

St Francis Community Special School

Wickenby Crescent, Lincoln LN1 3TJ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

St Francis Community Special School is a maintained school that provides residential care as part of a 24-hour curriculum for young people with medical, learning or physical disabilities, up to the age of 19 years. Boarding is available from Monday afternoon to Friday morning during school term time. There is accommodation in shared and single bedrooms for up to 18 young people each night. Young people spend two nights a week for a term at a time, and different young people stay each week. A small minority have a regular two-night stay throughout the school year. The school is situated on a residential estate in Lincoln.

Inspection dates: 7 to 9 February 2018

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: 7 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Young people feel very happy and very safe. They all, without exception, thoroughly enjoy residence.
- Young people's comments about residence are extremely complimentary.
- Young people thoroughly enjoy residence, and it is life changing for some. Young people develop new skills and coping strategies. They can, and do, use these newly acquired skills in other areas of their lives.
- Young people grow in confidence. They are more able to cope with personal challenges and to enjoy their life.
- Parents and carers are extremely positive about residence. Many parents and carers came forward to talk to the inspector. All the comments were overwhelmingly positive.
- Disability does not get in the way. Everyone is valued and very well respected, and there is a real feeling of achievement.
- Young people with varying needs are extremely well cared for by a group of staff who thoroughly enjoy their work. There are very positive relationships between staff and young people.
- Young people feel able to talk to staff about anything. Help extends to families as well, some of who feel more able to cope at home. This support positively affects the lives of families as well as the young people.
- Residence is exceptionally well led by dedicated managers. They care a great deal about young people's welfare. They set out to make a difference to young people's lives and are successful in their vision.

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

Recommendations

Ensure that suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for children. (NMS 5.3)

This is in relation to refreshing the decor in the bathrooms.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Young people experience an outstanding level of care. Their experience of residence is very positive. Research is used to make sure that the provision goes from strength to strength. For example, a recent project on happiness is being used to identify new ways to find out more about each young person's quality of life.

Young people feel tremendously confident about how residence changes their outlook on life. They report significant improvement in their self-confidence. Young people used words like courage, confidence and determination when they reflected on how residence has affected them. They said: 'It's amazing' and 'It's brilliant.' Young people feel more able to enjoy other areas of their lives. This is because their residential experience teaches them to manage their issues such as stress, anxiety and low confidence. They report that they use these newly acquired skills in other social situations at home.

Young people develop great friendships. These friendships add another dimension to their lives. Without residence, some young people would not have the opportunity to develop friendships because of a lack of social opportunities and confidence. Young people go on activities and have new experiences during their stay. One parent commented on the photographs that they had received of their young person having a great time. They said: 'My child looked like the cat who got the cream.'

Young people develop their independence skills, and parents are pleased to learn that their son or daughter is making their bed, cooking, cleaning and going shopping. One parent commented on this, saying: 'He has developed and grown. His independence has improved and he is far more organised.' These skills will help young people as they develop into adults and will be useful when they leave the school.

Young people with varying needs are extremely well cared for by staff who thoroughly enjoy their work. There are very positive relationships between staff and young people. Young people can talk to staff about anything, including their innermost thoughts. Young people laugh with staff and cry with them, and they solve problems together. Young people gain support and direction, and they learn about how to manage their problems.

Support from staff also extends to families. Families report that they receive strong individual support, helping them to cope with their challenges. One parent reported: 'They have really helped us as a family.' The head of residence helps parents and carers to manage health conditions and to improve young people's safety at home. She is very often instrumental in ensuring that young people's views about their support package at home are heard. Parents talk about there being 'brilliant working relationships' and 'support for me'. This high level of support helps some parents to

cope and, in doing so, prevents family breakdown.

Residence has a homely feel, despite some areas of the building, such as some bathrooms, looking a little institutionalised. Consideration is being given to making improvements over the next 12 months. Leaders have worked hard to make sure that young people feel comfortable in their surroundings. There is plenty of space for them to relax and have fun. Young people have chosen the decor. This is just one of the many choices that young people are encouraged to make.

Young people soon learn that they have a voice. They are helped to make positive choices about the food, trips, activities and routines. The prefect system is used well to gather young people's thoughts about what is going well and if any improvements need to be made. Young people know that their views are important. They regularly meet together without staff to discuss their experiences of the boarding provision. Young people have a very strong voice at this school, and this is promoted. This improves their self-esteem and confidence. Young people lead their own care plans and help to make decisions about how their care should be delivered.

Students with very complex health conditions receive excellent care. Nursing staff add exceptional quality to the care provided. Healthcare is consistently planned and delivered well. Medicines are managed effectively. Health plans set out individual healthcare needs, and these plans are followed meticulously to keep young people comfortable and safe.

There is a real feeling of camaraderie in the residential experience for young people. No disability gets in the way, and everyone is extremely well respected for their own personality, regardless of their gender, culture or type of disability.

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

Young people become increasingly safe as a result of using the residence provision. They learn about socially acceptable behaviour and about kindness to others. This ethos extends to all areas of the school, and behaviour is exceptionally good. Bullying behaviour is minimal. Socially acceptable behaviour is openly discussed, and this is an effective way for young people to become more socially aware.

Young people also learn about risks. Discussion takes place about different aspects of safety, such as staying safe online. More formal workshops address risk, too. This information sharing works well and ensures that very vulnerable young people understand how to protect themselves from being targeted or groomed online.

There are constant research initiatives about safety. New practice is developed, some of which is very useful in teaching young people about risks and raising their awareness. The school is currently involved in a project about child sexual exploitation. Young people's learning has been particularly valuable in this area. The sessions have been delivered by other disabled young people, who have actually

experienced being exploited. Students are likely to be more aware and knowledgeable about the risk of exploitation as they engaged so well with this research project. This area of practice is so strong that it is worthy of wider dissemination.

Leaders regularly check young people's understanding of risk. In doing so they can identify gaps in knowledge, or areas for further development. A recent self-audit on safeguarding has identified areas for improvement. Even when the school is doing well, areas for development are identified and addressed. This ensures that each young person derives the maximum benefit from residence and that they are cared for in as safe an environment as possible.

Staff have good links with other professionals. When safeguarding issues arise, safeguarding procedures are used effectively. There is a very clear audit trail which demonstrates effective safeguarding practice. The care leader is instrumental in improving young people's safety by working in partnership with families.

Recruitment procedures are organised well. Leaders ensure that they have enough information to make a clear decision on each staff member's suitability. This reduces the risk of unsuitable people working at the school.

The environment is very safe. There are regular health and safety checks. Staff and young people are clear about what they should do in the event of a fire. Young people are very able to recite the fire procedures, demonstrating that this knowledge is at the forefront of their mind should they need it. Portable appliance testing has taken place, but it is difficult to identify which individual items have been tested and when. While this is an area for improvement, there was a positive response from leaders about it during the inspection.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

This school has been outstanding for a number of years and continues to go from strength to strength. Leaders ensure that it never stands still. They continuously look for new areas of development. There is a feeling of excitement, high motivation and passion for the work from all staff, whatever their role.

Staff are very well trained and supported. The large majority of staff hold the required qualification. Managers have identified a small minority of staff who have worked in residence for a long time yet who have not obtained the required qualification. The care leader is clear that their competencies match those of qualified staff. This needs to be recorded to fully demonstrate that their skills and qualifications match those of the required qualification.

All staff speak about a love for the work and they are strongly encouraged by young people's consistent progress. They are extremely well led by a very strong residence care leader. She regularly oversees the day-to-day care. She makes it her business to

be completely knowledgeable and up to date about individual young people's strengths and challenges. She takes very prompt action to address issues as they arise. The school head leads the residence part of the school highly effectively. Together, these leaders are a driving force. They ensure that young people are at the centre of their management decisions at all times. Staff speak positively about the leaders, and comments included: 'Everyone knows what they are doing and they are amazing.'

School governors regularly visit the school and demonstrate a high level of enthusiasm and commitment. They provide an additional layer of scrutiny. For example, during the inspection the governor for safeguarding met with young people. He established what they have learned about safety, where from and when. Young people's knowledge is tested out to make sure that they have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe. Governors are fully committed to continuous development.

Young people are at the centre of very comprehensive quality assurance work. They regularly fill in questionnaires about their boarding experience. Quality assurance reaches each and every young person, whatever their communication style. For example, photographs and pictures are used to bring questionnaires to life for some young people.

Every opportunity is taken to make sure that there is continuous improvement. The overwhelmingly positive comments from parents in feedback through both questionnaires from the school and 'Parent View' are testament to all who work in, and manage, the residence provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC038622

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Inspector

Caroline Brailsford, social care regulatory inspector



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