

St Catherine's School

St Catherine's 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 students between the ages of 9 and 19 years who have a primary need relating to speech, language and communication.

The residential accommodation is provided in three houses on the school site. At the time of the inspection, there were 94 students, of whom 14 were accessing the residential houses.

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

Inspection dates: 20 to 22 January 2026

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: 10 February 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students feel secure, valued and understood because their living spaces reflect who they are and communication aids help them navigate their environment confidently. The homely atmosphere and accessible resources in each house promote belonging, engagement and positive daily experiences, supporting their emotional wellbeing and development.

Students enjoy a consistently warm and nurturing atmosphere, where staff understand and respond to their individual needs. Independence is promoted through communication, self-care and daily routines, with a strengths-based approach helping students to build skills and confidence. Personalised care that builds on student's strengths supports meaningful progress.

Residential staff know students and their families well and advocate effectively to ensure their needs are met and rights upheld. Students are supported to access entitlements such as disability bus passes and mobility support, including driving theory preparation. Students feel empowered and supported to pursue independence. Staff advocacy helps remove barriers and promotes confidence, autonomy and practical life skills.

Students have excellent school attendance and are thriving. They can articulate their educational journey and future plans. Staff show strong commitment to wellbeing, ensuring consistent access to speech and language therapy and occupational therapy, with strategies embedded in care plans and independence work. This helps students progress educationally and prepare for future moves with clarity and independence.

Students access a wide range of positive experiences in the residential houses and in the community. Those previously anxious and unable to express themselves now leave home safely, explore new hobbies, stay active and are building community links. Some now travel independently, including travelling home at the weekend. This has helped students to feel empowered to explore the world around them, communicate their wishes and take ownership of their journeys and experiences.

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

Students live in a safe environment with staff who understand their individual needs. Each child has a personalised emergency evacuation plan, ensuring staff know how to respond safely in an emergency. Individualised safety planning promotes student's trust, reassurance and confidence in the adults around them.

Students are supported to take measured risks with staff guidance, helping them build confidence and decision-making skills in safe, structured ways. Challenges can be explored safely, fostering emotional growth and self-belief.

There have been no significant incidents or physical interventions since the last inspection. Students feel safe, understood and supported by staff who respond thoughtfully to their needs. A calm, consistent approach promotes emotional regulation and reduces the need for intervention.

Online safety is a strength of the school. Leaders provide guidance to students and families, with consistent messaging across school and home, including through weekly newsletters. Consistent support helps students stay safe and make responsible choices, both in school and at home.

Medication and health support are managed safely. Nurses keep clear records and respond swiftly to concerns. Health needs are assessed pre-admission, with care plans updated as needs change and specialist training arranged. Staff work closely with families and professionals to support ongoing conditions. However, routine appointments for students registered out of area are not consistently tracked, risking missed information and delayed follow-up.

Students are encouraged to share their views and are regularly checked in with by staff. No complaints have been raised, but transparent systems are in place, including 'Widgit' forms for complaints, feedback, repairs and annual reviews, ensuring students can contribute meaningfully. Students feel heard, respected and involved in shaping their environment. Accessible systems promote emotional safety, choice and accountability, strengthening trust between students and staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential provision is led by an ambitious and creative senior team, committed to achieving the best outcomes. Students benefit from strong, values-driven leadership that champions their rights and ensures their voices are heard. Strategic collaboration and challenge promote high-quality, student-centred care.

Governors maintain strong oversight of residential provision through regular visits, strategic scrutiny and committee involvement. They understand student's communication needs and diagnoses and observe students in both residential and community settings. Governors also support and challenge senior leaders, including the principal.

Children are regularly visited by an independent listener they know and trust, who listens attentively to their views. An independent visitor also provides detailed reports to leaders and governors, adding external scrutiny. Students feel heard, valued and confident to express themselves. Independent oversight strengthens safeguarding and ensures their voices inform practice and leadership decisions.

Parent feedback is overwhelmingly positive. Families describe the care as consistent, nurturing and life-changing, with strong relationships, clear communication and tailored support. Students are more confident, and proud of each milestone they reach. Safeguarding is prompt and well-explained, helping children feel safe and settled.

Staff are deeply committed to student's development. Team meetings are used to reflect on practice and share learning when new behaviours emerge. These sessions strengthen team bonds and improve collaboration to support children. Ongoing learning and strong governance oversight help ensure safe, responsive care.

Relationships between residential houses, families and the wider professional network are transparent and supportive. Responsive leadership and stable foundations help students navigate change with confidence and emotional resilience.

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

Point for improvement

- Leaders should ensure that children have a clear plan covering their individual health and welfare needs. The plan should include records of routine universal health checks (e.g. age appropriate immunisations, dental health, hearing and eyesight checks).

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

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