

St George's School

Inspection report for boarding school

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| Inspector | Joe Staines |
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| Date of last inspection | 29 June 2004 |

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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|---------------|---|
| Outstanding: | this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality |
| Good: | this aspect of the provision is strong |
| Satisfactory: | this aspect of the provision is sound |
| Inadequate: | this aspect of the provision is not good enough |

Service information

Brief description of the service

St George's School is a Voluntary Aided specialist technology college, situated in the town of Harpenden. It was founded in 1907 and is one of the first fully co-educational independent boarding schools in England. In 1967, its Diamond Jubilee year, St. George's became a Voluntary Aided School in association with Hertfordshire Education Authority, which is responsible for the cost of education for all pupils. Parents of boarding pupils only meet the cost of accommodation and care as tuition is funded by the DFES in a maintained boarding school. The school has increased in size and now offers education to over 1,200 pupils including up to 120 boarding students, whose age may range between 10-19. Boarding students are accommodated in two units (Houses), which are located in the school grounds. Approximately forty per cent of the boarders are from overseas. Keswick House – Girls' Unit: Keswick House forms part of the original Victorian school house and offers accommodation for up to 65 girls, the smallest room being for two and the largest being a dormitory for seven. The rooms are located on three floors with bathroom/shower and toilet facilities available. Communal facilities include four lounges, one of which opens in a spacious private garden for girls' use and a small kitchen for making snacks. Improvements, which have been carried out recently, include some new carpets and castle beds with workspaces. Crosthwaite House – Boys' Unit: Crosthwaite unit was purpose-built as a boys' boarding house in the early 1970s. It can accommodate up to 55 boys and the present boarders are between 11 to 19 years of age. The smallest room is for two and the largest is a dormitory for seven. The rooms are located mostly on the first and second floors, each offering ample sanitary facilities. A new Sixth Form area was also completed in 2001. Communal facilities include a lounge, a games room, a small kitchen, a quiet room with computers for study and some facilities for Sixth Formers. Outside there is a patio area and a lawn for the boys.

Summary

This inspection was carried out over one week in the Autumn term of 2007. All of the key National Minimum Standards were assessed and the overall judgement is that St George's VA school provides an outstanding level of care to boarders. The most impressive aspect of the visit was the feedback from boarders about the relationships experienced amongst the group of students living at the school during term time, and the positive relationships with staff. The boarding staff team are well organised and managed by an experienced and dynamic Head and Director of boarding, who in turn are responsible to a governing body that places great importance on the boarding provision, for which the school is rightly held in high regard by the parents of boarders. An example of the comments made by parents was "They (the staff) have played a most significant part in the development of my children and the final statement I can make is to say, it's the best investment I am likely to have ever made - I am just happy I made it at St George's School". Good levels of healthcare are provided, Children are kept safe by a combination of robust policies and well trained, vigilant staff. Boarders are able to have a balanced experience where enjoyment is valued alongside achievement. Boarders and parents are able to contribute to the boarding experience. The environment is not the best, but is homely and safe, whilst the school has a clear set of plans in place for the development of the accommodation, with significant expenditure already made, and more planned.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first time this school has been inspected by Ofsted.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders are provided with Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) through the school curriculum by designated staff with particular areas of expertise. Each year group receives at least an hour period each fortnight. The school policy makes it clear that each key stage group has different objectives, however, all groups receive teaching under the four main headings of Citizenship, Health Education (covering drugs education), Careers and Sex and Relationships Education. In addition to classes, boarders benefit from a range of external speakers, providing specialist presentations on smoking, drugs education, political issues, personal safety, personal health issues and sexually transmitted infections. Boarders are clear about the school's stance on smoking, alcohol and illegal substances. Only very small amounts of alcohol are permitted for older boarders at special occasions, giving a responsible balanced message to those boarders likely to be faced with life choices around alcohol when they are at, or shortly after they leave, St George's School. Boarding staff are well regarded by boarders and provide a more personal form of advice if boarders approach them with personal problems, and are available to give advice or refer on, any boarders with concerns around any of the issues covered in PSHCE. Boarders are provided with first aid care by trained staff within the boarding houses, both of which are staffed by matrons, alongside other residential staff members. Boarders are able to see a doctor (of either sex alternately) at weekly visits to the school. The school nurse is appropriately trained, and an NHS school health nurse visits regularly and is available for consultation for any specific health issues. Accommodation for sick boarders is basic, but adequate, with access to toilet and shower facilities. It should be noted that the school has a plan for development for the on-site school medical facilities, which are currently cramped and unfit for purpose. In the boarders survey, less than 2% indicated they did not get help when unwell, and in discussion with the inspector, boarders confirmed that they received good care when unwell, and were routinely checked on by staff. Boarders' health is also promoted by good storage of medication, and the recording of medication given, whether by the school nurse during the day, or by house staff after school. However, running totals should be recorded to enable the school to monitor these records more effectively. Those pupils that self-administer medication, do so having been assessed by staff as sufficiently responsible to do so, and are provided with suitable storage containers within their accommodation.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders are protected from bullying by a comprehensive anti-bullying policy. The policy and procedures regarding the prevention of bullying are included in the handbook for boarders, staff members, parents and significant others. It covers the definitions of bullying, staff action with respect to incidents of bullying, the involvement of parents and other adults, pupils, action to take if you are bullied or see someone being bullied. Only three of the 104 boarders who completed the boarders survey reported that they were sometimes bullied, a rise from the already low proportion reporting on this subject when the school was last inspected. No boarders said they were bullied a lot. In fact, boarders confirmed that one of the best things about the school was the relationships between boarders. For example, one group of younger boarders commented that the best things in the school were, "...never lonely. Always people around, like

having lots of older sisters", and "good spirit, the older ones don't bully - more like help you out." Boarders are protected by the school's child protection procedures, which include all the required information, and with good links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board, who can provide expert advice and guidance if required. All school staff are appropriately briefed on child protection procedures, and evidence seen at this inspection confirms that concerns are referred on appropriately wherever necessary. Boarders are helped to develop appropriate behaviours in line with the school's written policy on pastoral care and discipline. The behaviour of pupils on all days of the visit was observed to be exemplary. In group discussions, boarders were clear that they are expected to behave courteously, considerately and sensibly. Pupils are encouraged in good discipline by positive role models, for example, in one discussion group a group of younger boarders stated that everyone had respect for each other and there were lots of friends at the school. The learning support department provides an excellent service to boarders with behavioural difficulties and the anger management support was particularly praised by the boarding staff in respect of the positive outcomes achieved. The school also benefits from the links it has with the county-wide behaviour support team, which supports pupils with identified behavioural problems if needed. Boarders are provided with privacy through the provision of suitably private showering arrangements, and staff who respect the privacy of boarders when undertaking their daily duties. Boarders are cared for by staff who have been recruited using a thorough process of vetting to ensure that the appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks and references have been undertaken. An example of good practice is the detailed risk assessment the school produces when workmen are attending the site for a period whilst building work is undertaken. The school has taken measures to ensure that boarders' accommodation is reserved for their own use and has rules, understood by all, about who can invite visitors to boarders' accommodation, and an example of good awareness in this area was reported to the inspector, by a member of the board of governors, who was challenged when observed by boarders in the boarding house just prior to this visit. However, some thefts from boarders' accommodation had been reported, and the effectiveness of some self-closing devices on entrances to one boarding house was less than satisfactory. Boarders report that they feel safe and secure within the boarding houses, and the risk assessments and health and safety audit tool used by the school provides a robust process for ensuring safety hazards are eliminated. Fire safety checks provide boarders with a safe environment. The school is in the process of completing its full fire risk assessment and uses old documents in the interim.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders can turn to a number of different staff members for guidance, including house staff, tutors, other teaching staff and other boarders. The learning support department of the school provides extra support, in the form of keyworker system and a number of groups, to boarders with identified needs. Meetings take place regularly between boarding staff and learning support staff. The school's information for boarders identifies a range of people, including representatives from the school, independent listeners, Childline and others. It also makes it clear that confidential counselling can be arranged via the learning support department. The school has a clear policy on inclusion, which is demonstrated by the efforts the school has taken to arrange the orientation of beds to support the religious and cultural needs of boarders. Boarders consistently commented that the relationships between boarders and between boarders and staff was positive, with no discrimination. The learning support team provide excellent support to boarders who have difficulties 'fitting in' with others, through the use of friendship clubs, designed to help boarders develop good social and relationship skills where needed.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have a range of means by which they can contribute to the operation of boarding at the school, including house committees, a boarding council and a prefect system. Boarders stated clearly that they had confidence in their boarding reps, who took issues up on behalf of other boarders at council meetings. Only one of 104 boarders who completed the survey stated that they did not have a say about the school. All others replied either always, usually, or sometimes. Boarders can also make comments and suggestions via a suggestions box placed in one of the boarding houses. Boarders have access to telephones and electronic equipment if necessary to maintain contact with family members, including those from abroad. Occasionally, boarders with family abroad make arrangements for family members to contact them at pre-arranged times to tie in with time zone differences.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders' accommodation has improved over the last three years. The majority of bathrooms have been reconditioned, a new laundry put in place, new carpets in some areas, and the provision of new wardrobes and desks, have all helped to make the environment warmer and more suitable for purpose. The school's development plan shows that a deal of refurbishment remains outstanding, but the school has recognised this, and dedicated a great deal of resources into bringing all areas of boarding accommodation up to a satisfactory standard.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Boarders, parents and staff are all provided with a range of good information about the school and, in particular, the boarding aspect. There is a comprehensive handbook, which includes information on the boarding facilities. It clearly outlines the aims and organisation of boarding at the school, admission criteria, an outline of the care and supervision for boarders and the religious or cultural aspects of the school. The staff handbook provides detailed instructions and information about school policies and procedures, the code of practice and expectations. The management and leadership of boarding is excellent. The Head has a wealth of experience and knowledge of boarding, and oversees the provision, meeting at least on a fortnightly basis with the Director of boarding. The Director of boarding has good relationships with the house staff, who themselves are provided with opportunities for development and training within their role, which is defined by a clear job description. The school's governing body includes a dedicated boarding committee, which meets termly and receives detailed reports from the Head and Director of boarding. The boarding committee monitors any issues affecting boarders and ensures that any staffing, finance and developmental matters are considered on a routine basis. The school development plan has a section specific to boarding. Boarders' welfare is promoted by the school's systems for risk assessing activities and the environment. The head, and Director of boarding between them regularly monitor the records of punishments, complaints and accidents. Staffing levels in both boarding houses are sufficient for the numbers of boarders, with no negative comments made about the availability of staff by boarders throughout this visit. An example of good practice was the involvement in terms of working shifts at one of the boarding houses, by the chair of the governors' boarding committee. Boarding staff have their own inset training days and the attendance at residential conferences for housemistresses

has improved the knowledge base and confidence of the boarding staff team as a whole. Despite boarding staff confirming good levels of support, the lack of recorded supervision and staff appraisal system detracts from the overall picture of staff support, however the school has taken positive steps to introducing these formally in the near future.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

| Standard | Action | Due date |
|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- undertake a review of security arrangements for boarding accommodation
- implement a system of recorded supervision and appraisal for all staff with boarding duties.

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for boarding school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' health is promoted (NMS 6)
- safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and welfare are supported by appropriate records (NMS 7)
- boarders' receive first aid and health care as necessary (NMS 15)
- boarders are adequately supervised and looked after when ill (NMS 16)
- boarders are supported in relation to any health or personal problems (NMS 17)
- boarders receive good quality catering provision (NMS 24)
- boarders have access to food and drinking water in addition to main meals (NMS 25)
- boarders are suitably accommodated when ill (NMS 48)
- boarders' clothing and bedding are adequately laundered (NMS 49).

Ofsted considers 6 and 15 the key standards to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are protected from bullying (NMS 2)
- boarders are protected from abuse (NMS 3)
- use of discipline with boarders is fair and appropriate (NMS 4)
- boarders' complaints are responded to appropriately (NMS 5)
- the operation of any prefect system safeguards and promotes boarders' welfare (NMS 13)
- boarders' welfare is protected in any appointment of educational guardians by the school (NMS 22)
- boarders are protected from the risk of fire (NMS 26)
- the welfare of any children other than the school's pupils is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated by the school (NMS 28)
- boarders' safety and welfare are protected during high risk activities (NMS 29)
- boarders' personal privacy is respected (NMS 37)
- there is vigorous selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with boarders (NMS 38)
- boarders are protected from unsupervised contact at school with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures; all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises are supervised (NMS 39)
- boarders have their own accommodation, which is secure from public intrusion (NMS 41)
- boarders are protected from safety hazards (NMS 47)

Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5, 26, 37, 38, 39, 41 and 47 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders have access to a range and choice of activities (NMS 11)
- boarders do not experience inappropriate discrimination (NMS 18)
- boarders' welfare is not compromised by unusual or onerous demands (NMS 27)
- boarders have satisfactory provision to study (NMS 43)
- boarders have access to a range of safe recreational areas (NMS 46)

Ofsted considers 14 and 18 the key standards to be inspected.

Annex A

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school (NMS 12)
- boarders receive personal support from staff (NMS 14)
- boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families (NMS 19)
- new boarders are introduced to the school's procedures and operation, and are enabled to settle in (NMS 21)
- boarders have appropriate access to information and facilities outside the school (NMS 30)
- there are sound relationships between staff and boarders (NMS 36)

Ofsted considers 12 and 19 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' possessions and money are protected (NMS 20)
- boarders are provided with satisfactory accommodation (NMS 40)
- boarders have satisfactory sleeping accommodation (NMS 42)
- boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities (NMS 44)
- boarders have satisfactory provision for changing by day (NMS 45)
- boarders can obtain personal requisites while accommodated at school (NMS 50)

Ofsted considers 51 the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- a suitable statement of the school's principles and practice should be available to parents, boarders and staff (NMS 1)
- there is clear leadership of boarding in the school (NMS 8)
- crises affecting boarders' welfare are managed effectively (NMS 9)
- the school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare (NMS 10)
- risk assessment and school record-keeping contribute to boarders' welfare (NMS 23)
- boarders are supervised adequately by staff (NMS 31)
- staff exercise appropriate supervision of boarders leaving the school site (NMS 32)
- boarders are adequately supervised at night (NMS 33)
- boarders are looked after by staff which have specific boarding duties, and have received adequate induction and continued training (NMS 34)
- boarders are looked after by staff which follow clear boarding policies and practice (NMS 35)
- the welfare of boarders placed in lodgings is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 51)
- the welfare of boarders is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated away from the school site on short-term visits (NMS 52)

Ofsted considers 1, 23, 31 and 34 the key standards to be inspected.