



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



TO: Karen King, Chief Administrator
St. Vincent's Special Needs Services School

FROM: Dori Papa, Ed. D., Education Consultant *DP*
Bureau of Special Education

DATE: December 16, 2020

SUBJECT: PRELIMINARY EVALUATION REPORT
Approval Review for a Private Special Education Program

Please note: This Approved Private Special Education Program approval review was conducted remotely due to the current public health and safety requirements resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. All required activities and components, as defined in the *Policies, Procedures and Standards for Approved Private Special Education Programs*, were conducted remotely and in accordance with the approval process.

On November 12, 2020, an evaluation team conducted a virtual site visit review for re-approval of the St. Vincent's Special Needs Services School special education program. The team consisted of:

- Dori Papa, Ed.D., Education Consultant, Bureau of Special Education (BSE);
- Laura Olson, Director of Pupil Personnel and Special Services, New Milford Public Schools; and
- Gwen Killheffer, Ed.D., Education Director, Solterra Academy.

During a previous virtual site visit on November 10, 2020, Dr. Papa reviewed the education files of students as well as personnel files. In addition, Dr. Papa has reviewed the application materials submitted to the BSE by your administration.

At the exit conference on November 12, 2020, the evaluation team shared its impressions and preliminary findings. The following areas of the special education program have been reviewed:

- Governance;
- Administration;
- Fiscal management;
- Admissions;
- Individual student records;
- Program requirements;
- Evaluation of student progress and reporting responsibilities;
- Student management techniques;
- Qualifications and requirements for instructional, administrative, and support personnel;
- Health and safety; and
- Termination of enrollment.

1. Commendations:

- Teacher and related service provider interview respondents described the administrative team collaborative and highly supportive—the employment longevity of many staff is indicative of high quality leadership.
- The program is designed to recognize the needs of a very specific group of students whose developmental and/or medical needs require a high level of individualized instruction, therapy, and medical monitoring provided by an on-site nursing staff (registered nurses and licensed practical nurses). The nursing staff provides medical monitoring and care for routine and emergency concerns. The program’s medical director specializes in developmental pediatrics, provides support to the nursing staff, and is available to consult with parents and local physicians.
- The school programming is characterized as therapeutic education utilizing a developmental and functional curriculum, to support a highly specialized instructional environment for each student. Staff that were interviewed reported that instruction is data driven, very individualized, and “focuses on the small successes in student progress.”
- The program provides a safe, nurturing environment where each student receives individual instruction and support to facilitate learning in all developmental areas.
- A positive culture and climate has been established and is evidenced by mutually respectful relationships among students and between staff and students.
- An outstanding level of collaboration, communication, and consistency relative to the development and implementation of appropriate social, emotional, behavioral, and academic programming for each student enrolled was noted by all staff interviewed. Interview respondents reported an “exceptionally high level of parental involvement in the individualized education program (IEP) development process unlike any other program they have observed.”
- The program has a strong interdisciplinary approach delivered by an array of educational and related service staff including special education and subject area teachers; physical, speech and occupational therapists; specialists in feeding therapy; adaptive equipment; and augmentative communication, as well as, applied behavioral analysis on staff and available to support all students.
- The team reported evidence of well-planned instruction that appeared to be appropriate to the current level of performance for each student and aligned with IEP goals and objectives.

2. Standard Deficiencies:

No standard deficiencies were identified in this program approval process.

3. **Recommendations:**

The following recommendations are offered to St. Vincent's Special Needs Services School Program:

- Consider the provision of professional development (PD) for education staff focused on identifying the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators.
- Continue exploring further expansion of technology resources and the tools and skills necessary for staff to enhance instruction through the use of technology. Consider making available a technology “go to” staff member to provide education staff with training and support in the delivery of remote instruction.
- Conduct an assessment of available space to efficiently store adaptive and medical equipment while maintaining accessibility within the classroom to relieve overcrowding of instructional spaces.
- At the end of each academic year, compile a list/summary of PD activities for each staff member to be retained in his/her individual personnel files in addition to maintaining the administrative PD binder.
- Consider including in each student’s file, evidence that progress reports were sent to the parent/guardian and the local education agency. If sent electronically, maintain evidence in the student’s file that the progress report(s) were emailed.

Within 15 working days from the date of this preliminary evaluation report, please indicate in writing to the BSE whether your program agrees with the report. Upon receipt of your written agreement, a recommendation for program approval through June 30, 2025, will be submitted to the Commissioner of Education.

Upon such approval, the following will be applicable to St. Vincent’s Special Needs Services School:

Approved Ages to Serve: Ages 3 through 22 (Grades PK–12)

Approved Student Capacity: 84 students

Approval Expiration Date: June 30, 2025

cc: Gerilyn Durnin, Education Director