

St George's School

Inspection report for Boarding School

Unique reference number	SC061220
Inspection date	31/03/2011
Inspector	Kristen Judd
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	12/10/2007

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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 George's School is 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. The school offers education to over 1,200 pupils and approximately 130 boarding students, whose ages may range between 11 and 18 years. Boarding students are accommodated in three buildings which are located in the school grounds.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced key inspection of the school. The purpose of the inspection was to assess the school against key national minimum standards and gauge improvements to the service since the previous inspection.

Outcomes for individual young people are excellent and demonstrate that the school provides boarders an excellent level of care and support from staff to help them make progress, both academically and personally. The school is fully committed to ensuring that boarders are kept safe and there are excellent safeguarding and anti-bullying procedures in place. The school continually monitors the services it provides and there is a strong emphasis on continuous improvement and development.

The minor shortfalls highlighted in this report do not significantly impact on the care that boarders receive.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection two recommendations were made. One was to make improvements to the security arrangements in place. Suitable and adequate security measures are now in place to prevent unauthorised access by the public to boarding houses and other school buildings used by boarders. A further recommendation was made in relation to staff appraisals. All staff now have an annual appraisal which ensures that staff are skilled and competent to carry out their responsibilities and duties effectively.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school is very effective in providing excellent and wide-ranging support to boarders. The comprehensive provision of a welfare service and pastoral care helps boarders to maintain their good health, to develop healthy life-styles and adopt positive ways to ensure their own well-being. Health issues are discussed in personal, social, health and citizenship education within the school day. This helps boarders to be well informed and make appropriate choices relating to their health. The school has clear policies and rules on drugs, alcohol and smoking. Their content is well known to boarders and their parents. The rules are robustly and consistently implemented by staff. Boarders can and do approach members of staff to discuss any personal issues or problems. The school is very effective in providing a healthy and highly nurturing environment to boarders. The pastoral care of boarders is at the heart of this school.

The recently built health centre provides excellent provision for sick boarders and day pupils. There is a qualified nurse available throughout the day. The school holds a medical history of each boarder. Parental consent to medical treatment and first aid is obtained at the point of admission. Boarders can either access the GP during the weekly visits to the medical centre, or make an appointment to see them at their surgery. Staff would accompany a boarder to an off-site appointment if needed. Care staff ensure that boarders' health records are regularly updated with information from parents so that staff who need to be aware of any boarder's needs are fully informed. Suitable accommodation is available for boarders who are ill, in the school's medical centre and in the separate houses.

Detailed systems are in place for the safe storage and administering of medication. Care staff are responsible for the administration of medication, and are able to demonstrate that excellent systems are in place to ensure that they are consistently followed. They hold a small supply of homely medication which they administer when required. Records are clearly maintained regarding medication which are administered by staff. However, running totals are not recorded so auditing the medication stock is difficult. Where boarders are known to be keeping and administering their own medication, they are assessed as sufficiently responsible to do so. First aid training is made available to staff.

Boarders benefit from catering staff with a strong commitment to provide freshly prepared local food which meets with the national healthy schools programme. The school provides appropriate food for boarders who have dietary needs such as specific allergies. Catering staff receive training in food handling and hygiene, so that meals are produced safely. Boarders are able to choose from a variety of dishes at main meals including a vegetarian choice. Boarders' views about the food are mixed. Most agree that the quality is sometimes good, as is the choice, but they felt that some meals could be better. The school recognises that food is an area that remains high on the agenda. As a result, menus are continually re-visited in order to maintain levels of satisfaction. In addition to main meals, boarders have access to a good

range of snacks, fresh fruit, drinking water, milk and juice in the boarding houses. The school also operates its own tuck shop for boarders to purchase treats of limited monetary value.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There is a robust system for the pastoral care of boarders. The school's countering bullying policy is available for staff, boarders and parents. The dangers of cyber-bullying are emphasised in the school's policy. Results from questionnaires issued to boarders prior to the inspection show that bullying is not an issue within the school. Boarders identify a wide range of adults within the school whom they would go to with any problems. The school has and follows an appropriate policy on child protection which is consistent with the Local Children Safeguarding Board procedures, and is known to staff. All staff are trained on responding to suspicions or allegations of abuse and know what action they should take in response to such suspicions or allegations. A senior member of staff is designated to take responsibility for the child protection policy, to liaise with the social services authority, and where applicable, the police. An embedded and proactive approach to child protection is adopted by the school with written information and training provided for all staff.

Boarders are clear that they are expected to behave courteously, considerately and sensibly. They are supported well to develop appropriate behaviours in line with the school's written policy on pastoral care and discipline. The learning support department provides an excellent service to boarders with behavioural difficulties as well as anger management support. Both boarders and staff are extremely positive about the support that they receive. There are good systems in place that ensure that staff are aware of the whereabouts of the boarders. Boarders are aware of what the expectations are if they are going to return late to school; this is detailed in the behaviour management guidance. Boarders are trusted to adhere to the restrictions in place for their own safety and well-being. Staff are aware of the need to work together with parents to provide a safe place for boarders by being consistent in their approach when addressing any inappropriate behaviour by boarders.

There is a clear, formal complaints procedure available to boarders and their parents if they are unable to resolve the matter informally. Detailed records are maintained of any concerns raised by parents with information of action taken. Sufficient procedures are in place to protect boarders' privacy and these are implemented in practice. Records in staff meeting minutes demonstrate that staff discuss boarders' privacy, highlighting the importance of waiting to be invited into bedroom areas.

Boarders are familiar with the fire evacuation procedures. Regular fire drills take place in the boarding houses. A fire risk assessment of the school and boarding provision is in place. Fire fighting equipment is regularly serviced and tested together with emergency lighting and fire alarm systems. Fire safety training is provided to staff and professional advice is sought regarding safety issues. Boarders live in an

environment where they are protected from the risk of fire.

Recruitment of all staff, including ancillary staff and those on a contractual basis, includes checks through the Criminal Records Bureau checking system, with a satisfactory outcome. For all adults who live on the school premises but are not employed by the school, there is a verifiable Criminal Records Bureau check. The school is rigorous in its measures to protect the boarders from unsupervised contact with adults who have not been checked and to ensure that visitors or contractors to the boarding houses are not admitted unaccompanied, unless there is evidence that they have been suitably checked.

Boarders' sleeping and living areas are for the exclusive use of boarders other than by the reasonable invitation of the pupils designated to use those areas. There is a clear school policy restricting access to school premises and boarders by people from outside the school, which is implemented in practice. Suitable and adequate security measures are in place to prevent unauthorised access by the public to boarding houses and other school buildings used by boarders, such as key pads. Any use of closed circuit television cameras or security patrolling of school buildings or grounds does not intrude on boarders' privacy.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are confident when in the company of care staff and converse with them openly, demonstrating the good relationship between them. They are able to identify a number of the school's staff that they can turn to if they have a concern. Overall there is very comprehensive support for boarders. This includes boarding staff, a counsellor, care staff, learning support staff, teachers, access to helpline telephone numbers and a range of peer support. Boarders have formed close friendships and bonds amongst themselves. The questionnaires completed by boarders confirm that most of them enjoy boarding. One boarder commented: 'I thought I would never be cut out for boarding life and I thought it was scary but now that I've come here it feels great'. Another commented: 'there is a great community in this house'. Staff are very much aware of each boarder's uniqueness, including their individual strengths and weaknesses.

The school demonstrates a commitment in practice to providing equal opportunities to all boarders. The school positively promotes the integration of all boarders. Staff are aware of the cultural diversities of its boarders and the difficulties faced by overseas boarders attending an English school for the first time. Their comments about feeling integrated and supported by the staff and other boarders are very positive. They are clear that they are made welcome and do not feel isolated or discriminated against. Activities and groups are open to all boarders and there is no sort of exclusion. Cultural differences are recognised and embraced. Boarders consistently commented that the relationships between boarders are positive, with no discrimination. One overseas boarder wrote: 'My friends have given me

confidence, comfort and self esteem which I have never had in my life. I will never forget this friendship ever'.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are formal systems in place for boarders to contribute to the operation of the boarding school. Boarders spoken to during the inspection are very able to voice their views. Although some boarders commented that they did not have enough say about the menus and the house rules that are in place. There are clear systems in place that ensure the views of boarders are sought; however; there is limited evidence to demonstrate how this is used in the development and practice of boarding.

Boarders may contact family and friends in private at reasonable times without having to seek permission from staff. Telephones are available to boarders in the boarding accommodation. Most boarders have their own mobile telephones and use them to contact family and friends. All the boarding accommodation provides internet connection which enables boarders to use email as a means of keeping in touch with their family and friends. Appropriate helpline numbers are displayed on notice boards. Staff contact parents about their child's progress and highlight any concerns. Parents are also encouraged to contact the school. Systems in place support boarders' ability to communicate and maintain contact with their families.

The school has a clear admissions policy which is followed in practice. Prospective boarders have the opportunity to visit the boarding facilities with their parents. A compliment received by the school said: 'I would just like to thank you, and your staff, for the warm welcome and very informative tour of the school by the two year seven pupils. They certainly gave our son a full flavour of life at St George's and life in boarding. We know everything from curriculum, sport, clubs, to food! It was a pleasure for us'. The school provides parents with a comprehensive and detailed guide that details the services that are provided and some of the school's policies and procedures. Boarders spoken to confirm that they were supported well when they began to board at the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Most of the year 13 students are accommodated in Skiddaw which is a separate purpose built building for those students in their last year at St George's. The house is designed for students to begin to accept far greater responsibility than in the other houses. It is an excellent facility and one of which the school is justifiably proud. This accommodation is of a high standard.

Keswick House is the girls' house and has communal facilities that include four lounges and three small kitchens for making snacks. Crosthwaite House is for boys,

and has communal facilities that include a lounge, a games room, a small kitchen, a quiet room with computers for study and a communal room for sixth formers which has kitchen facilities.

The two main boarding houses are going through a programme of refurbishment. Boarders share dormitory accommodation. The boys' house has had improvements to most of the dormitories and is about to have extensive work to the bathrooms during the summer break as part of the school's development programme. This work demonstrates the commitment of the school in working towards improving boarding facilities for all boarders. Boarders are positive about these improvements. They say that they enjoy sharing with other boarders and are generally happy with the sleeping provision. The bedrooms are clean and well ventilated.

There is an appropriate number of washing facilities in each of the houses. Staff work hard to provide a clean and welcoming environment for boarders and encourage the personalisation of sleeping areas. Boarders are provided with the means of keeping their possessions safe; some use the facility, others do not.

All students who board at the school have suitable facilities for changing by day. The school has excellent sporting facilities and a well-equipped gym. There are suitable changing facilities for the students to use when changing for games and other sports.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The information provided by the school in the prospectus, handbooks and on the website accurately describes the principles, practice and ethos of the school. The head teacher takes a deep personal interest in the boarding life of the school and its boarders. The Director of Boarding has the overall responsibility for boarding at the school and is working to further improve consistency and best practice across the boarding houses. Clear management structures, a good team ethos and effective systems of communication contribute effectively to boarders' welfare. One parent commented: 'I am very, very pleased with the boarding provision at the school'. As in any large community there were some negative comments, however, overall the positive feedback from parents and boarders alike outweighed the negative comments.

Boarders are well supervised by experienced staff who understand their needs and help them to progress and achieve. All staff have job descriptions that clearly set out their role in boarding and lines of accountability. Staff who undertake boarding duties are provided with induction training and with detailed policies and procedures, including guidance on meeting the individual needs of all boarders. Additional training is provided through in-service training days, with key boarding staff encouraged to pursue Boarding Schools Association courses. Regular senior staff meetings take place and all boarding staff receive annual appraisals. This ensures that staff are skilled and competent to carry out their responsibilities and duties

effectively in relation to the promotion of the welfare of boarders. Boarders confirm that they always know who is on duty, who is responsible for them and that they can find a member of staff when they need to, including at night.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school places a high priority on addressing issues of equality and diversity. International students are welcomed into the school. Boarders are encouraged to share information about their differing cultures and all staff promote respect and tolerance. Staff are very much aware of each boarder's uniqueness, including their individual strengths and weaknesses. The school does not place boarders in lodgings, so the national minimum standard in respect of this is not inspected.

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 a written record of actual medication stock held in the boarding houses is maintained (Breach of national minimum standard 15.12)
- consider developing how the views of boarders are taken into account in the development and practice of boarding. (Breach of national minimum standard 12.2)