

Starhurst School

Starhurst School, Chart Lane South, DORKING, Surrey, RH5 4DB

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| Inspection dates | 11/11/2015 to 13/11/2015 |
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| The overall experiences and progress of children and young people | Good |
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| The quality of care and support | Good |
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| How well children and young people are protected | Good |
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| The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers | Good |
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Summary of key findings

The residential provision is good because

- Under a new executive headteacher the leadership team and staff convey energy and enthusiasm as they strive to further develop and provide children and young people with even better outcomes. Effective team work across the school and with external agencies supports and promotes the health and well-being of children and young people.
- The committed and well-trained staff team give children and young people a positive and enjoyable time in boarding. They establish warm relationships with them and use these as a sound foundation for enabling children and young people to better manage their own behaviour. This makes a significant difference to their lives and that of their families and carers, one of whom said, 'it's a godsend of a resource for our child and the family'.
- Children and young people make progress through the boarding experience. They make good use of the opportunities offered to develop their skills and interests and have their voice heard. As a result they build their self-esteem and grow in confidence.
- Staff effectively promote the safety of children and young people. They have a sound understanding of the range of safeguarding issues and their role in reporting any concerns. Staff work hard to ensure that the children and young people they care for develop an age-appropriate understanding of how to keep themselves safe, particularly when on-line.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make a formal record of the risk assessment process undertaken when making decisions about sleeping accommodation for children and young people.
- Develop a recording system for the administration of controlled drugs to reflect the guidance of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (Handling of Medicines in Social Care) and review the medical parental consent format.
- Ensure that safeguarding records include the outcome of the investigation.
- Clarify the arrangements for information to be shared following return home interviews after any instance of a child or young person going missing.
- Further develop individual risk assessments in respect of any instances where there are concerns that a child or young person may expose themselves to risks.

Information about this inspection

Ofsted carried out this inspection with three hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice over two evenings; a formal group meeting with residential pupils, as well as informal discussion during shared meals; meetings and discussions with the executive head, the head of care, residential staff, the bursar, ancillary staff, the site managers; contact with the local statutory safeguarding authority; a tour of the accommodation; and scrutiny of the wide ranging documentation about boarding. There were no responses on Parent View, the views of parents and carers were sought during the inspection. Pupil responses to Ofsted's point in time surveys were also taken into consideration.

Inspection team

Maire Atherton

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Starhurst School is a maintained special school that incorporates day and residential provision for boys between 11 and 16 years of age with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The school has three residential units, one of which is used for senior residential pupils to experience semi-independent living and to acquire independent living skills. The residential provision offers weekly or flexi-boarding Monday to Thursday night. The school is situated on the outskirts of Dorking, Surrey and is able to take a maximum of 20 children on a residential basis. The last social care inspection of the school was in May 2014.

Inspection Judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Children and young people enjoy the boarding experience and many actively seek to increase the number of nights they stay. They make personal progress in this residential provision, particularly socially and in building their self-esteem and confidence. Parents and carers say: 'It gives him opportunities for social engagement with friends that he doesn't get at home'; 'We have seen a remarkable change in him'; and 'His emotional stability has improved so he is building friendships and developing socially'. They also say that their children 'love boarding'.

Children and young people's needs are the starting point for staff in determining the support level and style that each individual needs. Staff engage effectively with children and young people in their care. They build warm, nurturing relationships with them and enjoy each other's company. A parent said, 'they put his needs first, staff have a good bond with the children.' Another observed that her child 'is happy and confident with staff'.

Children and young people say that they always have someone to talk to because staff make themselves available. They feel listened to and say that staff ask their opinions and regularly ask them 'are you ok?' and 'is there anything we should change?' This happens formally in regular lodge meetings and informally around the dining table. Examples where things have changed include sharing a room and getting new pillows.

Children and young people feel safe and are safe as a result of the vigilance and diligence of the staff team. Staff communicate concerns to children and young people so that they have the information they need to understand the decisions made that they do not agree with, for example only playing age-appropriate games and DVDs. This means that although children and young people may not like the decision their response is measured and their dislike is appropriately expressed. Children and young people describe the staff as 'nice, fair and friendly. They know us well'.

The residential provision is well organised with well-being of children and young people at the centre. This informs the deployment and training needs of staff and ensures that children and young people are cared for by a competent and caring staff team. A parent observed 'there is good structure in boarding, he is developing routines at home on the basis of what he is learning in boarding. It is making big difference to family life.'

Staff effectively implement the arrangements for the promotion of health and personal development. Children and young people gain sound, age-appropriate life and independence skills. Younger children are enjoying the opportunity to help in the preparation of breakfast and an evening meal. Older young people may stay in the independence flat which provides them with opportunities for developing skills at the pace they are comfortable with. One young person wrote 'I enjoyed every minute of it...gave me a far greater sense of independence...a memorable experience.' Staff successfully promote the participation by children and young people in activities that reflect their interests and abilities. This is one of the key reasons children and young people give for liking boarding, 'the fun and activities', for example on-site pool, manhunt and football and off-site swimming and going to the skate park.

The quality of care and support

Children and young people are looked after by a well-established and stable staff team who know the young people very well. Staff make themselves available and open to engagement by young people and provide ample opportunity for one-to-one interactions. Staff are alert, sensitive and responsive to children and young people's needs and moods, pitching their interventions at a level each individual is able to engage with and respond to. Parents report boarding as a positive experience for their children. Children and young people also have easy access to contact details for the independent visitor, children's commissioner and a range of external helplines.

Staff manage moving in and moving on effectively. The introduction to boarding is taken at the pace of each child or young person. Staff provide opportunities for visits and extended days before the young person stays overnight. They may board for between one and four nights. At the beginning of the academic year the year groups move in gradually, giving new starters a chance to familiarise themselves with the setting in a quieter environment. Parents describe good support for themselves during the early stages of their child being away from home. One said, 'I had daily contact from the allocated member of staff for the first few weeks.' Young people in year eleven may be given the opportunity to board in the semi-independence unit as part of their preparation for moving on.

The frequent communication between academic and residential staff effectively keep the focus on children and young people's individual support needs. As staff share information this enables them to adjust their strategies to enable children and young people to manage their behaviour. In this way they also begin to develop a positive sense of self.

The residential accommodation, known as lodges, is well maintained. Children and young people can personalise their bedrooms, and create a space they are comfortable with. The communal rooms across two lodges on the first floor are warm, comfortable and provide children and young people with options of places to go. Staff are considering creating a quiet area. Children and young people also have use of the school gym, computer and music facilities in the evenings, which they really enjoy. Children and young people feel that their belongings are safe in the lockers that are in the communal areas, with the keys held by staff. Staff undertake active risk assessments about sleeping accommodation on the basis of observed behaviours and take action in response. However this is not formalised in a written risk assessment.

Young people enjoy a range of activities both off and on site. At the time of this visit swimming was a current favourite, using the diving boards and slides at a leisure pool, as was an indoor skate park. On-site hall games are also popular. Staff effectively use feedback systems to check that the activities are what the young people want to do and seek their views about new ventures.

Staff focus evening activities on physical exercise to model and promote a healthy lifestyle. Recent changes to the arrangements for evening meals has given staff much greater flexibility in organising activities. Children and young people are enjoying the different approach. As this is a part-time residential provision parents retain overall responsibility for the healthcare arrangements for their children. A parent was very pleased with how staff had looked after her child who was unwell: 'They sat up with him all night and called me in the morning'. The format for parental consent for a range of medical issues, for example first aid and asking parents to register with the local GP, does not fully reflect current practice and is confusing. Staff have good links with a local GP surgery who will see children and young people on an emergency basis. A Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services worker is on site one day a week. This excellent resource enables prompt engagement for children and young people with an identified

need, either directly or through consultation and advice for staff. The management of medication is sound. The system for the recording of controlled drugs does not fully meet the guidance provided by the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (Handling of Medicines in Social Care). The development plan for the residential provision includes the introduction of specific healthcare plans.

There has been some progress on the development of care plans since the last inspection. These now include health matters affecting pupils' development and progress. However the use of broad phrases in targets such as 'improve self-esteem' and 'work on social skills' do not fully reflect the detailed work by staff in working with children and young people to achieve their targets. This has also been included as an area for improvement in the residential provision development plan.

Children and young people enjoy the good standard of food provided. It is balanced, varied and individual needs are catered for sensitively. Residential pupils are pleased that they now eat breakfast and the evening meals in the lodges. Staff prepare meals in the boarding accommodation which provides children and young people with opportunities to participate in menu planning and meal preparation. Mealtimes are pleasant, social occasions used to make plans or reflect on the day.

Flexible and part-time boarding means children and young people see their family and carers every weekend at a minimum. Children and young people have access to a variety of means of contacting them when boarding, for example landline and mobile phones, email and video link. All children and young people have an allocated link worker. For those that stay overnight for three or four nights this is a residential member of staff, others have an education member of staff. Parents speak very positively about the weekly phone contact with the link workers. They feel that the level and detail of communication is of a good standard.

How well children and young people are protected

Children and young people are unanimous in saying they feel safe. A carer commented, 'he feels safe and enjoys it there.' They know who to go to with any concerns and how to make a complaint should they want to. Children and young people have very good relationships with the residential staff and although there are other people available that they could go to with a problem they could not see why they would want or need to.

All staff have a good grasp of safeguarding commensurate with their role in the school and are knowledgeable about the reporting systems and the policy that underpins these. There is a clear structure of designated safeguarding lead and deputy arrangements. All staff undertaking these roles have had the necessary training. The management of safeguarding concerns and allegations is robust. Senior staff have established good links with local authority safeguarding personnel. This enables the prompt sharing of any safeguarding concerns. There is a secure audit trail of the work done when concern has been raised. However the formal records do not routinely show the outcome, for example that the concern has been closed or moved to a new area of work.

The head of care has recently updated the safeguarding policy using current guidance. This document is well-written and provides staff with easily accessible and relevant information. The independent visitor monitors safeguarding practice in the termly visits.

There have been no instances when a child or young person has gone missing during boarding

time. Staff respond appropriately when a child or young person is missing from education and liaise effectively with other professionals, parents and carers. In such cases return home interviews have been held but the outcome has not been shared with the management or staff, so limiting their learning.

Staff are very knowledgeable about young people and their vulnerabilities and risks. This shows in their practice which serves to safeguard children and young people. This knowledge is not reflected in the individual written risk assessments which are under developed, for example in relation to self-harm.

Staff have developed good relationships with children and young people and this forms the basis of very sound behaviour management. Their behaviour in boarding is of a very good standard. Staff are consistent in their approach so ensuring that children and young people are given clear messages about what acceptable behaviour looks like. They respond positively to these messages. Staff are alert to triggers for behavioural challenges that children and young people may present and successfully adapt their practice to address these, for example being aware of the potential impact of changes to routines for some. Staff infrequently apply sanctions and rarely use physical intervention with just one instance since last the last inspection. The leadership team have introduced a new behaviour management model, which staff are being trained in. Policies and recording processes are under review in the light of this.

Staff introduce children and young people to keeping themselves safe topics as part of daily life. Anti-bullying has been a particular focus and children and young people demonstrate a very good understanding of what this means and what to do should they be a victim or see bullying. Staff consistently challenge any discrimination and the use of inappropriate language as part of this.

Staff effectively promote internet safety with children and young people, through discussion with them supported by clear information displayed on notice boards. Staff demonstrate good awareness and monitor in-house internet use effectively.

The application of the staff recruitment policy and procedures is robust, ensuring suitable people are employed to work in the school. This includes peripatetic staff.

The site management team take pride in applying their skills and knowledge in maintaining the accommodation and grounds. They ensure that systems for maintaining health and safety on the school site are routinely implemented. The school is broadly compliant with fire regulations, a report from a local fire safety officer earlier this year noted 'the standard in all areas is exceptional'.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

The structure of the leadership team has changed since the last inspection. Following the retirement of the previous head at the end of last term an interim executive head has been appointed for this academic year. He now leads two residential schools, supported by a head of care and a head of school in Starhurst. The residential team have welcomed this appointment describing his approach as 'a breath of fresh air, energising and enabling the team'. This is a significant achievement in the light of ongoing local authority residential and Social, Emotional and Mental Health reviews of the provision of special schools in the county.

The very experienced head of care provides effective leadership to an experienced and stable staff team. They are united in their commitment to supporting children and young people to achieve the best outcomes they can. They focus on enabling children and young people to develop a sense of security, safety and a positive self-view. The ethos of boarding is demonstrated in practice, and parents and carers speak positively of the difference boarding has made to their children. 'It is a fantastic school, it's really made a difference, he gets a level of support that enables and encourages him to succeed'.

The needs of children and young people are well met by the skilled and appropriately trained staff team. They develop good attachments that encourage children and young people to treat each other with consideration, most of the time. Staff constructively manage disagreements between children and young people and enable them to rebuild friendships where this may be necessary.

Induction is robust and provides a thorough foundation for staff new to the work. Staff are well supported by regular supervision, appraisals, daily handovers and team meetings. They describe a 'constant stream of communication' between themselves and education staff. Staff relish the training and development opportunities that they have. Core training is sound and supplemented by courses attended in response to the identified needs of children and young people. Staff talk enthusiastically about recent visits to other schools, where they have been able to share practice and pick up ideas that they are applying in their own work.

The small staff team, supplemented by consistent bank staff where necessary, model an ethos of continual improvement. The views of children, young people and their parents and carers are sought and listened to. One parent said, 'they do listen, if there's a problem I can ring up and talk it through, they are responsive.' The head of care has recognised that parents and carers are reluctant to engage with formal surveys and is actively reviewing alternative methods for seeking their views.

The appointment of the executive head has enabled changes that head of care has wanted to introduce, in particular breakfast and evening meal arrangements. The head of care has a development plan for the next year. This has a clear structure with realistic timescales and a sharp focus on the difference these changes will make for young people. There are very few complaints or critical incidents but when they do occur they are subject to thorough evaluation with any learning points identified. The executive head has initiated a process for the review and update of policies and procedures and this is well underway.

A new chair of governors was appointed in October 2015 following an external review of the governing body. The review was critical of its governance, and found it was insufficiently robust in its challenging and questioning of the leadership. The previous chair and two other members resigned. A new board of governors has been constituted and their first meeting is scheduled.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against *Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework*.

| Judgement | Description |
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| Outstanding | A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced. |
| Good | A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted. |
| Requires improvement | A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good. |
| Inadequate | A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress. |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 125464 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC013883 |
| DfE registration number | 936/7027 |

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 residential special schools.

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| Type of school | Residential Special School |
| Number of boarders on roll | 15 |
| Gender of boarders | Boys |
| Age range of boarders | 11 to 16 |
| Headteacher | Mr Craig Anderson |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 20/05/2014 |
| Telephone number | 01306 883763 |
| Email address | Info@starhurst.surrey.sch.uk |

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