

# The Swedish School Society

Welfare inspection report for a boarding school

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**Inspector** Angus Mackay

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

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, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.<sup>1,2</sup>

## Information about the school

The school provides education for Swedish children across two sites in Southwest London. Younger pupils attend the school in Barnes. The senior student site is accommodated within the American International University, Richmond Hill. The host family scheme is administered from the Richmond site.

The school does not provide boarding accommodation but recruits families in the local area to host students during their stay in England. A Host Family Coordinator is employed to recruit host families, administer the scheme and to liaise with students and families when necessary.

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>good</b>
Outcomes for boarders	good
Quality of boarding provision and care	good
Boarders' safety	good
Leadership and management of boarding	satisfactory

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the boarding inspection are as follows.

<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Outcomes for boarders

Outcomes for pupils are good with some outstanding features. Students benefit from the experience of education and boarding at the school. Academic attainment is improved, compared to the students starting point and in comparison with similar schools in Sweden. Students from the school have higher rates of entry to further education than comparable students in Sweden. In a group interview students said, 'We do really well academically. We have raised our grades massively since starting here.'

Students have a number of ways of influencing the running of the school. Students complete regular feedback forms on the quality of care and education. This feedback is particularly important in developing the schools approach to safety, respect for others and tolerance. The management team evaluate this feedback and use it in agreeing developments with the board of governors. Students have an events committee which they use to organise their own entertainments. There is also a student committee which is independent of the school management. Students say that the most effective mechanism for influencing the school policy is to go straight to the senior management team. During the inspection students were observed making direct contact with various members of the senior team including the head teacher her deputy and the host family coordinator. Students use these contacts to address personal issues or to make suggestions about the running of the school.

Students enjoy the experience of living with host families. They say that there are few major cultural differences in most families although some students do live with families from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Living with host families enables students to increase their respect and tolerance for differences, and their own identity and self esteem is strengthened. Students say that all families speak good English and this aids their development of language skills. Students interviewed had all benefitted from living with host families. One student captured the general feedback saying, 'Living with the family makes me more secure speaking English. I have become more sociable with others, more self-certain and more able to look after myself. I take more responsibility for myself, I use my initiative more and am more considerate to others. When you are not with your own family you are able to grow more and develop more as a person.' Students make significant progress in self-confidence and learning how to be self-sufficient through their boarding experiences.

Students are aware of the many support systems in place to ensure their experience of lodging with families is positive. Students use these supports appropriately to aid them in addressing more complex issues which they initially lack the skills or confidence to address. During the inspection students were observed dealing with difficult, and potentially upsetting issues, highly effectively. This involved students negotiating with the host family coordinator how they should resolve their difficulty and then agreeing their own role in the resolution. Students are empowered to deal with their difficulties with the minimum of support. This process helps the students

to develop their self-esteem, confidence and assertion skills. For example one student was supported to present her reason for leaving a host family due to their lack of compliance with the contract. The student was accompanied by the host family coordinator but presented the breaches of contract to the host family prior to leaving to lodge elsewhere. The student said, 'It was very difficult to do and I was very nervous but I feel so empowered by having done it.'

Students learn or improve their self-help skills in lodgings. They are responsible for maintaining their own bedrooms and personal hygiene. Some wash their own clothes and some negotiate with families to have this done. All have meals with host families and share responsibilities for cooking, clearing up, and general domestic chores. One student said that the major benefit was learning to be more considerate to other people. One student saying, 'You have learn how to live with other people. You start to understand how you behave in a house and become more considerate to others. For example you ask if it is alright to have a shower now or to help yourself to the last bit of cheese in the fridge.'

## **Quality of boarding provision and care**

The quality of the school's provision for residential learners is good. Students have excellent academic and pastoral support to aid their academic and social progress. All staff and students are fully aware of the high aspirations which the school has for them and the strong focus on the benefits of their living with host families. Students go through a rigorous selection and induction process in Sweden prior to acceptance.

Students are matched with families following a detailed profiling of both students and host family. The host family undergo an interview at their home which ensures they are: suitable people; providing suitable lodgings; in a safe area. The interview gathers detailed background information, which aids in the matching with students. For example if there are pets in the home only students who asked for this will be placed there. One student said her placement is perfect. 'I have a lovely room, in a lovely house, with lovely people. More importantly they have vegetarian meals.' The close matching of students and host families ensures most placements are successful for both parties.

The school is located in a university campus. Food is appropriately stored and prepared. Students have access to healthy meals and water, or other drinks, during the school day. Student's accommodation is with local host families. This accommodation is thoroughly vetted by the host family coordinator. The home is visited prior to use and is thoroughly checked. Host families sign a contract undertaking to meet the required national minimum standards for boarding for students under 18 in further education colleges. Students are provided with single rooms suitable for rest and study. Students confirm that they have privacy in their rooms. One student said, 'I think my room has a lock but I cannot remember because I do not need to lock it. I have total privacy in my room and no one from the family comes in there.' Students have regular healthy meals with families which

are suited to their personal needs and preferences. Students say, 'British culture is pretty similar to our own so we do not have major problems settling in.'

Students have their own events committee which organises some shared events each term. Students have access to sporting facilities with staff and some make use of these. Most students socialise outside of school with fellow students visiting parks, museums, galleries and shopping in London. During the inspection three groups of students went to either Madrid, Paris or Berlin on educational trips. Students say that study is important for them and they will always do this before going out to socialise. Students say that they have good contact with their parents through visits and use of Skype and telephones. Many host families enjoy excellent relationships with the parents of boarding students and maintain friendships after placements have ended. Students develop good social networks and access a wide range of leisure activities they choose and maintain themselves. They are able to sustain contact with family and friends at home, aiding them in maintaining appropriate cultural and social links.

All students are registered with local health care services as soon as possible. During the waiting period the host family coordinator ensures that they receive appropriate support and health care from local drop in services. The counselling service aids students with complex health needs to access appropriate support if required. Students are responsible for managing their own medication.

## **Boarders' safety**

The school is good in providing safe care for students. There is a strong focus on students taking responsibility for their own safety within a safe environment supported by suitable staff.

Staff recruitment procedures are mainly in line with safer recruitment in education guidelines. However not all relevant staff are trained in safer recruitment. During the inspection the head teacher booked places for all senior staff on safer recruitment training run by the local authority. Members of the governors have completed this training, ensuring appropriate standards in the appointment of senior staff. The school check all staff using Swedish safer recruitment guidelines and then again using local safer recruitment guidelines. However the school have not been checking, with each previous employer involving work with children, young people or vulnerable adults, to check the reasons the employment ended. During the inspection the school commenced an audit to identify any staff who required this check and then contacted past employers where required. All other checks are in place enhancing the safe selection of staff.

All staff have received training in child protection and safeguarding at the appropriate level for their job. There is a designated person for child protection, suitably qualified following training provided by the local safeguarding children board. There have been no referrals to the Local Authority Designated Officer since the last inspection. Students say they feel safe in the school and in their lodgings. Adults providing

lodgings are subject to recruitment checks including advanced disclosures with the disclosure and barring service, references and identity checks. During the inspection, as an additional safeguard, the school requested disclosure and barring checks on all people over 16 accommodated in host families. Candidates are interviewed by the host family coordinator and checked for their understanding of how to provide good quality care in a safe environment.

The school is located within a university and all appropriate health and safety checks are in place. Site security is good and all visitors are required to be appropriately supervised. CCTV is unobtrusive providing good safety in communal areas and within the grounds. Students have access to safe recreational areas. Fire drills are held at a minimum of each term and the site has an up to date fire risk assessment in place. Students education is provided in a safe well maintained environment.

Students have confidence and high levels of trust in the host family coordinator. Students confirm that they know of the support systems in place including complaints, counselling and immediate contact numbers for emergency situations. They are provided with guidance on staying safe in the community and areas to avoid. Students say that senior managers are approachable and available to discuss any issues whenever they need this support. Students were observed using the excellent, skilled and sensitive support, from the host family coordinator, to successfully resolve difficulties they had experienced in lodgings. Students have effective support networks to aid them in resolving any issues within school or lodgings.

Students receive good support with personal problems and issues of settling into a new culture. Each student has two mentors from within the teaching team. Mentors help students to achieve academic success but are also there to provide pastoral care. Students are encouraged to self-refer to counselling but mentors refer some students where they think additional specialist support is required. The counselling service will also link with other professional agencies, where necessary, to provide support with more complex issues. Students say that they will often use other teachers, the host family coordinator, or senior staff to help with personal issues as they have confidence in all staff. Students say, 'We can also discuss issues with our host family. We feel as safe here as at home, which is pretty good.' Students suggested that it would be helpful to dedicate time to mentor sessions within the timetable otherwise they would continue to bypass this valuable support system. Students say they met the counsellor at the start of the year and received a card from her but were not familiar with her or her service. During the inspection the counsellor and school management commenced improving publicity of the service to ensure all students are comfortable to self-refer. There are good supports in the school which effectively pick up on health and welfare issues for students.

Staff encourage students to take responsibility for their own behaviour and there are no instances of restraint, missing persons or sanctions for poor behaviour. Students

say there is no bullying within the school, in lodgings or within the community. Students learn how to use the internet safely and say that staff give guidance on how to use social media safely. Students have to abide by a contract with host families and this includes meeting specified behavioural targets. Students are clear about what behaviours are acceptable. For instance students said that they cannot drink alcohol or take drugs and if they did they would be expelled from school.

## **Leadership and management of boarding**

The leadership and management of boarding is satisfactory. The leadership of the school work closely with a highly engaged board of governors to provide high standards in education for students. Governors are active within the school and regularly conduct quality assurance visits. Governors receive highly detailed reports on the quality of education and some aspects of the boarding experience. However there is not a thorough process of self-assessment of the quality of lodgings and student welfare practice. During the inspection managers outlined a reporting format they are trialling to provide a comprehensive analysis of the benefits of lodging with host families and welfare supports to students.

The school has a clear statement of principles and practice which is regularly reviewed and updated. The statement is readily accessible to students, parents and professionals working with the school. The statement provides an accurate picture of how the school works and in particular how staff support students to be independent. The school maintains good contact with parents including those in Sweden. Parents receive e mails, telephone calls and Skype calls ensuring they are aware of any changes to the statement of principles and that they are fully aware of their child's progress.

The school has made good progress in meeting the recommendations for improvement made at the last inspection. Students now discuss their lodgings with the host family coordinator each term. However the host family coordinator, or other suitably competent member of staff, does not visit and check all accommodation annually. During the inspection the host family coordinator resolved a complaint from a student about accommodation which may have been picked up earlier if checks of host families were conducted as required.

The school has all required policies in place. There are good relationships with the local authority and the school use these to gain good quality training. Staff receive regular training and supervision from appropriately qualified staff. For example the counsellor receives professional supervision from an appropriately qualified person outside of the school. The school has not yet put in place a training plan but does monitor staff refresher training in key areas such as safeguarding, child protection and first aid.

Students have a student council which is established to gain the views of students on the development of the school. The council is completely independent of the school



staff and run entirely by students. Students say they are aware of the council but not aware of how to use it or what it does. The student council is not currently affording students effective influence on the management of the college.

## **National minimum standards**

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

- ensure that at least once a college year a member of staff visits all lodgings in which it accommodates students to check the continued suitability of the accommodation and to review provision with the adult responsible for the student(s) in each lodging, recording assessments in writing and taking action on any concerns identified (NMS 46.10)
- ensure that you check with each previous employer involving work with children young people or vulnerable adults to check the reason employment ended (NMS 34.2(viii))
- ensure that the college implements a process of regular self-assessment of the residential and student welfare practice (NMS 8.4)
- improve the effectiveness of formal opportunities for students under 18 to express views on relevant aspects of their accommodation, welfare and welfare support, either directly or through student representatives. (NMS12.2)

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



26/03/2014

**Inspection of The Swedish School Society**

Yours sincerely,

Angus Mackay