

# St Mary's School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	133653
<b>Local Authority</b>	East Sussex
<b>Inspection number</b>	316180
<b>Inspection dates</b>	13 November 2008
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Jeffery Plumb

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Boarding provision</b>	Residential provision
<b>Social care URN</b>	SC050390
<b>Social care inspector</b>	Liz Daniels

The inspection of social care was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

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<b>Type of school</b>	All-through
<b>School category</b>	Non-Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	128
Sixth form	60
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Rev Canon Gordon Rideout
<b>Headteacher</b>	David Cassar
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	9–10 June 2005
<b>School address</b>	Bexhill on Sea East Sussex TN40 2LU
<b>Telephone number</b>	01424 730740
<b>Fax number</b>	01424 733575

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<b>Age group</b>	7–19
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	13 November 2008
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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors and two Social Care inspectors.

## Description of the school

St Mary's is a non-maintained mixed special school for learners with speech, language and social communication difficulties. St Mary's is a Christian Foundation. Many learners have additional areas of need including moderate learning difficulties, physical disability, hearing impairment, autistic spectrum disorders or complex medical difficulties. The trust admits learners from all over the United Kingdom. The majority of learners have a statement of special educational needs and almost all take advantage of the trust's age-appropriate boarding provision. Standards are well below the national average, reflecting the complexity of the learners' needs. The trust has 24 learners from minority ethnic backgrounds. Their language needs do not differ from those of the other learners because, like them, they have speech and language difficulties. There are three learners in public care. The trust has gained the following awards: Charter Marks, Investor in People, Positive about Disabled People Award, Healthy Schools Award, Football Association Award, the Charter Standard for Schools Award, Sports Mark Award and the Active Mark Award.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

**Grade: 1**

This is an outstanding school. The principal and dedicated staff team refuse to accept learners' disabilities as a barrier to learning. They work ceaselessly to ensure outstanding resources such as modified furniture, tools and high quality electronic communication aids, are accessible to all learners so that they can access the rich curriculum provided and excel as learners. Consequently, student achievement, particularly in communication and independent mobility, is outstanding. Curriculum planning provides an opportunity for each student to 'reach for the sky' and achieve challenging targets. Parents are delighted with what the trust achieves for their children but the Trust does not always sufficiently engage them as partners. Achievement in English, mathematics and science is outstanding. Teaching is outstanding; it engages all learners and accelerates their learning. Learners become confident and secure very quickly in this supportive school. They make rapid gains as independent learners. Their work-related skills are particularly well developed.

Learners' well-being and personal development are outstanding. The vast majority develop important life skills such as reading a bus timetable and travelling independently and safely. They accrue budget skills and learn to plan, shop for, prepare and cook healthy meals. Through a sensory curriculum they learn practical skills to equip them for further college courses. The trust promotes learners' health and safety exceptionally well. The trust listens to learners and acts on what they say to ensure they receive dignity in their care and provide them with opportunities to excel in their learning. Behaviour and attendance are excellent.

Care, guidance and support are outstanding and integral to the success of this trust. The boarding provision is excellent. Tracking of student progress over time is excellent. The use of performance data to inform planning to raise student achievement lies at the heart of this trust. Leadership and management at all levels are excellent. Governance very effectively supports and challenges the senior leadership team. Improvement since the last inspection has been outstanding, as is the capacity for further improvement. The trust provides outstanding value for money.

## Effectiveness of the sixth form

**Grade: 1**

The leadership and management of the sixth form college are outstanding. Learners make outstanding progress measured against their key goals. These key goals focus on enabling them to develop the skills required to live as independently as possible. Upon leaving the sixth form college the majority of learners are equipped to enter further education colleges, enabling them to reach their full potential. The curriculum is innovative and flexible. The college plans the curriculum to meet the needs of every student. Relevant work-experience opportunities enable learners to prepare for life beyond college. Their home-base accommodation supports and promotes independent living. On a daily basis they plan and shop for their evening meal. They develop good budget and housekeeping skills. Teaching is outstanding and makes a valuable contribution to the development of learners' communication and independence skills. Accreditation opportunities open the doors to further college courses relevant to the world of work. Learners are involved in shaping their care

and educational plans. They develop a good sense of their rights and understand that responsibilities go hand in hand with their rights. They show dignity and respect to others and are keen to support others less fortunate than themselves.

## **Effectiveness of boarding provision**

**Grade: 1**

The boarding provision at St Mary's is outstanding and the key National Minimum Standards are exceeded.

The health of the young people at St Mary's is embedded within the Trust's waking curriculum. The Health Services Team, which includes nurses and therapists, plays an integral part in each young person's assessment and the subsequent development of their Individual Learning Plan (ILP). The ILP clearly includes the holistic health needs of each young person, and individual protocols then provide additional support for managing those with complex needs. The nurses employed all hold current registration; they work closely with the medical officer and paediatrician who attend the trust. Medication management within the Trust is complex; medications are safely managed and administration can be tracked, although some records are fragmented.

The quality of food provision at the Trust is high and provided by an enthusiastic, experienced and qualified team who deliver balanced menus and cater for a large number of different specialised diets. Menus are well publicised in appropriate formats that enable choice for all the young people.

The Trust aims to ensure the young people's welfare is promoted and they are kept safe. Privacy is respected and staff demonstrate a clear understanding about maintaining confidentiality. Complaints are well managed, recorded and monitored; one person now coordinates concerns raised by the young people, while formal complaints are recorded and appropriately investigated. Robust policies and procedures ensure any allegations of abuse or concerns are coordinated through a named staff member for safeguarding. A comprehensive training programme ensures all staff have a basic knowledge, and the proposal for additional training in the residences is an excellent development. Bullying is minimal and any instances are well managed. Similarly, behaviour is well managed and incidences of disruptive behaviour are minimal. Key staff are trained in 'Team Teach' and there remains a low incidence of restraint. Behaviour management is well monitored although the monitoring of sanctions within the college residences is less structured than within the school residences.

Positive steps are taken to ensure the young people, staff and visitors to St Mary's are safe. There are comprehensive risk assessments which are reviewed appropriately. Unannounced fire drills are well executed and any identified risks explored. There is excellent monitoring for all visitors to St Mary's and keypad entry for all external doors prevents inappropriate public access. Personnel staff have recently undertaken the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) training in safer recruitment, and relevant policies and procedures have subsequently been reviewed. Appropriate checks are made and all staff have an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Shift leaders ensure that any new staff are appropriately supported.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The homely environment of the residences underpins each young person's ability to absorb learning. Activities specifically support each young person's developmental needs as well as academic achievement. Activities and advice within the houses are also clearly aligned to the physical, social and health education within the curriculum and are appropriate to each young person's age and intellectual ability. For the minority of young people who have different cultural needs, staff have clearly liaised with parents to ensure those needs are met. The Trust has strong and positive contact with parents. There are many opportunities for the young people's views to be heard. Information is communicated through words, pictures, symbols and signing and staff are trained in the different methods of communication needed. An independent person is also readily available and her details well publicised within the residences.

Nine houses, two of which are off-site, provide the residential accommodation at the Trust. The homes are being continually modified and adapted to meet the very complex needs of the young people. Bedrooms and communal areas are spacious and the excellent kitchen and laundry facilities enable social integration as well as the development of independence.

A comprehensive Statement of Intent identifies how the Trust cares for the young people, through the waking curriculum. An experienced and qualified staff team care for the young people in the residences, supported by a full multidisciplinary team. All staff undertake a thorough induction; supervision, alongside an improved appraisal process, ensures staff are well supported and monitored. In addition, the Trust actively supports the staff with training to achieve appropriate qualifications.

There are now thorough monitoring processes in place across the Trust. Internal monitoring has been delegated to the appropriate personnel and overseen by the principal and chief executive officer through the heads of department. Governors' visits are undertaken each term and, in addition, a detailed annual report to the governors includes a review of the operation and resourcing of the Trust's residential provision for the young people.

## **What the school should do to improve further**

- Build on the systems in place to work in partnership with parents to further enhance learners' learning and raise their achievement.
- Ensure that there is evidence that the sanctions issued within the college residences are monitored to ensure they are fair and consistent as required by National Minimum Standard 10.

## **Achievement and standards**

**Grade: 1**

Achievement is outstanding. Although standards reached by learners are below national averages, learners achieve very well given their capabilities and starting points. Learners make rapid progress in English, mathematics and science. With the

support of signing and use of electronic communication aids, learners communicate successfully. As their communication improves they become less frustrated and engage with learning. Gains in writing using symbols are very good. By Key Stage 4 the vast majority of learners have the necessary literacy skills to follow nationally accredited courses, which equip them with the skills required in the workplace. Progress in mathematics is outstanding across Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 4. By Key Stage 4, many learners tell the time accurately, interpret bus timetables and shop using money. In science learners ask deep questions and independently engage in problem-solving activities with confidence.

Careful positioning in the food technology room and suitably adapted utensils enable learners to develop the important life skill of planning, preparing and cooking a healthy meal on a tight budget. The removal of barriers to learning using adapted switches, modified tools and imaginative positioning in well-designed chairs makes a valuable contribution to learners' outstanding achievement across all subjects. Understanding of the difficulties experienced by learners with hearing and visual impairment and skilful matching of work and resources to their needs enables them to make the same progress as their peers. Skilful behaviour management of learners with autism enables them to improve their access to learning. Most learners in public care exceed their challenging learning targets.

## **Personal development and well-being**

**Grade: 1**

Learners thoroughly enjoy school. They have positive attitudes to learning. They say that their challenging lessons are also fun experiences. In a drama lesson focused on learning about trust, learners burst into raucous laughter as they attempted to disentangle themselves safely from their partner in a rope tie. Learners confidently express their views through a vibrant trust council. They asked for more widgeit software programs to assist them in their writing. The trust responded positively and standards in writing have improved. The trust successfully promotes learners' interest in healthy eating and taking regular exercise. Learners say, 'Eating fruit is better for us than burgers and chips'. The trust addresses learners' emotional and mental health needs exceptionally well. Learners learn the difference between safe and unsafe touch and, when ready, they learn how to travel independently and safely. Older learners care for younger learners. Learners learn to take responsibility for each other. Enterprise projects develop learners' work-related skills and they learn budget management skills. Behaviour is excellent. Skilful behaviour management techniques support learners with challenging needs related behaviours exceptionally well. Attendance is excellent because learners love coming to school. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of learners, including their awareness of cultural diversity, is excellent.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

**Grade: 1**

Teaching sparkles because of the enthusiasm of a dedicated team of teachers, support assistants and therapists who work ceaselessly to remove barriers to learning for every student. The sensory, hands-on experiences they plan for learners in all subjects engage them as learners. Relationships are excellent in every class and so learners are confident to take risks in a safe environment and this accelerates their learning. Teachers rigorously use assessment to plan the next steps for learning lesson by lesson. Consequently, learners make excellent progress in the areas most important to them at that particular time. 'Joined-up working' between all professionals is the magical ingredient. For example, work by an occupational therapist on developing learners' motor skills and positional language feeds their learning about Newton's measurement of forces in science. Excellent planning coupled with skilful development of learners' communication skills across all subjects ensures that all learners move forward quickly with their learning.

### Curriculum and other activities

**Grade: 1**

Relevant, innovative and creative, the curriculum effectively meets the needs of each student. Each student has an individual tailor-made learning programme with key goals, which are most important in their development. Therapy is integral to the curriculum and removes barriers so that learners access learning safely. Suitably modified, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies develop learners' communication skills and practical mathematical skills exceptionally well. There is a strong focus on vocational education and the development of learners' independence. Excellent electronic communication aids support learners with their talking and a range of switches enable non-ambulant learners to propel and even dance in their wheelchairs on their own. The trust works hard to latch on to learners' interests through a project and collaborative-based curriculum. For example, based on their own musical interests, they are encouraged to design a cover for a compact disc. The provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education is outstanding. The range of extra-curricular activities, visits and visitors to enrich the curriculum is outstanding. Exciting outdoor activities make a very valuable contribution to learners' social skills development while promoting enrichment and joy in their learning experience.

### Care, guidance and support

**Grade: 1**

Therapists work in a very effective partnership with dedicated education staff to support learners with disabilities in overcoming difficulties and so accelerate their learning. The speech and language therapy support enables learners to communicate independent choices and, as they say, to believe in what they can accomplish. Excellent collaborative planning between occupational therapists and teachers ensure 'joined-up working' that benefits learners' learning, and care workers in the boarding provision make a valuable contribution to the development of learners' social skills. Induction and transition arrangements are excellent. External careers support is very valuable and supports learners in accessing suitable vocational courses at colleges of

further education. Parents are thrilled with what the trust achieves for their children, but the trust does not sufficiently engage them as partners in supporting their children's learning. Risk assessments, including student behaviour, are detailed and thorough. Robust child-protection procedures are in place and meet government guidelines. Learners say that they feel safe. The system for tracking learners' academic and social progress is outstanding. The trust uses it very effectively to set learners challenging targets to raise their achievement.

## **Leadership and management**

**Grade: 1**

The Principal has extensive responsibilities as he also runs the charitable trust that supports the school and college. He provides a clearly articulated and inspirational vision. Shared by all staff, it focuses on removing barriers to learning for learners with disabilities, and developing their work-related and independent life skills. The success lies in the outstanding collaborative planning between therapists, educational staff and care staff. The team provide every student with opportunities to reach his/her maximum potential. The dedicated leadership team are clear about their responsibilities and roles and make a valuable contribution to developing an innovative curriculum and raising student achievement. The trust knows its strengths and areas for development and plans exceptionally well for improvement. The leadership team ensures that the trust plays a very significant role in the local community. The diversity of the trust's community is celebrated. The rubric used to monitor teaching and learning is rigorous but non-threatening. It gives excellent feedback to teachers and develops them. Whole-school strategic planning involves learners in the process. It is an excellent planning model and brings about rapid improvements in the education of the learners. Governance is outstanding and makes a very valuable contribution to the success of this outstanding trust.

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**Annex A**

# Inspection judgements

<b>Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate.</b>	<b>School Overall</b>	<b>16–19</b>
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<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
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<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
The effectiveness of boarding provision	<b>1</b>	
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

## Achievement and standards

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	<b>1</b>	

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	<b>1</b>	
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	<b>1</b>	
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	<b>1</b>	
How well learners enjoy their education	<b>1</b>	
The attendance of learners	<b>1</b>	
The behaviour of learners	<b>1</b>	
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	<b>1</b>	
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	<b>1</b>	

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

<sup>1</sup> Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

All white boxes must be completed. The grey boxes are used wherever the inspection team has sufficient evidence to come to a secure judgement.

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	<b>1</b>	
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	<b>1</b>	
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	<b>1</b>	
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	<b>1</b>	
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	<b>1</b>	
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	<b>1</b>	
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	<b>Yes</b>	<b>Yes</b>
Does this school require special measures?	<b>No</b>	
Does this school require a notice to improve?	<b>No</b>	

**Annex B**

13 November 2008

Dear Learners

**Inspection of St Mary's School, Bexhill on Sea TN40 2LU**

The inspectors greatly enjoyed visiting your school and talking with many of you. It was a true joy and privilege to spend a day with you and to see the interesting and exciting work you do.

We think that your school is outstanding. You make rapid gains in communicating independent choices. Your development of practical mathematical skills is also outstanding. The teaching you receive sparkles and you enjoy learning as a result. The boarding care and the care you receive in school are excellent. You gain in confidence and independence as a result of attending this superb school. Your relevant and exciting curriculum prepares you exceptionally well for further college courses and the world of work. Your principal and his dedicated staff team ensure that your school is led and managed exceptionally well.

We have asked your principal to improve just a couple of things. We would like him to work more closely in partnership with your parents to help improve your learning. We have also asked him to ensure that the sanctions in the residences are monitored.

We thank you for all your very hard work. We are delighted that you enjoy school and ask you to continue to support your principal, staff and governors to make your school even better than it already is.

Jeffery Plumb  
Lead inspector