

St John's Catholic School for the Deaf

Church Street, Boston Spa, Wetherby, West Yorkshire LS23 6DF

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

St John's School Catholic School for the Deaf is a non-maintained day and residential special school for pupils aged three to 19 who have hearing impairments. Accommodation is in the main school building and is arranged in separate groups according to the ages and needs of pupils. The school's ethos is based on Christian values. There is great emphasis on supporting the development of pupils' spoken language. The school has 48 pupils on roll. At the time of inspection, 21 pupils used the school's residential facility; 18 of these were post-16 students. These students attend local colleges in the York area. Residential pupils are supported by the national deaf child and adolescent mental health service (NDCAMHS) based in York.

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 June 2019

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: 27 November 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children flourish in a very nurturing environment where care is tailored to their specific needs. Children enjoy their residential experience and feel able to share any worries and ask for support from staff when they need it. Children enjoy excellent relationships with staff who know them extremely well, and many go on to develop lifelong positive relationships with their peers within both the deaf and hearing communities.

Children are assessed and then follow a model devised by the school to build their emotional skills and resilience to equip them for the challenges of adult life. The model, which has clinical oversight, develops the children's self-esteem, perseverance and positive relationships. Children develop key practical skills they will require to live independent lives, as well as learning how to develop positive relationships and strategies to manage their emotional well-being. Children and parents spoke positively of the programme and the skills gained, and the changes in children's health and overall well-being.

Parents say that they are amazed at the progress and the skills children acquire, from entering the residential provision with limited language skills to being able to undertake work experience in busy environments. One young person created a very powerful film about the experiences of the children in the sixth form, demonstrating the positive effect of staying at the school. This was shown at the leavers' assembly. Another young person has gained a level 2 apprenticeship in joinery and plans to use this to educate hearing people about how successful deaf people can be if given the right opportunities.

The children in the sixth form attend local colleges, work experience and employment through well-established networks developed by the school. Pictorial evidence is all around the school of how immediate and past leavers have successfully gone into employment or on to further and higher education. This acts as encouragement for other children to have the same aspirations and desire to succeed as they are encouraged to learn the importance of education and develop high aspirations for their futures. All children leaving the sixth form in 2019 have the next stage of their future secured.

Maintaining children's good health is a high priority of the school. Children's emotional health improves as the children learn their own coping strategies which they can successfully transfer into other areas of their life. Children receive exceptional support from the school nurse, who constantly researches new ideas to improve overall well-being. She has recently won a national award for her work on helping staff talk more openly and confidently about suicide and self-harm, and is speaking at a conference on mental capacity and the challenge of decision-making about sexual activity for children with learning disabilities.

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

Leaders and staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of risk management. Children are encouraged to develop skills to keep themselves safe in school, the community, college and work-based surroundings. As children learn skills to live independently, this is balanced with appropriate staff support, findings from risk assessments and guidance. For example, a child may practise many times with staff support how to travel on the bus, before being allowed to do this independently. This enables them to learn a valuable skill safely, rather than denying them this opportunity.

The designated safeguarding leads (DSL) demonstrate effective leadership in decision-making in safeguarding. Any real or suspected incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively. Comprehensive systems are in place to respond to safeguarding or pastoral concerns and the DSLs have excellent links with local children's services. There is evidence of effective intervention when they consider that children may be at risk of harm, leading to improved outcomes for children. For example, free accommodation is provided for day children when families in crisis need some additional support.

Leaders have managed some difficult situations very effectively since the last inspection and have taken time to review the outcomes and any learning, which has led to a review of procedures.

The children know and respect the 'Golden Rules' which were devised by the school council setting out the expectations of school behaviour. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare and are managed well. Effective systems monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of plans, and creative strategies are used to limit the use of physical restraint. For example, one child was struggling some mornings to get ready for school quickly enough. Staff recognised this and a strategy of 'patience and time' was introduced so that the child did not sense the urgency from staff, which was leading to her anxiety. Since then there has been no further use of physical intervention, and school mornings remain calm.

Sanctions are rarely used and instead children are rewarded for good behaviour, or 'random acts of kindness', through creative systems like the 'Green Tickets' and student of the week. Children experience a calm, well-ordered and structured environment, which reduces their anxiety and encourages good behaviour. Close cooperation between care and school staff means that children arrive at school happy and ready to learn.

Effective and wide-ranging training and events ensure that staff and children have an excellent understanding of safeguarding. Children have joined staff at events on subjects including Prevent, community safety, alcohol and drug use and gambling addiction.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Governors, leaders and managers have huge ambition for their children. They are relentless in their drive to ensure that children learn skills and gain qualifications to be able to live fulfilled lives. Recognising that not all their children will be able to gain external qualifications, they have embarked on an 'enrichment' programme to develop vocational opportunities and enterprise projects. This includes the installation of a polytunnel to grow fruit and vegetables, which they sell, the breeding of quails so they can sell their eggs, and an aviary for owls. Some children learn how to handle birds of prey, teaching them employability or volunteering skills, and others can enjoy the sensory experience of watching and touching the birds.

Internal and external monitoring by the head of care, governors, an external consultant and an independent visitor leads to high-quality, sophisticated reporting systems, focused on continuous improvement. These systems track the progress of every child effectively, and where any contraindication is detected swift action brings about a refocus on plans or targets.

The residential accommodation is led by an experienced and visionary head of care who continually seeks to improve the provision and support children's progress. He regularly visits other outstanding schools to gain new ideas to develop further. The residential development plan, which is closely aligned to the social care common inspection framework, sets out the ambitious plans for the future of the residential provision. These include, for example, plans to develop post-19 provision and volunteering opportunities for children who may be unable to obtain or maintain paid employment.

Staff work in an environment of high support and challenge. They are regularly rewarded for good work through team events and compliments, but equally expectations are high and performance management is effective. A comprehensive range of training opportunities and learning events continue to develop the staff team. Parents spoke highly of the contribution the staff have made to their children's development and success.

Leaders, managers and governors recognise that to increase the support for their children they need to work in partnership with other agencies. Evidence of this is all around the school, from gifts of pieces of equipment, joint artwork projects, visits, and workshop opportunities. Employees of a large national company spent the day with the sixth form, carrying out 'mock interviews' to prepare them for the 'real thing', and talking about the world of work. The school have submitted their Steps to Success' programme, and a film created by a student about knife crime was submitted for an 'Innovation Award' to a national awarding body.

Leaders and managers are strong advocates for their children and work relentlessly to ensure that they are given every opportunity and do not face discrimination. They are not afraid to challenge other agencies and professionals. For example, when the

local authority withdrew its funding for a child in residential care who was making tremendous progress, they took up the challenge and were successful.

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: SC001535

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mrs Ann Bradbury

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 01937 842144

Email address: info@stjohns.org.uk

Inspectors

Helen Humphreys, social care HMI (lead)

Jamie Richardson, social care inspector



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