

# St George's School

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

**Inspection dates** 01/11/2016 to 03/11/2016

<b>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
The quality of care and support	Good	2
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### The boarding provision is good because

- The impact of the boarding experience enhances young people's academic attainment and social development.
- Young people feel safe in the school. When concerns are identified, the school shares these with appropriate agencies to provide good safeguards.
- Safeguarding arrangements in the school are effective. Designated staff consistently implement the safeguarding policy in accordance with the school's guidance.
- Young people's behaviour is extremely good. Mutual respect is a thread throughout the school. There are no incidents of bullying.
- The leadership and management of the boarding provision are integrated throughout the school senior leadership team. This drives improvement.
- The experienced staff team is highly professional and is dedicated to making the boarding experience beneficial and enjoyable.
- The oversight and monitoring of incidents of young people being absent from boarding without permission require better analysis.
- The layout of the dining room and presentation of the meals could be improved.
- Choices for 'tuck' sold in the boarding houses fail to include healthy options.

## **Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools**

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

## **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Ensure that the 'tuck' provided in the houses incorporates healthy choices.
- Implement a system to monitor potential trends and patterns of young people who are absent without authority.
- Improve the layout and aesthetics of the school dining hall, to provide a more pleasant dining experience.

## Information about this inspection

The welfare inspection of the boarding provision was undertaken by three inspectors following a notice period of four hours. The inspection activities included meeting with the senior leadership team, the chair of governors, the director of boarding, the catering manager, boarding staff, the designated safeguarding person, and young people; scrutiny of policies and records; observation of mealtimes, including sampling food, and evening routines. 27 parents gave feedback directly to inspectors, through Ofsted's 'Parent view' and seven were contacted directly by telephone.

## Inspection team

Deirdra Keating	Lead social care inspector
Natalie Burton	Social care inspector
Rosie Davie	Social care inspector

## **Full report**

### **Information about this school**

St Georges is a co-educational boarding school for young people aged 11 to 18 years. There are 1331 young people on roll, 104 of whom board.

Boarding accommodation is provided in three boarding houses adjoining the school and within the grounds. The boarding provision was last inspected in 2013.

## Inspection judgements

### The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

**Good**

The young people make progress in all areas of their lives, including academic achievement, creativity, and social and emotional outcomes. Young people are motivated and focused on their academic progress. Parents agree unanimously that their children are taught well and make good progress. Staff and peer support aid 'prep' and study time. Resources such as extracurricular maths support are available for young people, and day-to-day routines are conducive to study.

Successful achievements are celebrated during the academic year. One member of staff said: 'We like to bring in speakers to show the young people examples of life after school and to say thank you to those who may be leaving us.' This helps young people to visualise their futures and value their contributions.

The atmosphere in the boarding houses is characterised by young people and staff who are friendly, aspire to achieve and share goals. Young people are motivated to work hard. They eagerly pursue sports training, in preparation for fixtures, and enjoy downtime with their peers. This brings young people closer together in a shared community spirit.

Safeguarding arrangements are implemented by designated staff and understood by all. These are given a high priority in the school. The leadership and management of the school are strong and cohesive. There is a continued energy and drive to improve the boarding provision and to maintain good results. Strong and realistic understanding by the management team of areas to develop, coupled with good knowledge of boarding issues and how they relate to the whole school, has resulted in significant improvement.

During the weekends, a variety of events keep young people occupied. These include go-karting, trips to national attractions or visits to the theatre. A gym and sports hall in the grounds provide the opportunity for physical exercise. One parent said: 'My child always seems to be super busy.' One child said: 'The staff make sure we have lots of activities to do, to stimulate our minds.'

Young people contribute to boarding life. They take leadership roles, as heads of boarding, and actively contribute their views, resulting in representation in forums across the school.

### The quality of care and support

**Good**

Relationships between staff and young people are warm and based on mutual respect. Staff actively seek to recognise and value the individuality of young people. One member of staff said: 'I care for each child here as if they were my own.'

An effective induction programme ensures that arrangements are sensitive and responsive to the individual needs of young people. Staff deliver induction to new young people thoughtfully. As a result, the experiences for those new to the school are good. House staff have recently improved this by introducing a formalised buddy scheme. This

helps to promote friendship and support. One parent said: 'Induction is very well managed. My child was made to feel part of the community from the beginning.'

Each cohort includes young people of different nationalities and from ethnic groups that are culturally diverse. The atmosphere is warm, welcoming and homely. Young people are kind and respectful to one another. This results in a supportive and nurturing environment. A number of young people said that they love to board at the school.

Boarding houses are distinct in character and provide comfortable living arrangements. Skiddaw House provides opportunities similar to first-year university life, for year 13 students. This helps to promote responsibility and independence. Boarding houses include communal areas and a kitchen where young people, appropriate to their age and stage, can prepare snacks or bake. Each house provides ample space for relaxation study and free time. There is space in the dormitories to store personal belongings, including secure storage. Young people say that staff amend room-sharing arrangements quickly, when necessary, to ensure that relationships remain harmonious. This helps young people to feel comfortable in their surroundings.

Young people have breakfast and evening meals in the school dining hall. The catering staff have recently introduced themed food evenings, which young people describe as being 'great.' Nutritious, good and varied foods ensure that a range of dietary requirements is available. Key staff consult with young people to seek their feedback about the food and identify any areas for improvement. Catering for large numbers can impact on the food presentation. Furthermore, the dining room is very large and noise amplifies. These factors impact on the quality of the overall dining experience.

Boarding houses offer an afterschool 'tuck shop' that mainly sells fizzy drinks, sweets and chocolate. Although fruit is displayed and available in the houses, the staff do not promote alternative healthy snack options sufficiently. 'Tuck' is made available close to evening meal times and options are unhealthy and low in nutrition. This does not support young people to make healthy choices.

Young people welcome extra help with coursework. This is available daily after school from the teaching staff. There are good facilities for private study in the boarding houses or the school library.

Some staff have been working in the boarding houses for a number of years. One parent said: 'We chose this school because of the quality of the boarding staff.' Staff get to know individuals and are respectful and sensitive to their personal circumstances. Young people described staff as 'approachable', 'kind' and 'caring'. This enhances the quality of their experiences while away from home.

Staff encourage friendships between boarders and pupils at the school who do not board. This helps social development. Young people contact families and friends using a phone or an electronic device. Staff provide appropriate control of mobile phone use in the way that a responsible parent would. Parents said that when they visit they feel welcome and that the school social media accounts keep them up to date with boarding life. This helps the young people to remain in regular contact with their families.

The arrangements for storing, handling and administration of medication have improved. This helps to reduce the likelihood of human error and ensures that the right child receives the right medication at the right time. The local general practitioner visits the school to provide a weekly surgery. Staff are attentive and knowledgeable about

individual ailments and conditions of the young people. New medical 'grab sheets', in the event of an emergency, enable staff to access specific information in terms of health needs. These ensure that, whatever the circumstance, key staff are aware of each young person's physical and emotional health needs.

Policies and records sampled demonstrate that staff take a mindful approach to addressing pastoral concerns. The staff share information quickly with parents and seek advice, guidance and support from other agencies. This supports young people's well-being and mental health.

Staff ensure that the young people pursue personal interests and take advantage of a wide range of activities. Young people attend school clubs, such as gardening, rugby and lacrosse. Others routinely access pursuits in the local community, such as music lessons, teen yoga, horse-riding and dance classes. Staff are flexible in the provision of transport, facilitating weekly participation in clubs and sports outside school. This supports young people's upkeep of skills, hobbies and interests and provides positive links with the local community.

#### **How well children and young people are protected**

**Good**

Young people report feeling safe and can easily identify staff with whom they can share any concerns. Information throughout the accommodation informs them how to make a complaint or raise a concern. Independent listeners attend events and visit the boarding houses. This provides an alternative individual, outside the school, should young people need to raise concerns.

The management regularly review the policies and protocols in place to safeguard young people. Staff attend regular safeguarding training, ensuring that responses are informed and reflect the school's policy. The school's designated safeguarding person maintains clear logs of all child protection concerns. They have good relationships with external agencies, in particular with the local authority. This ensures that, when child protection concerns are identified, young people receive additional support to meet their individual needs. Regular boarding pastoral welfare committee meetings discuss concerns, disseminating information across the school. This ensures that all professionals involved with individual concerns agree on the decisions made, providing a multi-disciplinary approach to safeguarding young people. Detailed records enable effective monitoring, helping the staff to identify issues at the earliest opportunity. Staff balance care and safety to make certain that safeguarding does not oppress or limit young people's experiences.

When allegations against staff have been made, the designated safeguarding person implements the safeguarding policy. They implement the advice from the local authority designated officer. When internal investigations are conducted, they demonstrate transparency and objectivity in decision-making and outcomes to all parties. Learning points are used to reduce the potential of any recurrences.

There are no concerns about child sexual exploitation. Staff have sufficient understanding of the signs that they need to be aware of, in particular for those young

people who go home regularly. There have been two incidents of young people missing from boarding. Staff implemented the missing child policy to take steps to locate the young people swiftly. There is a clear procedure for signing in and out of boarding houses. At weekends, parental agreement is required for young people to go home or visit friends, and staff must be informed of expected return times. Although, in the main, the system works effectively, on occasion staff have not implemented the school's policy. Following identification of this shortfall, the school's management team took action to reduce the risk of a recurrence, by reinforcing the policy and procedure with the staff. However, there is no system to monitor potential trends and patterns of young people who are absent without authority. Although staff take action to locate young people, this fails to identify potential patterns and trends

Bullying is not a prevalent issue in the school. One child reported: 'Staff do not tolerate any bullying. They are very quick to deal with this issue.' Bullying records clearly document action taken at the time, to ensure that young people receive advice regarding how to manage the situation. Staff monitor this by meeting with young people to ensure that any action has been effective.

There have been no restrictive physical interventions since the last inspection. Behaviour management strategies are positively applied, and there are clear behavioural expectations. Individual and dormitory reward schemes promote positive behaviour. Rewards include a take-away meal or first supper sitting. Staff promote a restorative approach. Incidents are minimal and, when they occur, staff encourage young people to reflect on their actions and on what they could do better. When disciplinary actions are implemented, there is a period of reflection. In addition, young people's views are sought. This helps to promote appropriate behaviour and to ensure an orderly and harmonious environment.

There are well-established processes in place for staff recruitment. Young people are actively involved in the recruitment process. Meticulous records are maintained in respect of adults living on the school site. Robust agreements require non-school employees to adhere to requirements, which focus on the protection of the young people in the school. There is no unauthorised access to the boarding accommodation.

The site is physically safe and secure. Visitors are carefully monitored, signed in and chaperoned.

Maintenance is of a good standard, and minor repairs are completed quickly. This boarding accommodation is free from hazards and ensures that the young people are physically safe. Fire drills and checks are completed regularly. The health and safety of the provision are good. This protects young people from hazards and environmental dangers.

### **The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers**

**Good**

A key strength of this school is the cohesive senior leadership team. Senior staff work collaboratively, to ensure that the management of the boarding provision is integral to the whole school. The team is characterised by staff who have the capacity and drive to



implement change. A collective effort has resulted in a focused approach to address identified shortfalls and to improve the boarding provision.

A new director of boarding has driven a number of changes, by engaging and consulting with young people, staff and parents. Young people take an active role in the school. They confidently articulate their views in the knowledge that these are valued and contribute to changes.

A detailed boarding development plan incorporates key areas of improvement, such as engagement and listening to young people. An internal review of boarding has been undertaken to ensure compliance with the national minimum standards. This provides a realistic overview of areas to improve and clearly links to the boarding development plan. This demonstrates a comprehensive overview and effort to continuously raise standards.

The governing body is fully involved in the operation and management of the boarding provision. Concentration on protocols, policies and new staff appointments reinforces the senior leadership team. Regular visits to boarding houses and attention to busy periods of the boarding day, coupled with observation of interactions and behaviours, provide governors with good oversight of the boarding provision.

Boarding is well organised. Established routines and embedded rules keep the houses safe and orderly. The staff rota provides consistency and contingency for unforeseen circumstances. Staff maintain a clear focus on young people, continually monitoring their progress and emotional well-being. This prioritises their welfare needs.

Long-serving staff are established and dedicated to their roles. Regular training updates support good management of young people's welfare needs. The team has wide-ranging experience. Staff skills are utilised well to enhance the boarding experience. Staff are supported well in their posts. Performance management reviews incorporate a review of each boarding house. This adds another component to the measuring and monitoring of performance. The review identifies action points and shows examples of good practice, such as visiting other schools and trialling new ideas and systems.

There are a number of young people from different cultural backgrounds. A Christian ethos is maintained throughout the school and operates non-exclusively while representing the school's aims. Young people have a number of different religious backgrounds. Diversity is acknowledged, unobtrusively resulting in a cosmopolitan influence.

Complaints captured since the last inspection do not relate to boarding. Concerns and grumbles are logged in boarding houses and dealt with as they arise. Parents spoken to say that they feel able to raise concerns in the knowledge that the school will act and listen. Parental feedback and 'Parent view' responses are unanimously positive, with 95% respondents saying that their children are happy at the school, 91% saying that children make good progress and 100% of parents saying that they would recommend the school.

The school has made significant improvements to the boarding provision, demonstrating aspiration and potential to enhance this further.

## 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
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding, and the impact that 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's 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 that children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	117556
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC061220
<b>DfE registration number</b>	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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Boarding school
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	104
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	11 to18
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Raymond McGovern
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	15/10/2013
<b>Telephone number</b>	01582 765477
<b>Email address</b>	admin@stgeorges.herts.sch.uk

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