

Emergency welfare inspection

School name	Royal Alexandra and Albert School
DfE registration number	936/4623
Unique reference number (URN)	125279
URN for social care	SC013933
Inspection number	10018130
Inspection dates	20–21 April 2015
Lead social care inspector	Keith Riley
Social care inspector	Chris Peel



Information about the inspection

The inspection of boarding provision 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.^{1,2,3}

This inspection was aligned with an education inspection, for which there is a separate report. The welfare part of the inspection was unannounced, with inspectors arriving in the afternoon preceding the school inspection. Inspectors spoke to a selection of pupils from all nine boarding houses. They spoke to senior leaders, boarding staff and other key staff pertinent to the identified themes. Documentation relevant to the issues was also scrutinised. All evidence was considered in coming to a determination of whether any national minimum standards were being breached.

Information about the school

The Royal Alexandra and Albert School is set in a rural area of Redhill, within a large estate. The school is a maintained school of just over 1000 pupils of whom over 450 are full boarders and another 500 are Flexi Boarders. The school provides residential care for pupils from seven to 18 years old in a range of boarding accommodation, across nine boarding houses.

Reason for inspection

Ofsted became aware of information, from an independent source and through the annual pupil surveys, that gave cause for concern. These concerns related to an alleged drugs culture, bullying, safety, security and access to medical treatment.

Welfare

The senior management team has a comprehensive drugs policy in place. Staff implement this consistently in practice. Pupils understand the process and the sanctions for substance misuse. This includes testing for drugs and referral to other agencies for support. There is clear understanding by all that any positive test will result in a short-term exclusion while necessary investigations take place. This includes liaison with the police if necessary. Permanent exclusions are given serious consideration and are enacted in the case of any dealing, obtaining or supplying illegal substances to or from other pupils. There was no evidence to suggest that there is a drugs culture in the school.

Staff demonstrate a thorough knowledge of the behaviour management programme. This is clearly displayed in each house, and outlines the eight steps that may be taken, depending on the severity of a misdemeanour. Pupils spoke positively of the

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents.

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/boarding-schools-national-minimum-standards.

approach. Bullying is taken extremely seriously and it is clearly laid out in the behaviour management programme. Staff are diligent at following this, including referrals to senior managers if necessary. Some incidents were tracked at inspection. They demonstrated that the policy had been followed in practice, with parents kept informed. Both victim and instigator are supported. Strategies are successful. Any allegation of bullying is subject to a comprehensive investigation by senior staff, including gathering witness statements. Senior staff document investigations well and clearly evidence how they come to their conclusions. Pupils report positive and constructive relationships with staff. They identify various adults they can talk to about any concerns, as well as using the anti-bullying email address or text number. Pupils have identified bullying as a concern through internal and external surveys. The nature and extent of this is yet to be explored by the senior management team. There was no evidence at this inspection to suggest that there is a bullying culture in the school or that bullying is tolerated.

The site is close to a public right of way. Pupils say that they feel safe with a large number of resident staff around. They feel confident of the security at night, with doors and windows checked, the presence of security staff, intruder alarms, door alarms and closed circuit television. There is a clear system for reporting any maintenance issues. Any health and safety concerns are given priority by the site management team. Pupils have suitable, lockable storage facilities to keep their personal valuables safe. Pupils are safe and their belongings are secure in this school.

Staff understand the policy of knocking on bedroom doors and waiting for an answer before entering. The vast majority of pupils report that this is applied in practice. Some staff reported inconsistencies in the approach. The head of boarding has recently reminded staff of the policy. The impact of this is yet to be evaluated. There are no widespread concerns about the privacy of pupils.

The designated safeguarding lead has been in post since January 2016. He has been proactive in developing relationships with the local authority safeguarding team. He ensures that referrals are made promptly, such as to children's services or to the local authority officer responsible for safeguarding. Advice is taken seriously and internal investigations are thorough. There is a clear written audit trail that demonstrates the outcomes. These are ratified by other relevant safeguarding professionals. Risk assessments are shared and comment is invited to ensure that the best control measures are in place to minimise risk.

The human resources team ensures that safer recruitment practice is adopted. This includes the exploration and explanation of any gaps in employment, as well as pursuing and obtaining suitable references. The team does all it can to ensure that only adults deemed suitable to work with children are employed.

Catering staff ensure that pupils, including those with special dietary needs, are provided with meals that are adequate in nutrition, quantity, quality, choice and variety. There are sufficient number of vegetarian and, sometimes, fish options. Staff

take into account the views of pupils, particularly through the food council, which is seen as a positive influence.

Procedures for looking after the health of pupils are effective. Qualified nurses staff the health centre. A general practitioner visits weekly. The care of young people who are unwell or have long term conditions is good. There are protocols in place to deal with injuries. There are good arrangements for the administration of medication, including assessment of self-administration by some pupils. Pupils spoke positively of the health staff. Pupils are able to stay in the comfortable sick bay while they recover from an illness. Pupils have access to the healthcare that they need.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

No breaches of national minimum standards were identified.