

## Welcome to St John's Catholic School for the Deaf

St John's School for the Deaf, based in Boston Spa, West Yorkshire, is a non-maintained day and boarding school for hearing impaired pupils aged 3 to 19. In 2007 we became a specialist school for sensory and physical impairments.



St John's is:

- a community where our values reflect the ideals of the life and teachings of Christ;
- an environment where every voice is heard and celebrated;
- an excellent school, open to change and future challenges.

We are a Catholic school whose mission is to recognise and develop the entire potential of every person. Our school welcomes young people and their families of all faiths and of none. As an oral school we place great emphasis on developing to the full each child's potential for understanding spoken language. We also believe that the majority of deaf children can acquire some degree of spoken language skill.



Throughout their education, we encourage our students to investigate and reflect spiritually and ethically on the demands of daily life, and to learn that relationships are built on respect, forgiveness and reconciliation. It is of great importance to us that we educate our students to value education not just for what it brings to them, but for how it can help them contribute more fully to the communities in which they live, and enable them to take their place as responsible, confident young adults in the 21st century.

## About us

St John's is an oral school where pupils are taught by specialist teachers of hearing impaired children. There is great emphasis on supporting the development of pupils' spoken language as well as reading and writing. This approach is underpinned by our commitment to the use of technology to provide children with maximum access to speech. We have a resident audiologist, all classrooms are acoustically treated and pupils have speech therapy delivered by a team of therapists. In 2015 Ofsted commented that *"planning for future learning is accurate overall because staff understand pupils' needs*

*and ensure work set meets the needs of pupils. This enables most groups, including those who are disadvantaged, to make good progress overall.”*

Some pupils have special needs in addition to deafness such as visual and physical impairments, dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism and ADHD. Most pupils arrive with linguistic levels significantly below their hearing peers but have the opportunity to study a wide range of GCSE and other nationally accredited courses. After post 16, students go on to university, further education or employment.

We are a residential school, and many of our pupils who live far away stay here from Monday to Friday, travelling home at weekends. Pupils enjoy their boarding experience, and our latest social care inspection (February 2015) found that *“Pupils recognise the progress they make through attending the school. They are empowered because they become confident and effective communicators who readily share their views and opinions. Pupils have open and warm relationships with staff which are built on honesty and respect. Pupils say they can discuss matters that affect them with school leaders within elected care and student forum meetings.”*

### ***The Primary Department an Early Years Foundation Stage***



Our Primary Department caters for children who are deaf, multi-sensory impaired or who have communication difficulties. These young people face particular challenges acquiring language, and need to experience a curriculum that is delivered at an age-appropriate interest level but at a level they can understand. As speech is such a complex auditory signal, they also need quiet conditions to process it.

At St John’s pupils are taught by additionally qualified specialist teachers, and supported by learning support assistants and intervenors. Our high staffing ratio allows for children to be taught individually or in small groups, and to follow a highly personalised curriculum.

Our aims in the primary phase are to introduce the children to school life in an enjoyable and positive way, and to lay the foundations for high educational achievements. We make communication and language learning an integral part of each child’s experiences, and foster each child’s appreciation of their own self-worth and a respect for others.



A particular feature of teaching at St John's is the use of a technique called the Maternal Reflective Method. This is built on the principle that the best starting point for language teaching is the child's individual interests and experiences. Staff seize these as meaningful opportunities that make language come alive. The teacher produces a reading text which directly relates to what the child has done or said and this personalised written language is used to teach vocabulary, spelling and grammar. This text can also be a stimulus for pupils' own writing.

Our own team of speech and language therapists provides direct therapy individually and within small groups. In the primary department, this can be as often as three times a week and is complemented by other intensive interaction experiences such as Jabadao, where our therapists use music and movement to promote communication.

### ***The Secondary Department***

In our secondary department, students work in small groups of pupils with similar educational needs. They are taught by specialist teachers of hearing impaired children supported by Learning Support Assistants. Pupils study up to ten subjects, including additional English lessons which target specific reading skills and enhance their access to the wider curriculum.



The development of literacy is a key priority for our school and, when students have particular difficulties in this area, we provide intensive specialist teaching. We have teachers of the deaf with additional qualifications in dyslexia and dyspraxia and have developed a shape-coding system that is used throughout the school by both teachers and speech therapists to support pupils' understanding of grammatical structures.

The promotion of speaking and listening skills is integral to learning in all subjects. To facilitate listening, all classrooms are acoustically treated and sound field systems enable pupils to hear their teachers and peers above any background noise that could mask speech. In addition, all our students have individual or group sessions of speech and language therapy. These may be as often as three times a week and are delivered by our own team of highly specialist therapists.

There is a high level of personalisation in our curriculum and more than sixteen different subjects can be studied at different levels, from entry level to GCSEs and their equivalent. Different curriculum pathways are planned for individual students to match their needs and interests. While some students follow wholly school based courses, we also offer a high quality vocational curriculum strand from year 9 onwards. Students can choose an Employability and Personal Development course which involves attending a local skills centre each week. Students have tasters of areas of work including horticulture, hospitality, construction, hair and beauty, and animal care. The language content of the course is

prepared and taught by specialist teachers at St John's and our teachers and learning mentors support the practical sessions at the skills centre. This provides an early introduction to life at college, and builds our pupils' confidence in working with young people and tutors outside St John's.

Throughout the school, we encourage our pupils to participate in new challenges and provide a wealth of enrichment opportunities. All pupils take part in inter-school sports competitions which are adapted for our young people with physical difficulties. Former students have achieved places in national football teams and athletics squads. Locally, we are closely linked with a specialist sports college and our pupils take part in outdoor challenges with their mainstream peers.



### ***The Sixth Form***



At St John's, we are very proud indeed of our students' successes in our sixth form. This is where their earlier intensive educational input comes to fruition. Our sixth form students attend mainstream colleges supported by our own learning mentors and a teacher of the deaf. Students receive additional tutorial support at school as well as continuing with speech therapy and courses in English and Maths. During their time in the secondary

department, we prepare students very well for this next educational stage and, as a result, we have never had a student drop out or fail a course.

All students in the sixth form follow a specially designed curriculum, the continuing focus of which is the development of language and literacy. Functional skills in English, Maths and ICT provide the core and a special programme, Moving On, integrates PSHE, RE and skills for adult life. In addition, students opt to study a link course, either 'A' levels or a vocational course. Students may choose to do this at one of two local colleges, York and Askham Bryan. Both of these colleges are within a twenty minute drive of the school and offer a wide range of courses at different levels of entry which include Pre Foundation, Foundation Learning Tier, level 2 and level 3 courses

Teaching in the sixth form is exceptionally well planned around students' individual interests and aspirations. Students are well supported by school staff into a broad range of academic and vocational college courses. Students receive additional support for basic skills, study and work skills, personal,

social and health education and independence and life skills, both in school and in the boarding provision. This prepares them highly effectively for the next stage in their lives. The latest Ofsted report (Feb 2015) noted that “students who attend the sixth form unit make excellent progress both in school and at college. They benefit from a very well-planned curriculum, which enables them to pursue a wide variety of career options for the next phase in education or the world of work.”

Placements in St John’s Sixth Form are residential. This enables students to access a 24 hour curriculum that equips them for adult life. In the residential setting, students have a wide deaf peer group and follow a full life-skills programme, which is accessible for young people with a range of additional needs such as visual or physical impairments. On a practical level, students are taught budgeting, shopping and self-care skills such as washing and ironing. As a group, the students plan and budget for their own leisure time and, by the end of their time with us, it is expected that students will have well developed independence skills, including independent travel. Post 16 funding includes daily travel by minibus into York College and students undergo a travel training course so they can travel back to St John’s independently. When students are learning to drive, St John’s staff support the driving theory by preparing students for the various elements of the assessment.



### **Children with Multi-Sensory Impairments**



Young people with combined visual and hearing impairments are described as having multisensory impairments (MSI) or deafblindness. These difficulties may be accompanied by other disabilities such as additional sensory impairments, physical disabilities, complex medical needs and learning difficulties.

St John’s provision for MSI pupils has evolved over a number of years. As with all of our students, our aim is to achieve optimum learning for all, using new technology, a bespoke learning environment and specialist teaching approaches. These young people are supported by expert staff such as MSI teachers and trained intervenors who understand the impact of complex sensory impairment on individual responses. Our staff are experienced in providing meaningful learning experiences, which enable pupils to meet their potential, both academically and personally.

We have a small but growing cohort of MSI pupils, whose combination of sensory and other needs vary. As each pupil has a unique response to their own needs and abilities, so the MSI curriculum is designed to allow high levels of personalisation, and an accreditation route appropriate to each pupil. High staffing ratios and teachers who are subject specialists allow for the study of a range of qualifications at Key Stage 4, ranging from Entry levels to GCSEs and their equivalents.

Our timetable for MSI pupils includes a range of learning experiences outside the classroom. Students take part in water therapy and swimming as well as equine therapy with Riding for the Disabled (RDA). In addition we offer art therapy, aromatherapy and massage.

Perhaps the most important therapy for all pupils at St John's is speech therapy. Speech therapy has a special emphasis for MSI pupils because communication may be harder to achieve. Teachers and therapists plan together to improve children's expressive as well as receptive language skills. Communication systems are built around the child's preferred communication mode. We are flexible in our approach and use a range of methods including PECs (Picture Exchange Communication system), hand over hand signing or computer aided systems.

### ***Residential Care***



Pupils come to St John's from all over the United Kingdom. During the week, St John's is their home from home, and so it is important that our residential pupils receive care that is consistently outstanding.

Our care setting is welcoming and homely, an extension of pupils' own family homes. Each group has a kitchen diner, sitting room, recreation area and study space. Students live in small groups of between five and eight young people and each group is staffed by a small team of care staff, each of whom mentors one or two pupils in their care. We aim to develop high levels of self-esteem and confidence in our young people, teaching them the skills they will need for independent adult life. Living in small groups with supportive staff helps our young people to form positive relationships and the ability to negotiate and cooperate with each other.

Our residential pupils have individual or shared study bedrooms, and have their evening meals in small family groups. Each group has its own well equipped kitchen and sitting room, and pupils enjoy a range of



leisure activities such as swimming, theatre trips, and sports activities. During the Ofsted visit in 2015, inspectors noted that *“pupils said the combined residential and education experience is ‘brilliant’ with both aspects contributing to highly positive outcomes. Care staff understand the importance of education and there is excellent liaison between education and residence to ensure a consistent approach.”* Residential pupils have a strong voice, and are able to make their views known through care council meetings.

## **Facilities Available**



The school is based in Boston Spa, to the north east of Leeds, and is close to the national motorway network. The busy village of Boston Spa offers many opportunities for our pupils to become a part of the local community, through youth clubs, scouts and guides, and for older pupils, work experience placements in local businesses.

Our location makes working with local schools very easy as we have five schools within walking distance. A number of theatres, the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the Hepworth Gallery are all within easy reach, as well as York and the Yorkshire coast. Learning outside the classroom builds an enthusiasm and engagement that result in very good progress and achievement.

The school is housed in a range of buildings, some dating from 1870. Whole school masses and celebrations take place in the school chapel, whilst teaching takes place in light, airy, acoustically treated classrooms. All classrooms have interactive whiteboards and we have recently invested in a number of iPads which are used creatively across the curriculum. We are proud of our new fully equipped drama room and the recently refurbished music room, where we have installed a sound recording booth to develop our pupils’ musical skills. The vibrant school library has a central place in the school, reflecting the importance of language and literacy in underpinning learning. We have recently established two sensory rooms containing a range of technologies and equipment to provide sensory stimulation. For younger children we have an interactive soft play room containing a ball pit.

All of our classrooms are acoustically treated, we have state of the art amplification systems, and an on-site audiologist and technician ensure pupils’ cochlear implants and hearing aids are always working properly.

The school has extensive well-tended grounds, a large sports hall and a fully equipped multi gym. Pupils participate in a number of sporting competitions and challenges outside of school.



## **Additional Support**

### ***Speech and Language Therapy***



The speech and language therapy team have experience and highly specialist skills working with deaf children and young people. We work closely in collaboration with parents, class teachers, learning support workers, care staff and other professionals to ensure an integrated approach to communication, speech and language learning where common goals can be shared.

Intensive individual time with an experienced speech and language therapist is important for the majority of the pupils in St John's. This provides essential support to improve areas of need related to communication, speech and language. It is a time when the pupil can both develop and reinforce communication skills with confidence and learn at their own rate. *"Speech and language therapists make a significant contribution to pupils' language development through collaborative work with the teachers and with staff in residence."* OFSTED 2012

### ***Audiology***

St John's has its own audiology department that is equipped with the latest audiometric facilities, enabling our audiologist to monitor each pupil's auditory capabilities. Our audiologist, who is assisted by a full time technician, has a background in clinical audiology and is also an educational audiologist so can apply an educational understanding to her clinical knowledge.

Achieving maximum benefit from hearing aids and cochlear implants extends much further than simply fitting suitable devices; our audiologist regularly completes a range of tests with each student to assess exactly what they can hear. Audiological assessments are shared with parents and individual audiology centres to provide a seamless service. Being in school every day means that our audiologist can observe pupils in a range of listening environments and immediately feedback information if any changes to hearing aids or speech processors are recommended.

### ***Deaf CAMHS***

A unique element of our provision is our close links with the National Deaf Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Team, which is based in nearby York. Mental health professionals specialising in deafness can provide counselling and support for young people, and referrals are acted upon quickly. The team also work with families and provide regular training for our school staff.

## **Learner Success**



At Key Stage 4 we offer a broad curriculum that is tailored to the strengths and learning needs of each individual student. Students choose from a wide range of courses from Entry Level to Level 2. These include GCSEs and Btec courses, the Arts Award and courses in pre-vocational learning run by City & Guilds and Asdan. By the end of year 11 all of our students have successfully completed qualifications in a range of subjects that enable them to progress on to further study.

The vast majority of our students choose to stay on into St John's Sixth Form, where they continue their study of core skills, alongside link courses in their chosen vocation. The intensive specialist support our students receive ensures their success and we have not had a student drop out from our sixth form to date. In recent years St John's students have achieved success in a wide range of courses, including Travel & Tourism, Drama, Art, Media Studies, Hospitality, Sport and Engineering – to name but a few. Ultimate learner destinations include employment – for example in the hotel industry, as a sports coach, working with young children – and a significant proportion of students who choose to continue their academic studies at university.

## **Admissions**

All pupils at St John's have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care plan. If you think we may be the ideal school for your child, please contact us to talk about the admissions process. Before offering a place to a child, we undertake a detailed assessment to determine whether we can meet your child's needs. We can then guide you through the admissions process and support you in making a request for a place to your local authority. Please contact Mandy Dowson on 01937 842144 [info@stjohns.org.uk](mailto:info@stjohns.org.uk) for an initial discussion. We can arrange visits for prospective parents / carers to have a look at our school throughout the year. The school website ([www.stjohns.org.uk](http://www.stjohns.org.uk)) has lots more information about our school.