

St Vincent's School A Specialist School for Sensory Impairment and Other Needs

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	104734
Local authority	Liverpool
Inspection number	377120
Inspection dates	20–21 June 2012
Lead inspector	Hilary Ward

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection of residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Special
School category	Non-maintained special
Age range of pupils	4–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	38
Of which number on roll in the sixth form	7
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Elizabeth Jones
Headteacher	Stephen Roberts
Date of previous school inspection	4 December 2008
School address	68 Yew Tree Lane West Derby Liverpool L12 9HN
Telephone number	0151 2289968
Fax number	0151 2305070
Email address	office@stvin.com

Residential provision	St Vincents School for the Blind
Social care unique reference number	SC040724
Social care inspector	Sonya Robinson

Age group	4–19
Inspection date(s)	20–21 June 2012
Inspection number	377120



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Introduction

Inspection team

Hilary Ward
Sonya Robinson

Additional Inspector
Social Care Inspector

This inspection was carried out with three days' notice. The inspector observed 13 lessons taught by ten teachers and by teaching assistants; two of these were joint observations with members of the school's leadership team. In addition, the inspector heard readers from across the age range using braille and large print formats. Meetings were held with senior leaders and managers, including the Chair of the Governing Body, pupils and groups of staff. Inspectors took account of the responses to the on-line (Parent View) survey in planning the inspection, observed the school's work, and looked at a range of documents, including school improvement planning, curriculum development, assessment and progress, data and safeguarding. The inspector scrutinised responses on 11 parent and carer questionnaires received and those from pupils and staff.

Information about the school

St Vincent's is a small non-maintained special school for pupils who are blind and partially sighted, usually combined with additional learning difficulties and disabilities including those on the autism spectrum and some who have physical, medical and other sensory conditions.

The school is run and managed by the parent charity, the Catholic Blind Institute, which operates a range of adult services as well as the school. The trustees delegate the day-to-day management of the school to its governing body.

Pupils may be admitted at any time, currently from 18 different local authorities. All pupils have a statement of their special educational needs. At present pupils are predominantly of White British heritage. The school is designated to take children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, but has not admitted any for several years. The school's sixth form, for students from 16-19 years of age, is known as the post-16 department. After-school activities are offered to both day and residential students.

The school has designation as a specialist school for sensory impairment. It holds a number of awards including: Liverpool Inclusive Schools Award, Healthy Schools status, Silver Sing-Up Award and Arts Mark.

Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory and 4 is inadequate
Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

Inspection judgements

Overall Effectiveness	1
Achievement of pupils	1
Quality of teaching	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	1
Leadership and management	1

Key Findings

- St Vincent's is an outstanding school. Parents and carers are completely confident that the school is meeting the needs of their children exceptionally well. Staff in all settings are proud to work at the school and pupils are absolutely clear that they love coming to school, they enjoy their learning and feel extremely well supported.
- Achievement is outstanding. Pupils make outstanding progress in both their education and their personal development, often achieving much more than might be expected given low starting points. Pupils make particularly good progress in their reading and writing skills using braille, large print and assistive technologies appropriate to their needs. The post-16 provision is outstanding. Students' skills in literacy and numeracy help them to gain external awards which demonstrate their success in a wide range of subjects at the highest level for each individual.
- The reason pupils do so well is because of the outstanding teaching. Teachers are highly skilled at planning work which is very well-matched to the needs of individual pupils, which enthuses and interests them so that they want to learn.
- Behaviour and safety are outstanding. Pupils show excellent attitudes to learning and perseverance in overcoming their difficulties. They receive excellent support to develop independence and resilience from education and care staff and from specialist staff such as mobility officers, technology assistants, medical staff and therapists.
- Leaders and managers, including members of the governing body, are highly effective in leading teaching and managing performance. They constantly review the provision and seek ways to improve it to meet the often complex needs of the pupils. They have identified that learning pathways could be tailored even more specifically to pupils' needs and their impact closely monitored. As a result, changes have been made to the excellent curriculum which are already improving outcomes for pupils and promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development particularly well. Curriculum managers monitor and evaluate outcomes for pupils well, but are not always aware of the best practice taking place in the school.

- The residential provision makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' achievement, their safety and well-being. Staff ensure that a wealth of activities is provided which promote pupils' confidence and independence and support their learning.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop and monitor the curriculum to better meet pupils' individual needs through personalised learning pathways.
- Develop peer observations to enable curriculum managers to monitor and evaluate outcomes for pupils even more effectively and to model best practice in all subjects.

Main Report

Achievement of pupils

Pupils make outstanding progress from a wide variety of starting points. As a result of teaching which is extremely well-matched to individual needs, pupils make outstanding progress in their literacy skills, quickly learning to read and write using braille, large print formats and other assistive technologies. They are then able to use these skills across other subjects where their skills are equally impressive. For example, in one post-16 technology lesson, two students were working on developing early keyboarding skills using adapted keyboards, two others were creating spreadsheets to follow up some work on recognising the value of money, while a third was creating a video of animated dance. All students were working at their own level and enjoying their success.

Pupils achieve so well because teachers have the highest of aspirations for them. A few of the most-able students access subjects through partnerships with mainstream schools where they achieve higher-level awards, including A-Levels. From Key Stage 3 onwards, students begin to work towards Entry Level Awards, for most starting at Level 1 and then raising their achievements to Levels 2 and 3, with some attaining GCSEs by the time they leave school. The curriculum has been recently revised so that pupils follow personalised learning pathways to ensure that all groups and individuals can achieve to the best of their ability. Parents and carers are very appreciative of this initiative, as one commented 'The individual teaching plans are excellent, the holistic approach enables all-round development.'

Targets in pupils' individual education plans are determined through excellent team work, including contributions from teachers, support and care staff and in consultation with parents and carers and the pupils themselves. Progress against targets is extremely well-monitored, reviewed and analysed regularly using a variety of assessment and benchmarking strategies. This ensures that no pupil falls behind. Targets are not only for academic attainment, but also for pupils' personal development. The outstanding care, guidance and support received from education and residential staff and from specialist staff such as mobility officers, therapists, nursing staff and technical assistants, help pupils to build resilience and become confident and independent members of the community.

Parents and carers are very pleased with their children's progress and development and appreciate the specialist skills of the staff in all departments. One commented, 'He entered

the school as an anxious, unhappy, miserable child unable to do much. He is now happy, confident and they are making the best of his abilities. A life saver/changer. Marvellous.'

Quality of teaching

Teaching seen during the inspection was largely outstanding and never less than consistently good. This picture matches the school's own monitoring of performance and is the reason why pupils make rapid and sustained progress towards their goals and achieve outstandingly well over time. Teachers have very high expectations and pupils tackle demanding work with confidence. Teachers, teaching assistants, care and support staff all know the pupils very well. They enjoy very respectful and supportive relationships which are greatly appreciated by parents and carers as well as by the pupils themselves. 'Staff here are brilliant, they make learning really good fun' and, 'They help us to do things we never imagined we would be able to do,' were typical comments made. Parents and carers commented in the questionnaires and in Parent View about the high quality and effectiveness of teaching.

Teachers build on previous learning to extend knowledge and skills highly effectively. The basic skills of literacy, numeracy, science and technology are taught especially well and are incorporated very effectively into other subjects in the curriculum. Aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning are incorporated into all lessons so well that they are an intrinsic part of pupils' development.

Teachers and assistants are highly skilled and knowledgeable in using tactile resources and a range of strategies to help pupils understand concepts they cannot see. For example, in a science lesson on forces, pupils went into the gym and pulled and pushed various items of equipment and then climbed ropes to understand the effects of friction. In a mathematics lesson, a group of blind pupils felt the material in a kilt and how it was made up and then suggested a formula for how they could work out the amount of fabric needed to make kilts for themselves.

The move towards individualised learning supports teachers to plan activities for a class or group while being clear about the learning outcomes for individuals as they follow their personalised pathways to their individual targets. Pupils are involved in self-evaluating their work, with teachers questioning effectively and ensuring participation at all times.

The outstanding teaching of literacy, including braille, and the teaching of mobility and life skills, continues into the post-16 department. Increasingly students go out into the local community to practise skills, such as the use of a long cane, and the knowledge they gain in the classroom, in real-life settings. They study issues such as managing their money and how to find a good bargain.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Behaviour seen around the school during the inspection was exemplary and it was obvious that pupils enjoy school very much and have very positive attitudes to learning and to their residential experience. As a result, attendance is above average. Inevitable difficulties faced by pupils from time to time, particularly those with autism spectrum conditions, are managed discreetly and effectively so that they never disrupt learning. There have been no incidents of racism for many years and pupils expressed the view that occasional bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively. Together with their parents and carers, pupils are clear

that behaviour is not a problem in school and that the very positive relationships they enjoy with staff ensure that they always have someone to talk to and feel safe. One parent referred to the school as having a 'fabulous sense of family' with staff from across all sectors of the school sharing caring attitudes, kindness and fairness. Staff are very sensitive to pupils' needs and quickly pick up when they have concerns, are distressed or anxious. They work very effectively as teams to meet the full range of pupils' needs so that they are better prepared to face the world when they leave the protective environment of the school.

Pupils are polite and considerate to each other and to adults. Pupils with better vision support their blind peers to move around the school and help them find things they need in lessons. Physically-able pupils help the more disabled to enjoy physical education lessons by ensuring that rules are fair to everyone. All opportunities are taken to develop good social skills. For example, at mealtimes pupils sit in family groups where they learn good table manners and turn-taking, both practically and in conversations. The school recognises the importance of helping pupils whose circumstances may make them vulnerable develop a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe and different aspects of safety are threaded through the curriculum.

Leadership and management

This is the second successive time that St Vincent's School has been judged outstanding in an Ofsted inspection. Leaders and managers, including the governing body, have not rested on their laurels but have demonstrated an outstanding capacity to improve. The school has continued to grow and develop to better meet the changing needs of pupils exceptionally well since the last inspection through highly-effective self-evaluation. This is exemplified by the strategic review of the curriculum which has involved all interested parties, including parents and carers and the pupils themselves. The move to more individualised planning and personalised pathways is ensuring that all pupils enjoy success in both their academic and personal development. The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in all aspects of the curriculum continues to be outstanding.

Frequent monitoring of teaching and learning has ensured the highest standards. Leaders and managers recently identified a need to develop staff skills for the increasing number of pupils with autism spectrum conditions. A whole-school approach has secured staff knowledge and skills to meet the needs of these pupils highly effectively. However, at present, monitoring of their subjects by curriculum leaders is less well-developed.

The residential provision has maintained the excellence judged in recent inspections. Staff teams work together across school and residence as a cohesive whole so that St Vincent's is a highly efficient community. Staff at all levels focus successfully on eradicating discrimination, promoting equality and ensuring pupils' safety. Safeguarding arrangements are robust and continually reviewed.

Parents and carers feel very well-informed about what their children are doing at school and supported by the family liaison officer, education and care staff. Partnerships with other schools and the local community create enhanced opportunities to meet individual needs in the rich curriculum. All staff who returned questionnaires say they are proud to work at the school. There is high morale and a common purpose to ensure that the personal and educational development of pupils is maintained at the highest standard. Every member of staff contributes to building pupils' self-esteem and confidence and helping them to improve their achievements, well-being and life chances.

Residential provision

The provision of residential care is outstanding. Residential pupils experience the highest quality care from staff they trust and respect. The highly-effective integration of education and social care results in residential pupils receiving remarkable support to help them overcome their learning difficulties and disabilities. They are cared for in line with their local authority care plans and the school liaises extremely effectively with parents and carers to promote continuity of care. Parents and carers have every confidence that their children are being well looked after. As one parent put it, 'Excellent standards, excellent teaching, excellent residential care and excellent communication between home and school.'

Residential pupils report feeling safe, protected and valued by their carers. They are afforded excellent healthcare, assessment and support to enhance their physical and emotional well-being. The rich evening programme of leisure, sports and recreational activities enables every pupil to develop personal and social skills, talents and abilities and includes, for example, horse-riding, dance class, youth clubs, football, chess and wall-climbing. The young people were keen to share extremely positive views, for example they said 'staff are awesome, encouraging independence all of the time', 'when you need help they help you', 'they encourage you to do lots of exercises', 'I have lots of mates here'.

Residential pupils live in a safe environment. Parental and carers' questionnaires received by Ofsted confirm that they feel that children and young people's safety is met well. All staff are very well trained in safeguarding and are knowledgeable about safeguarding policies and procedures. They are able to recognise the signs and symptoms of abuse and know exactly what they need to do to protect children and young people.

Residential pupils enjoy high-quality relationships and can clearly identify staff to talk to if they have any worries or concerns. They feel free from bullying because they are confident that staff will deal with any issues promptly and effectively. Staff are extremely aware of the vulnerability of the children and young people at St Vincent's and the risks they face in the community. They seek to minimise risks and give excellent advice about personal safety.

Residential pupils enjoy a warm, welcoming, homely environment. The residential units are well-maintained and bedrooms are personalised by children and young people during their stay. Leadership and management of the boarding provision are outstanding. Pupils are protected by a comprehensive range of detailed health and safety procedures, risk assessments and checks.

National Minimum Standards

The provision meets all national minimum standards for residential special schools.

These are the grades for the residential provision

Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	1
Outcomes for residential pupils	1
Quality of residential provision and care	1
Residential pupils' safety	1
Leadership and management of the residential provision	1

Glossary

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add up exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school.
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.
Safety	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



22 June 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of St Vincent's School, A Specialist School for Sensory Impairment and Other Needs, Liverpool, L12 9HN

I am writing to tell you how much I enjoyed visiting your school with my colleague Sonya, who visited your residential houses. We both agreed that your school is outstanding and we know that you think this, too. You might like to know a few of the things that we think are especially wonderful about St Vincent's.

- We agree with you that staff in your school care for you exceptionally well. They keep you safe and help you to learn to do things for yourselves.
- Your teachers do a fantastic job in teaching you to learn to read and write using braille, large print, computers and other sorts of technology.
- Teachers are excellent at planning work which is well-matched to all your different needs. They help you to pass exams and complete coursework to get awards of which you are very proud, so well done to you.
- Your behaviour is excellent and helps you to learn really well.
- Your principal, senior teachers and members of the governing body are always looking for ways to make things better for you and have made improvements to the curriculum which we are sure you will find helpful.

We have asked the school to do just a couple of things to become even better.

- We have asked your teachers to make sure that they develop and monitor the new personalised planning to ensure that it meets your needs really well.
- We have also asked teachers who have responsibility for different aspects of the new curriculum to work with other teachers to ensure that it improves your learning.

Thank you for making our visit so enjoyable and for telling us how much you enjoy school.

Yours sincerely,

Hilary Ward
Lead Inspector

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