staff to provide excellent care for students. One parent said, 'Being a residential student at the school has been life changing for my child.'

Students in the residential provision achieve excellent outcomes. Students are at the centre of the decisions that shape their lives. This is because staff ensure that they tailor pathways to the individual wishes and needs of each student. Staff are highly skilled at identifying the progress made by students and speak about each student's journey with immense pride.

Students share warm and positive relationships with staff. Staff know and understand each student extremely well. This enables them to gain the trust of the students they work with. Students say that they have a voice and can identify trusted staff in the residential provision. This enables them to put forward their views and suggestions about enhancements to their residential and school experience.

Staff have achieved complete integration across all departments including education, health, therapy, and residential teams. Staff ensure that communication between the teams is flawless and comprehensive. This supports students with positive transitions and ensures that the teams provide a consistent experience for each individual student. Students are appropriately supported when moving on from the provision. As a result, students often take a multitude of independent living skills with them. This is due to the dedication of the staff who work collaboratively together.

An exceptionally strong therapy team helps to support students to thrive. There is an extensive team of mental health first aiders, that helps to provide a sense of being cared and nurtured for both students and staff alike. Senior leaders recognise the need to support and look after staff to enable them to provide the best care for students.

Feedback from families is exceptionally positive. For example, one parent said, 'Students develop their social skills and learn how to cope with the necessities of life such as cooking for themselves, doing laundry etc. These skills are imperative for [students name] to live a fully independent life.' Another said, 'The staff are all, without fail, professional, caring, compassionate, supportive and considerate.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

A skilled and well-trained team ensures that safeguarding is at the heart of everything that goes on at the provision. Staff do exceptional work to embed learning around safeguarding into all aspects of residential life. This supports students to learn how to keep themselves safe and helps them as they move on to more independent settings.

Staff are vigilant, and their deep knowledge of every student enables them to spot concerns swiftly and take proactive steps to reduce risk whenever possible. Staff also work hard to keep families well informed, sharing any new or emerging concerns that could impact on the safety of students.

Students say that they feel safe in the residential provision. Staff support and nurture positive relationships between students and their peers. Staff have also introduced positive initiatives to support students to engage with others from outside the residential provision safely. For example, some older students go to a local nightclub and another student is part of the Scout movement. Staff have also constructed an in-house shop to help students to gain confidence in purchasing items before they do so in the community.

Staff make effective use of the school's well-developed reporting and recording mechanisms to ensure that concerns are rapidly brought to the attention of safeguarding leads. Staff form strong collaborative partnerships with external safeguarding agencies. Students also have a range of ways to raise concerns and use these confidently and staff address student's worries or concerns quickly and sensitively.

Health and safety monitoring arrangements are exemplary. All checks are completed as required with strong management scrutiny. Students are protected from unsuitable people through the meticulous and thoughtful application of safer recruitment practices.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The head of residential provides excellent leadership to the residential provision. This is firmly supported by the school's leadership team and staff, from all disciplines, who comment extremely positively on the support, commitment, enthusiasm, and dedication of leaders. Senior leaders and governors have a clear plan for the residential provision and there is a culture of continual review and striving towards excellence.

The senior leadership team has a clear and well-focused vision that places the students at the heart of everything that they do. Leader's role model their shared ethos of high-quality individualised support. Staff engage with this vision with huge enthusiasm and dedication.

The newly appointed head of residential has had a significant positive impact, bringing a sense of autonomy to the students. The views of students are embedded throughout the provision and there is a culture of active listening and a keenness to make positive changes. Students are happy and confident when they articulate their views and enjoy an active residential life. The head of residential has introduced a wide range of new activities that promote students' well-being and engagement. These activities range from a monthly fever night club, to sports and leisure activities as well as weekend stays that encourage collaboration. Consequently, students who once struggled to feel connected or motivated, can now explore their potential in new, exciting ways. Staff are extremely proud of their involvement in these activities, which have supported students to make profound progress.

Staff say that they feel well supported and praise the quality of supervision and continual professional development through annual appraisals. This is further enhanced by team meetings. Staff say that they feel heard and that their expertise and experience is important to leaders. Staff feel included in important decisions about the future of the school and the residential provision.

Staff receive extensive training to meet the individualised needs of the children in the residential houses. This includes areas such as epilepsy and diabetes. The school environment is tailored to the needs of neuro-diverse children and trauma informed practice is being embedded following staff training. The introduction of art and dance therapy sessions has enabled students to learn how to express themselves in new and different ways. Students have built their self-confidence. This has helped them to engage in talking therapy, which is something that they were unable to do previously.

Leaders ensure excellent communication and collaboration with external professionals. Professionals have trust and confidence in the care provided. They can readily identify the positive impact that the provision has had for the students that they support. Leaders' ability to nurture these relationships ensures that students receive coherent and consistent care across all areas of their lives. One social worker said, 'We are grateful that [students name] has been able to attend residential. It is very nurturing and supportive and has allowed them to thrive and enjoy activities. The staff have been integral in helping [students name] to socialise and make friendships and build on their independence skills.'

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: SC012597

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Sarah Thompson

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

Hannah Cox, Social Care Compliance Inspector

Emma Haskell, Social Care Inspector

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