

St George's School

St. Georges School, Sun Lane, Harpenden, Hertfordshire, AL5 4TD

Inspection dates	15/10/2013 to 17/10/2013	
Overall effectiveness	Adequate	3
Outcomes for boarders	Good	2
Quality of boarding provision and care	Good	2
Boarders' safety	Adequate	3
Leadership and management of boarding	Adequate	3

Summary of key findings

The boarding provision is adequate because

- The new senior management team have been in place for a very short period of time. They are identifying areas for improvement accurately and are starting to tackle them, although it is too early to measure impact. Two recommendations were made at the previous inspection before the school became an academy. One was addressed while inspectors were on site, therefore there are now no breaches of National Minimum Standards
- Although adequate overall, the school delivers good outcomes for boarders and good quality of boarding provision and care.
- Boarders in this school embrace diversity; they say it is one of the most positive aspects of school life. Boarders develop and broaden their understanding of ethnic and cultural differences and enjoy the opportunities to develop friendships with a wide range of people. Boarders, from around the world, enjoy accessing a wide range of academic and leisure opportunities, regardless of their needs and backgrounds.
- Boarders benefit from a positive boarding experience, which demonstrably supports their achievements socially, academically, and within their chosen extra-curricular interests. They develop a moral and social conscience and have good opportunities to act as positive role models for their peers. Clear expectations and aspirations underpin individual achievement. Parents spoken to and surveyed report high levels of satisfaction with boarding arrangements.
- There are many practices and processes in place to promote boarders are safeguarded and positive behaviour is routinely promoted. However, the effectiveness of these is impacted upon by the variability in relationships between boarders and the boarding staff, with many boarders lacking confidence in the staff's ability to tackle issues or hear their concerns.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools

Information about this inspection

St George's School is situated in the town of Harpenden. The school became an academy in July 2012, funded by the new St George's School Harpenden Academy Trust and 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. The boarding provision was last inspected in March 2011.

Inspection team

Bill Wallace	Lead social care inspector
Louisa Bayley	Social care inspector
Jansy Kelly and John Daniell	Social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

St George's School is situated in the town of Harpenden. 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. The school was last inspected in March 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the recording and monitoring systems to ensure that medication stocks are recorded and regularly audited, with consistency between each of the boarding houses.
- Ensure robust plans for support, training and oversight are in place and implemented in full for all staff where concerns exist regarding their practice.
- Further develop and embed the arrangements for the oversight of staff and their individual supervision and management.
- Ensure systems to monitor the whereabouts of boarders are robust and consistently applied.
- Provide opportunities for boarders to give their honest views of the boarding experience.
- Further develop trust and confidence in boarding staff by ensuring boarders have an opportunity to contribute views to the operation of boarding provision, are able to raise concerns and make complaints, and their views are given appropriate weight in decisions about the running of the school.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for boarders

Good

Outcomes for boarders are good. Boarders spoken to are aware of their responsibilities to support each other and to be respectful; they take these responsibilities seriously. The more experienced and older boarders offer guidance and advice to younger boarders who are encouraged to go to them for support.

A significant number of boarders spoken to were critical of some of the boarding staff not being easily approachable and wanted staff who were more sympathetic to their concerns. Female boarders also wanted to spend more time with staff but recognised they were busy. Boarders are very appreciative of the interest and presence of the recently appointed Director of Boarding who boarders feel offers strong levels of support.

Behaviour of boarders was generally good. Staff make expectations clear, underpinned by a well-understood discipline policy tailored to meet the needs of individual boarding houses and a supportive environment. Inspectors found examples of effective interventions; where analysis of poor behaviour triggers support delivered through the learning support team. This is a strength of the school.

The learning support team has strong links with both the boarding and day provision and this offers an holistic approach to school life. It provides a comprehensive range of services, including external specialist provision and personalised counselling. The team responds to the diverse needs of boarders. It has its own English as an additional language specialist within the assessment team and utilises the services of an external Black and Minority Ethnic Achievement Input Group.

The way staff deal with the poor behaviour of a group of students, including boarders, has led to significantly improved behaviour, better relationships with staff and stronger engagement with academic studies. The success of this particular group has been recognised and applauded by staff and students are proud of their achievements.

Boarders were not without criticism of the provision, but those spoken to found the experience overall a positive one. They have opportunities to contribute towards addressing concerns through the Food Committee, Boarders' Council meetings and a termly year group meeting that is chaired by the Director of Boarding. Changes to menus have been instigated through the Food Committee. Female boarders expressed a wish for more on-site activities to which the school is responding by making the old gymnasium available.

Boarders have opportunities to develop their interests and skills through a wide range of activities which are promoted well. Achievements are recognised and celebrated. The school's contribution to charitable causes is outstanding. Boarders nominate the causes they support, and are highly motivated to the school's fundraising efforts. This well-established charitable culture is embedded across the school, reflecting its Christian ethos and its boarding principles and practice.

The experiences of Year 13 boarders living in Skiddaw House are positive with boarders describing the support they receive as "fantastic". The accommodation and support available has a family feel to it; which boarders welcome. Boarders spoken to feel this provision supports their need to prepare for greater independence and responsibility.

Boarders' health needs are met if they feel unwell or are injured, with clear arrangements to access medical staff and advice.

Boarders are well prepared for life after St. Georges. They receive valued support from boarding staff, an essential information booklet before entering the 6th form and the UCAS pack in preparation for university. 85% of students go on to university, 14% take a gap year or defer university and 1% progress to apprenticeships.

Quality of boarding provision and care

Good

The quality of boarding provision and care is good. Parents and prospective boarders receive comprehensive information on, and an introduction to, the boarding provision; ensuring a smooth transition. This helps boarders to understand expectations placed upon them and how they will benefit from boarding.

Good links exist between pastoral and academic staff with recent improvements brought about by the new management. A range of systems exist, which enable communication of issues and positive feedback between the staffing disciplines. Consequently, good levels of information sharing support staff to meet boarder's individual needs.

Boarders say their needs are met; they have time to relax, to study and to enjoy a wide range of interests and pursuits. They say that boarding is a positive experience; they cited their friendships and the cultural diversity as the aspects they like the most. Boarders are able to access external adults, such as independent listeners and an advocacy service, if they wish to raise issues. They also have access to the school counsellor, enabling them to raise any personal issues or concerns about the school. Parents have positive views of the boarding provision and say their children benefit from it.

The broad range of available activities reflects individual preferences, aptitudes and skills. Activities include religious worship opportunities for individuals who express their wish to attend. Boarders are encouraged and supported to attend activities outside the school community, which helps to ensure they are not isolated from life outside of the school. This enhances the range of social and leisure experiences available and provides an opportunity for boarders to develop their individual interests. The headmaster acknowledges and reinforces individual achievements in his weekly bulletin to parents and pupils.

Staff provide opportunities for boarders to develop their work ethic and sense of responsibility. The boarders are able to apply for paid positions, such as helping in the dining hall at meal times and running birthday parties for children on the school site at weekends. Boarders say they enjoy having the opportunity to earn and it helps them to realise what it is like to work and how to conduct themselves in a work environment.

Facilities in the school for managing illness and injuries are good. The medical rooms are well equipped and offer separate facilities for pupils when they are ill. Boarders have regular access to a visiting health worker and a general practitioner surgery in the school once per week. Boarders have good access to other health services, such as the dentist and optician. There is a sensitive approach to issues of emotional and mental health, with good levels of communication with families and external services. The school curriculum supports pupils well in understanding their emerging sexuality. The school counsellor also completes work on targeted areas, such as understanding feelings and emotions, with groups of pupils. Systems in place for medication are adequate. However, the inspection identified the systems as an area of improvement as there is currently not a clear stock audit and inconsistent recording.

Boarders' safety

Adequate

The school makes adequate provision to safeguard boarders welfare. Effective staff recruitment

and retention policies and practices ensure that suitable staff are employed within the boarding houses. The majority of responses to allegations and suspicions of harm are dealt with promptly and efficiently. The host Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) reports good relationships and robust practice from child protection and senior staff at the school. However, where allegations against staff are upheld, or where concerns exist, plans for on-going support, training and oversight are not always rigorously implemented.

Once child protection concerns have been identified within the boarding facility, the response is robust, timely and effective. Child protection staff and senior managers seek advice, and appropriately challenge professionals from other agencies, in order to secure positive and safe outcomes for the boarders. Where the needs of, and concerns for, individual boarders do not meet the threshold for children's social care, the school implements effective 'team around the family' plans to meet their needs. It is clear that staff seek to improve practice, and implement learning from child protection investigations that benefit both the individual boarder and the wider group of young people attending St George's.

Boarding staff successfully promote positive behaviour from the boarders and use a range of rewards and sanctions which are consistently applied. Additionally, they are skilled at identifying particular behaviours within groups of boarders, and address these through the use of creative strategies. Throughout the inspection, the boarders presented themselves as confident individuals who had respect for both themselves and others. While there is evidence of positive practice in the sharing of achievements, a small number of boarders feel that their individual successes are not always recognised by all boarding staff.

The school has systems in place to ensure they know the whereabouts of boarders at all times. However, some inconsistencies in the robustness of these systems were observed during the inspection, including instances of boarders correcting information held by staff regarding the whereabouts of their peers.

Although the school does not currently use restraint, they appropriately include it as a potential measure of control within the discipline policy. Unauthorised absence from the school grounds is dealt with effectively, with staff and boarders understanding the use of sanctions on their return. For boarders who have been identified as being more likely to have unauthorised absence, individual plans are put in place, which are effective at reducing risk.

Anti-bullying policies are an integral part of the school's discipline policy. The different types of bullying, and the impact these can have upon children and young people, are clearly defined. Staff are able to articulate their responsibilities in relation to bullying. While the vast majority of boarders state that bullying is not a significant issue at the school, some boarders' perception is that bullying is not well understood by other boarders, and that not all staff are able to tackle issues of bullying effectively.

The school undertakes individual assessments in order to manage risk of outside activities for the boarders. This enables staff to support and promote the boarders' independence and involvement within their local community, while also providing the relevant support and supervision. The vast majority of boarders report that they feel safe both within the school and boarding areas, and in their community. However, confidence in assuring the boarders' safety is compromised by a significant number of boarders stating that they would not speak with a member of boarding staff if they had any concerns.

Leaders and managers have systems in place to ensure the health and safety of boarders. Procedures for assessing various forms of risk to boarders are detailed and regularly reviewed. Key codes on boarding house doors and CCTV support staff to ensure visitors and contractors are properly supervised within the boarding facilities. There are effective fire safety measures in

place, including the routine checking and maintenance of equipment. Staff and boarders are aware of the action to be taken in the event of a fire, and regular fire drills take place with the boarders.

Leadership and management of boarding

Adequate

The Leadership and management of the boarding provision is adequate. The new senior leadership team have identified its key priorities to drive improvement for boarders. Some of these have already been implemented, including the piloting of academic tutoring to support boarders in their studies. There are already emerging signs of improvement. Boarding is given appropriate priority and the new Director of Boarding has a reduced teaching commitment, which allows her to develop improvements. She has a clear understanding of the challenges that boarders face. However, although it is evident that steps are being taken to tackle these challenges, it is too early to evaluate the impact of many of the measures recently introduced.

Two previous recommendation regarding medication and consultation with boarders had not been addressed. The recommendation to ensure that a written record of actual medication stock held in the boarding houses is maintained had not been addressed prior to the inspection. The school has taken action to remedy this during the inspection and it is no longer a shortfall against the National Minimum Standards. Boarders expressed reservations about how their concerns would be treated and this area needs to be developed.

The Director of Boarding is improving the boarding arrangements, including those made for formal individual staff supervision, and seeking the opinions of boarders. This consultation highlighted some of the issues identified through this inspection, such as ensuring boarders feel able to approach all staff easily to discuss their concerns.

Staff have access to a suitable range of training which regularly features aspects relating to the safeguarding of children. There are practices and processes in place to ensure boarders are kept safe, and positive behaviour is routinely promoted. However, the effectiveness of these is affected by the variability in relationships between boarders and the boarding staff, although the school has started to address this matter.

All required policies are in place and subject to regular review by leaders and managers. The senior leadership team is improving its systems for monitoring the implementation of policies and the impact they have on boarders' outcomes.

There are sufficient staff overall. However, recent staff sickness has necessitated increased demands on staff to cover absences, which has the potential to impact on staff's ability to discharge their duties with boarders to the best of their ability.

The school fully meets its stated principle aims and practice of providing a "secure, friendly and stable environment within a Christian context". Boarders are encouraged to develop self-reliance, respect for others and to contribute to boarding life.

The school makes a wide range of information about the provision available to boarders, external agencies and parents and guardians, including through a regular e-newsletter. The recently appointed headmaster introduced a 'Year in Review' booklet which captures the school's achievements.

Parental complaints are logged and dealt with appropriately. Low-level concerns from boarders are dealt with less formally, but to boarders' satisfaction. However, boarders cannot yet distinguish between what constitutes a concern and a complaint. Boarders' views are gathered regularly through various committees and more recently, a specific questionnaire, instigated by

the Director of Boarding.

The overwhelming majority of responses to Parent View are positive, and reflect parents' satisfaction with the quality of care their children receive. Nearly every parent who responded would recommend the school. They also believe their children are happy and feel safe. The small number of parents spoken to by inspectors were positive about the boarding experience of their children.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	138356
Social care unique reference number	SC061220
DfE registration number	919/4614

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

Type of school	
Number of boarders on roll	120
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	11 to 18
Headteacher	Mr Raymond McGovern
Date of previous boarding inspection	31/03/2011
Telephone number	01582 765477
Email address	admin@stgeorges.herts.sch.uk

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