

St Georges (Ascot)

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Seka Graovac / Sandra Jacobs-Walls
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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

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 an independent school that offers both boarding and day education to up to 300 girls. Pupils enter the school at the ages of 11, 13 and 16 years. Admission is usually by the Common Entrance examination. The school is an Anglican foundation. It welcomes girls of any faith or none. There is a chapel on the premises.

The school aims to provide education in a caring environment and to be a place where girls can grow as individuals. Its stated purpose is to equip girls with the best possible academic qualifications, as well as to help them make the most of all their other talents, be they sporting or creative. The school offers boarding to up to 130 girls. Boarding is arranged by year groups and accommodated in three buildings over the school site. The first four years are housed together in the main school building. The upper years boarders live in two purpose built buildings. The upper sixth form girls have single bedrooms. The school is situated in Ascot, close to London and Heathrow airport. Although only five minutes walk from Ascot High Street, the school overlooks open green fields.

At the time of the inspection, the school had 113 boarders. Many girls spoke to the inspectors, either individually or in small groups. Ofsted received written comments about the boarding provision at this school from 19 girls and nine parents.

Summary

The main aim of this announced inspection was to assess the quality of the boarding and welfare provision at St George's School in Ascot. The school was inspected in line with all national minimum standards for boarding schools and Every Child Matters. The inspection took four days and Ofsted inspectors were accompanied by a boarding schools' additional inspector. The inspection found many examples of good boarding practice and some excellent ones. Girls benefit from having trusting relationships with the school staff and the management. However, some significant shortfalls were also identified. The continuing lack of robust staff recruitment checks raises serious concerns. In line with Ofsted benchmarking guidance and based on the risks to children's safety associated with poor staff vetting practice, the overall quality rating of the provision in this school has been judged as poor. Some other shortfalls were also identified at the inspection, leading to eight new recommendations being included in this report.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous inspection was carried out in October 2006 by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. At that time, eight recommendations were made.

The school took appropriate steps to address seven of these recommendations. This has led to the improvements in many aspects of the boarding provision. For example, the complaints procedure has been updated. Staff members have received fire safety training. An action plan following the health and safety assessment has been implemented. The independent listener's contact details have been included in the handbooks. Boarders have been given greater access

to the fitness suite. A refurbishment plan has been developed to ensure that the environment is well maintained.

However, the quality of the school's staff recruitment process remains poor. The related recommendation had to be restated in this report. This significantly impacted on the overall rating of the quality of the welfare provision.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The school is committed to promoting boarders' health in a number of different ways.

A structured personal, social, health and citizenship education programme ensures that girls receive comprehensive information on how to enhance their own well-being and who to ask for help when it is needed. Various school staff deliver this programme. External speakers draw on different areas of their expertise to make it more interesting for pupils.

The school's excellent catering services provide a great variety of well balanced and nutritious meals.

The school's programme of physical activities also contributes to boarders developing healthy lifestyles.

The school has clear policies in relation to the use of alcohol, smoking and illegal substances. These policies are well known to all parties and are consistently followed in practice.

Boarders benefit from having a trusting relationship with the school nurse. A female doctor is also available to see girls at the school; she visits twice a week. Boarders can choose to see a different doctor. Through effective partnership working with the local surgery and other health services, the nurse ensures that boarders' health needs are appropriately identified and met. Boarders' health records contain relevant health information. This includes the information provided by parents at the point of application for their child to enter the school. Welfare plans are in place for individual girls with a known medical condition. Those plans contribute to the effective communication between the medical and other school staff. Girls are satisfied with how their personal information is protected. They report the nurse seeks their permission to talk with other staff members about their particular health need. Girls are also made aware of the reasons for the information being shared; this is on need to know basis only. Staff have identified that the surgery is in need of sound proofing. Currently, boarders' confidentiality is compromised. There are firm plans in place to move the surgery.

A medical cover roster ensures that medical advice is always available. There are good arrangements in place to ensure that staff receive first-aid training. This helps protect boarder's well-being. The school obtains written parental permission in advance, for the administration of first aid and appropriate non-prescription medication. However, the school's arrangements for record keeping relating to prescribed and non-prescribed medication are not robust. For example, no records are kept of medicines that are held on behalf of the boarders by the school. This means that it is not possible to appropriately monitor what has happened with medication, once it enters the school.

Girls are well looked after by the nurse and boarding staff when they feel unwell. Suitable accommodation is available for the separate care of boarders who are ill. Boarders report receiving good care and special attention when they need it.

Girls feel well supported with any welfare concerns and personal issues. However, the lack of individual written welfare plans relating to significant emotional or behavioural difficulties compromise the quality of communication and the consistency of good practice.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

The school has many clear policies and good arrangements in place to safeguard boarders' welfare. Girls report feeling safe. They board in an environment that is free from bullying. Trusting relationships between boarders and staff members contribute to a calm and happy atmosphere in the school. Parents report feeling confident that their children are well looked after. The school has clear rules that are known to boarders, parents and staff members. Staff are consistent in their management of behaviour, discipline and the use of punishments. This is well balanced by a comprehensive rewards scheme for good behaviour and personal achievement. Girls report being fairly treated at all times. The standard of boarders' behaviour is generally satisfactory and staff have not had to use physical intervention techniques. The effective prefect system ensures inclusion of boarders' perspective in safeguarding. It also provides opportunities for girls to take on leadership roles. Boarders' personal privacy and other universal children's rights are promoted. Good supervision arrangements and comprehensive written risk assessments of high risk activities, protect girls' safety while allowing them to experience these activities. There are good opportunities for boarders to learn about the risks involved and how to keep themselves safe.

However, some areas of the school that are accessible by boarders have safety hazards that could be easily avoided. For example, the school's recycling machine is not kept locked as highlighted in the relevant risk assessment.

The fire risk assessment is comprehensive. The school's fire evacuation procedure is sound and well known to boarders and staff. However, the school's records do not evidence that fire drill evacuations are conducted at the frequency recommended by the national minimum standards.

The main shortfall in how the school safeguards boarders is linked to the poor staff vetting practice. The school's written recruitment procedure is not consistently implemented. For example, many of the staff files do not contain evidence of the appropriate checks being completed before the employee starts working at the school or in some cases, at all. The shortfalls include the lack of Criminal Records Bureau checks, the lack of references and no positive proof of identification. This means that girls are entrusted to be cared for by some staff members who have not been thoroughly vetted. This seriously compromises boarders' safety.

There is open access to the school, as there are no gates. Boarders' accommodation is secured through the use of key-padded locks and the surveillance equipment outside the buildings. Visitors report to the reception area and are issued with the passes. Clear arrangements are in place to protect boarders, when members of a particular group use the school chapel. However, there is no written agreement between the school and any other adult not employed by the school but living in the same building as boarding accommodation.

Boarders and parents are enabled to make complaints if they are dissatisfied with the service. The school appropriately and swiftly responds to the issues raised. Any concerns relating to a child's welfare are examined in the light of the school's comprehensive child protection policy. All staff and boarders are aware of the school's clear procedure for reporting any safeguarding concerns to the school's designated child protection officer and the headmistress. Good partnership working between the school and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board contributes to the protection of children at the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders are appropriately supported to gain educational achievements, as well as to have fun time at the school. There is a good balance of structured learning and reasonable free time for boarders to engage in activities of their choice. There is a suitable quiet provision for both organised prep and boarders' private study. The school provides a good range of appropriate sporting and cultural activities including various clubs. Boarders have access to many safe recreational areas, both indoors and outdoors. Lacrosse is particularly popular in this school. Trips around Britain and trips abroad with the appropriate safeguards in place are regularly organised.

The school has developed a number of initiatives to promote diversity and equality. There is a disability policy review committee and learning support programmes for pupils with a known learning disability. The school's international student council promotes the awareness of the particular issues faced by overseas students. Boarders report feeling respected and having an expectation that any form of discrimination will be challenged. The school's caring atmosphere help boarders to develop nurturing attitudes and to be sensitive towards other children's needs. The integration across different year groups is particularly strong. The school has an equal opportunities policy that expresses a commitment to anti-discriminatory practice. However, this policy does not make any reference to issues of sexual preference or having a positive attitude towards gay and, lesbian people, or the diversity of gender identity or expression..

Boarders report having a wide range of people they can turn to for discussion of personal and welfare issues, as well as academic or other matters. The relationship between boarders and staff is very good. Boarders feel well looked after and are confident in approaching boarding staff, teaching staff or the school nurse for advice and help. They also have access to an independent person, whom they can contact directly about personal problems or concerns at school. The school facilitates friendships between all boarders. There is also a formal peer support system. Boarders enjoy special social events organised with other boarding schools.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The school has good systems in place to secure boarders' contribution to the operation of boarding in the school. There are a number of well established formal councils in place, such as the school's council and the food council that meet on a regular basis. Some other councils, such as the international school council and the internet safety council have been more recently formed to strengthen boarders' voice. Girls feel empowered to effectively influence the running of the school. There are a number of instances when this has happened. For example, the installation of additional drinking water facilities around the school.

Boarders and staff share an appropriately warm relationship. Girls feel trusted and in turn, trust school staff. The quality of this relationship also means that girls feel able to openly express their views and share their experiences. Staff members encourage and appreciate boarders' involvement. Both staff and boarders know that everybody benefit from the consultation arrangements in place. For example, the internet safety council recently discovered that some younger boarders were accessing an inappropriate website. This has led to an increased level of online safeguarding at the school.

Girls learn and board in a happy, friendly atmosphere. The comprehensive induction programme enables girls to settle in with ease into their new environment. The levels of homesickness are low. Some girls jokingly reported that they felt homesick when they were not at the school.

The school provides boarding and looks after girls' welfare in close partnership with their parents. The communication between the school and parents is good. The school regularly provides talks to parents on topics that parents themselves choose. This has recently included talks on sex education, emotional intelligence and cyber safety.

There are good arrangements in place to enable boarders to maintain relationships with their families. Girls have mobile phones and broadband access. There are also various pay phones around the school. Boarders receive their post unopened.

Boarders have appropriate access to information and facilities outside the school. They are well informed about the world around them and feel integrated in the wider society.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders live in a pleasant, clean and well maintained environment. The systems in place for heating, lighting and ventilation are functioning well. The space available in the communal areas and in the sleeping accommodation is sufficient. The standard of décor is good. The furnishing is appropriate and reflects boarders' preferences. Girls enjoy having opportunities to experience communal living and to share their lives with friends from the school. Younger boarders sleep in dormitories that can accommodate up to six people. Older boarders have individual bedrooms to allow them to have more space for individual study and to prepare them for independent living. They also have opportunities to practice their cooking skills by occasionally preparing meals in the boarding houses with the appropriate level of staff support.

The school provides adequate toilet and washing facilities that allow girls to maintain their personal hygiene. They report no queues or issues with privacy.

Each boarder has separate storage facilities that include a lockable drawer. Borrowing items without the owner's permission is a rare occurrence at the school. Boarders light-heartedly explored this issue in one of the assemblies that was organised and delivered by them.

Girls enjoy good economic well-being. They know that the school protects their rights and their property well. They report that the school has effective arrangements with their parents to ensure that they get their pocket money. They can easily purchase items they need and want either from the well stocked tuck shop at the school or in nearby high street shops in Ascot.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

Comprehensive information about the school, its ethos and principles of boarding practices is available on the school's website. In addition, printed information is also available to the stakeholders. Parents, boarders and staff know what to expect from the school.

The school is led by an experienced management team and the body of governors that amongst themselves have a wealth of relevant experience and expertise. There is a comprehensive framework for management meetings on different levels. This facilitates good communication and enables monitoring of the welfare provision. However, the shortfalls identified in this report indicate that the school's own quality assurance monitoring is not fully effective. The recommendation given to the school in 2006 by the Commission for Social Care Inspection to implement a robust staff recruitment procedure is repeated. The school's safeguarding processes are inadequate. Due to the high risks associated with the poor staff recruitment practice, the overall rating has also been judged as inadequate. The quality of the school's record keeping also compromises effective monitoring.

Many good and excellent aspects of boarding provision indicate that the school has a capacity to improve. There is a clear written development plan that maps out the school's intended future.

Emergency plans are also in place. These include appropriate planned responses to a range of foreseeable crises, such as a possible swine flu pandemic.

The school's promotion of diversity and equality is satisfactory. There are a number of developments in place that aim to enhance and strengthen this commitment.

Boarding staff receive adequate guidance, appraisal, training and support. However, the school could not demonstrate that the induction programme for all staff includes guidance on child protection. The staff disciplinary procedure does not describe guidance and support available to staff during suspension or investigation relating to an allegation being made against them, as specified in the national minimum standards.

Staff members know how to support girls in line with the good boarding practices. Boarders are well looked after by staff who have clear understanding of their professional roles. The boarding provision is well organised. There is a consistency of practice across the boarding houses. The duty rosters demonstrate the adequate levels of supervision of boarders. Girls confirm that boarding staff can be easily summoned at all times. Boarders and staff members appreciate the stability of the provision that has been enhanced by the recent staff restructuring programme. The school is reviewing the impact of less resources being available to deliver boarding provision with the aim of minimizing any potentially negative impact.

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):

- implement a system for keeping written records of all medication, that enables effective monitoring (breach of national minimum standard 15.12)
- develop an appropriate individual welfare plan for any boarder with special welfare needs, significant emotional or behavioural difficulties (breach of national minimum standard 17.2)
- evidence that fire drills are carried out at least once per term (breach of national minimum standard 26.3)
- protect boarders from unsupervised contact with adults who have not been subject to the robust recruitment procedure that includes all recommended checks (breach of national minimum standards 38 and 39)
- develop a written agreement between the school and any adult not employed by the school but living in the same building as boarding accommodation that covers all matters listed in the related national minimum standard (breach of national minimum standard 39.4)
- protect boarders from reasonably avoidable safety hazards (breach of national minimum standard 47.1)
- demonstrate a commitment to equal opportunities and avoidance of inappropriate discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation (breach of national minimum standard 18)
- evidence that the induction training for all staff includes guidance on child protection (breach of national minimum standard 34.4)
- include provision for guidance and support to staff during suspension or investigation while allegations against them are being investigated. (breach of national minimum standard 35.4)