

# St Swithun's School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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<b>Inspector</b>	Clare Davies / Liz Daniels
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<b>Registered person</b>	St Swithun's School
<b>Head/ Principal</b>	
<b>Nominated person</b>	Jane Gandee
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	14/03/2008

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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 Swithun's is a senior day and boarding school for girls. At the time of the inspection there were a total of 214 boarders and 257 day pupils. Pupils are aged between 11 and 18 years and can choose to be full or weekly boarders.

Boarders are accommodated within six boarding houses on site. A junior house, four mixed year houses and a separate house for girls in year 13. Each boarding house is managed by a resident housemistress and a resident assistant. The school offers extensive recreational facilities and is located on the outskirts of Winchester, Hampshire. A junior school for day pupils is on the same site.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection to assess St Swithun's School against the national minimum standards for boarding schools. An interim inspection of regulatory compliance was undertaken by the Independent Schools Inspectorate at the same time and will be reported upon separately.

There are good outcomes for boarders and all but two of the standards have been met. Outcomes relating to the boarding accommodation, the promotion of equality and diversity, and the enjoyment and achievement of boarders are assessed as outstanding areas of the boarding provision. There is a strong commitment to the safeguarding of boarders' welfare. This is evident in comprehensive policies and procedures to guide and support staff supplemented with good training opportunities. All staff have received training on child protection matters and there are robust procedures for safer recruitment, ensuring all new staff are suitably checked to work with children and young people. Sound relationships exist between boarders and school staff. Good behaviour and very low levels of bullying are indicative of these good relationships. Some risk assessments relating to boarding houses need to be more comprehensive and medication in boarding houses is not always recorded and stored appropriately.

Since the last boarding inspection there has been a revision as to how judgements are formed and this can be referenced through the benchmarking document published on the Ofsted website.

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

No recommendations were made as a result of the boarding inspection in March 2008.

## Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Staff support young people well by ensuring their health is fully promoted when they board. Currently, a well co-ordinated personal, social and health education programme is developing throughout the school. It is included in the school curriculum for some year groups and additional sessions are arranged across all ages, some within boarding time. House staff are aware of the programme content, enabling them to follow up any queries young people raise, as well as discuss the risks associated with smoking, alcohol, drugs and sexual activity. The nursing staff are also readily available as a resource for young people to discuss any concerns they may have. Good communication between boarding staff and the nurses contribute to meeting the physical and emotional needs of boarders.

Good numbers of staff are trained in first aid and there are suitable resources across the boarding houses for its administration. However, although parents consent to emergency treatment and the administration of medication, they are not currently asked to consent to the administration of first aid. There is 24-hour nurse cover and this, with the support of a local general practitioner, (GP) enables very good medical and nursing provision for boarders. The school confirms that the nurses are registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council and they link closely with the GP for their professional guidance. Medical records containing the necessary health and welfare information are held in the sanatorium for each young person who boards. There are good arrangements for any boarder who is ill as they can either stay in a single room within their house or be in the sanatorium, in well furnished rooms with suitable facilities.

Medication is safely stored within the school's sanatorium. However, clear procedures are not available for staff to follow regarding the safe storage, administration and recording of medication within the boarding houses; this has resulted in some inconsistencies and presents the risk that any discrepancy could not be easily tracked. Good risk assessments for those young people who self-medicate confirm they fully understand the correct procedures to follow and this is well monitored. Good hygiene is promoted by the wide use of alcohol gel within the school.

The catering staff have an excellent understanding of what makes a balanced and nutritious meal and put this into practice by offering an extensive range of food. All main meals are taken in the school dining room where there is always a choice of main dishes with vegetarian options, salad bar and jacket potatoes. Puddings, yoghurts and a selection of fresh fruit are always available to follow. Boarders enjoy the food and appreciate the many choices. Very few negative comments were received about the food offered, acknowledging how it had improved. The catering manager meets with representatives from pupil groups, as a food forum, to discuss any changes to the menus. The boarding houses have kitchen areas where drinks and snacks can be made. One of the after school activities involves gardening and the allotment club it was reported proudly how they provided the kitchen with their

produce last season where it was cooked and served. Planting is underway for another season of home grown produce. Similarly the Green Society are proud to report that after a presentation in assembly about food wastage there was a reduction by 35 per cent. This initiative and the allotment contribute well to the school's commitment to sustainability.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is good.

Procedures to guard against bullying are effective with a pupil version of the policy in addition to clear guidelines for staff including strategies for dealing with such incidents. Boarders report that they do not feel bullying is an issue at St Swithun's School and on occasion when there is an incident it is dealt with by staff. One boarder reported that there is 'no bullying, but there are mild disagreements'. The policy to counter electronic and digital bullying is comprehensive and meets the revised national minimum standard. Boarders and staff have received guidance on how to protect their identity and use technology in a safe manner. Following an external training course, a member of boarding staff produced a document 'How to stay safe online' to alert staff and pupils of the potential risks. Boarders are required to sign a school agreement for safe use of technology and the school network. Access to the internet is restricted and denies boarders the use of social network sites to promote their safety. Some boarders would like this school policy changed, the headmistress is considering the installation of software that will enable boarders to make phone calls over the internet at a very reasonable rate. This will be of particular benefit to boarders whose family and friends live outside of the United Kingdom.

The school has a very good policy on child protection and a simple reference to 10 key points for staff to consider in the safeguarding of children and young people. Sixth form boarders are also made aware of this guidance, this ensures they know how to respond appropriately if they should have concerns about the safety and welfare of other boarders. The designated person has trained at a suitable level and delivers training to all staff within the school. The staff handbooks include additional guidance on safe working practices and weekly staff meetings provide a forum for discussion in this area. The school has a nominated governor for child protection who provides a level of monitoring and contributes to the review of the policy.

Boarders know what is expected of them and their behaviour through the published policy and reminders in class discussion, house meetings, assemblies and on an individual level if necessary. Rewards and praise are given to boarders with regular celebration of achievement in boarding houses and whole school assemblies. Should there be any misbehaviour, likely consequences are in the form of school-based community service or constructive activity such as tidying areas of the boarding house or sorting out the lost property. A messy kitchen may result in access denied until volunteers come forward to clear up. Boarding staff create an open atmosphere of discussion with boarders, building up sound relationships. Generally boarders report that discipline is dealt with fairly. Records confirm that serious incidents are

rare and dealt with appropriately by the headmistress and her deputy. Good policies outline the expectations and management for any pupil that may become involved in serious incidents such as smoking, consuming alcohol or drug misuse.

The procedures for making a complaint are published for boarders and their parents and they provide contact details for Ofsted. Boarders are encouraged to talk to any member of staff with any concern or complaint they may have. There have been no formal complaints from boarders, good relationships between them and the staff assist in their resolution at an informal stage. Records confirm that any complaint is appropriately dealt with.

There have been some incidents of personal items going missing within the boarding areas. Boarders report that this has lessened and improved as a result of the school arranging for a police officer to talk about keeping personal possessions safe and using the lockable spaces provided by the school. Boarders feel safe on the school site and are aware of the security measures in place to protect them. Most boarders have single rooms and therefore most boarders have sufficient privacy. A few junior boarders reported that they feel their privacy is compromised on occasion due to the layout of their boarding house. However, they recognise that this improves as you move up through the school into different accommodation each year.

The school carries out comprehensive recruitment of staff with robust selection and vetting procedures to ensure staff are suitable to work with children and young people. All staff have clearance through the Criminal Records Bureau and references are received and verified before employment commences. There are effective systems to safely manage the presence of visitors where registration occurs and a visitors badge is issued. Resident adults not employed by the school (spouses and partners) are subject to a written agreement to ensure the arrangements for the safeguarding of boarders is clearly understood. For example no access to boarding houses is permitted unless they are accompanied. Parents and boarders have been informed of the preferred taxi provider in the area as the local authority has undertaken suitability checks on these drivers. These systems evidence the school's strong commitment to safeguarding.

Matters of health and safety across the school site are generally managed very well with sound policies and systems for regular checks on the effectiveness of equipment and safety measures. There are systems installed for the prevention and detection of fire. Boarders have experienced evacuations at different times of the day and know what to do if the alarm should sound. There are a series of risk assessments covering activities and off site trips that are very comprehensive and monitored by a designated member of staff to ensure consistency in risk management. Boarding houses have a more generic risk assessment and do not fully identify the individual characteristics and activity within each house. This could lead to some risks not being identified and therefore without a plan to minimise such a risk. For example, the risk assessments for the boarding house accommodating year 13 is identical to the one for the junior boarders.

## Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There is a range of activities for boarders to enjoy with clubs and societies on offer after school and many boarders participating in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. There are excellent facilities on site including a sports hall, swimming pool, fitness suite, performing arts centre with capacity for an audience of 600, music department, art and design technology department, sports courts and playing fields. Off site activities include singing in the choir at Winchester Cathedral, horse riding, community service in the locality, shopping trips and access to local leisure facilities. Many boarders report that they are dissatisfied with the range of activities on offer at the weekends. However, there is at least one off site trip and an on site activity organised every weekend. Boarders can go to the local town for a period of time at age appropriate levels. Each boarding house has more than one communal area where girls can meet together to enjoy television, films, music, craft or play games. The kitchen areas are suitably equipped for cooking activities.

The boarders receive good levels of personal support from staff and this is a strength of the school. There are boarding staff available at all times who have developed sound relationships with the girls. Boarders can identify a range of adults that they can approach within the school with a concern or a problem. In addition to school staff, boarders can receive support from older boarders, an independent listener, nursing staff and the chaplain. The new headmistress has visited boarding houses in the evening to meet the boarders and establish their views. The boarders report that they welcome this level of interest and feel able to approach the headmistress and other senior staff with any issues they want to raise. Cluster groups ensure that boarders know each other in different year groups. This system is popular with the girls and particularly appreciated by younger boarders as a way of getting to know older ones. A list of external helplines are published; these include ChildLine, Ofsted and the Children's Rights Director. The good behaviour of boarders and low level of incidents of bullying are indicative of happy boarders who feel secure in their surroundings. Boarders provided the following comments; 'I love it. I can't imagine being a day girl', 'I feel that the students create a supportive network' and 'I really enjoy boarding and I feel safe'.

There is a strong commitment to equal opportunities and creating an environment where there is no inappropriate discrimination. Inclusion of everyone is evident regardless of ability, race or cultural background. The school has an accessibility plan and has undertaken many adaptations to promote equal access across the site for all pupils, staff and visitors. St Swithun's has a Church of England foundation but welcomes girls from other religions and arrangements are made to support boarders in practicing their faith within school or at a local place of worship. The integration of boarders from different nationalities is promoted well where difference is celebrated through the curriculum, assemblies, catering provision and the boarding environment. Learning support is available where identified and some boarders receive help when English is an additional language.



## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

There are formal opportunities for boarders to express their views through tutor groups, boarding house meetings, surveys and the food forum. The school forum has operated in the past though is being reviewed to consider a more effective way to promote the 'student voice', this development is being student led by senior girls within the school. A presentation on this type of consultation has been given to the whole school during assembly and the date for the first meeting has been set this term.

St Swithun's School has been very active in making a positive contribution to the wider community. Some pupils have been working together with other young people from two local colleges and the university to write and apply locally a young people's charter for compassion. Some drama students have been involved in 'theatre in education' projects, taking their productions out to local primary and junior schools. Sixth Form pupils visit the junior school to teach French, under the direction of the French teacher, and some pupils help with after school music, drama and art activities at another local school.

Boarders can contact family and friends by using their personal mobile telephones, through accessing school email and using the school's pay phones. There is good provision of internet access in boarding houses with desks in each bedroom having a connection available. The school maintains contact with parents through telephone, email, the website and regular newsletters. Parents are encouraged to speak with staff regarding any concern they may have to ensure it is resolved quickly. The new headmistress has surveyed parents for their views and many stated that they would welcome an increase in communication from the school, something the headmistress has started to implement.

New boarders have the opportunity to visit before they join the school or become a boarder. Many girls described how they were made to feel welcome when they were new and how other boarders were assigned to help and show them around. Cluster groups comprise of at least one boarder from every year. This includes the girls in the junior boarding house who like the opportunity to meet other girls. New boarders and their parents receive welcome packs of information including welcome letters from the headmistress, allocated housemistress and the chaplain. School handbooks are provided along with other publications such as '50 tips for starting boarding school' and a parent guide from the Boarding School Association.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

The six boarding houses are distinct in character and design with all of them being in good decorative order. Girls are able to personalise their bedroom areas with

posters, photographs and their belongings. Most girls have single rooms and they report how they like their boarding houses. A strong feature is the amount of communal space available in each house where girls can socialise, practice their music and welcome visitors from other houses. Common rooms are suitably fitted with comfortable furnishings and homely touches of fresh flowers, pictures and ornaments.

All meals are provided in the main school dining room yet each house has at least one kitchen where boarders can make drinks and snacks. In at least one boarding house, girls used their cooking skills to make pancakes on Shrove Tuesday, during the inspection. The upper sixth form house has additional kitchen facilities where boarders are able to prepare for semi-independent living that they may experience at university next year. Toilet and bathroom provision is very good with no reports of any experiences with queues or low water pressure when using the showers.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The prospectus and handbooks provide an insight into the ethos and structure of the boarding provision. Some information is available on the school's website. The overall management is undertaken by the headmistress ably supported by the deputy headmistress and other senior staff. The headmistress has been proactive during her first term in post to seek parents' views and meet with boarders and day pupils personally to help inform the school's development plan.

The senior housemistress and the boarding staff contribute effectively to delivering good quality boarding provision. Tutors attached to boarding houses who provide regular supervision and support enjoy their pastoral role in addition to their day time teaching duties. They report how they can see the benefits of boarding and how it can contribute to the girls' personal development. The boarders report that they really like the organisation of boarding through being together initially in one house as year 7, mixing with many other years in the vertical boarding arrangement and then coming back together again as one year group for their final year.

Policies and procedures are of a very high standard, providing staff with clear guidance. There are sound systems in place to monitor the safety and welfare of boarders with clear record keeping and effective meetings promoting good lines of communication across the school. Boarding staff report how beneficial it is to dedicate some of their weekly meeting time to sharing best practice examples. This may involve reporting back from some external training or simply sharing some good practice that has gone well.

The staff handbook and job descriptions ensure that everyone knows what is expected of them. All staff speak highly of the support and communication they receive and they welcome the training opportunities made available to them. Training has occurred in fire safety, first aid, child protection, food hygiene and on some boarding issues. All boarding staff have completed or are in the process of

completing some training through the Boarding School Association. Ancillary staff report that they are trained suitably on health and safety matters, child protection and any areas specific to their work.

Boarders respond well to the structure and enjoy their boarding experience at St Swithun's School. There are adequate levels of supervision, staffing is sufficient in number for the boarders' needs and boarders know where to locate an adult during the night if required.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school fosters a big commitment to community service, this extends beyond the school into local communities and support for projects at a local, national and international level. Links with a girls boarding school in Uganda promotes an awareness of inequality and difference. Pupils are encouraged to make contact with the children in Uganda and support them through fundraising events. More locally support is provided to the elderly, a women's refuge, a group for people with learning difficulties and a homeless charity.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Compliance with national minimum standards**

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- ensure that written parental permission has been obtained in advance for the administration of first aid (NMS 15.14)
- ensure that prescribed and 'household' medication is kept securely. In particular ensure boarding staff have written procedures for the administration and storage of any medication and the recording of such administration (NMS 15.10)
- ensure that the school has an effective system of risk assessment, with written records. In particular, ensure environmental risk assessments are specific to each boarding house. (NMS 47.9)