

Gordon's School

Gordon's School, Bagshot Road, West End, Woking, Surrey GU24 9PT

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| Inspection dates | 06/03/2017 to 08/03/2017 | |
| The overall experiences and progress of children and young people | Outstanding | 1 |
| The quality of care and support | Outstanding | 1 |
| How well children and young people are protected | Outstanding | 1 |
| The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers | Outstanding | 1 |

Summary of key findings

The boarding provision is outstanding because

- Residential boarders flourish and make exceptional academic, social and emotional progress. Residential boarding brings added value to the school and makes a vital contribution in assisting residential boarders fulfil their potential and make the most of their unique abilities. Residential boarding enhances academic achievement.
- Aspirational senior leaders convey their vision, passion and enthusiasm for continuous improvement to a dedicated residential boarding staff team. High expectations and new initiatives are positively influencing residential boarders who strive to achieve.
- Residential boarding staff are exceptionally caring, generous with their time and responsive to individual needs. Positive, warm and encouraging relationships are at the heart of the community.
- Safeguarding residential boarders is at the centre of practice, with a strong commitment to protecting them from harm. Staff understand the pressures faced by young people. E-safety and the appropriate use of social media have high importance. Supporting residential boarders to develop emotional resilience is a new initiative to promote their well-being.
- Respect, courtesy and consideration for others are embedded in the culture and evident throughout the school. Behaviour is excellent.
- Residential boarders acquire self-confidence, maturity, independence and the skills to live and work with others in preparation for a fulfilling adult life.

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 categorisation of formal and informal complaints and allegations against staff are classified as such and are managed in accordance with the school's policies.
- Ensure that specific risk assessments for sleeping arrangements are in place, which demonstrate that staff have assessed the compatibility of the group in terms of known or potential risks.

Information about this inspection

The school was given four hours' notice of the inspection. Inspection activities included discussion with residential boarders and joining them for meals. Meetings were held with the headteacher, deputy head (pastoral), assistant head (pastoral), assistant head (director of co-curricular), bursar, lead nurse, house parents, residential boarding staff, designated safeguarding officers, chair of governors and catering manager. A wide range of records and documents were reviewed. Forty-five parents gave feedback through Ofsted's Parent View and four were contacted directly by telephone.

Inspection team

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|-----------------|----------------------------|
| Jan Hunnam | Lead social care inspector |
| Deirdra Keating | Social care inspector |
| Natalie Burton | Social care inspector |

Full report

Information about this school

Gordon's school is a co-educational academy, which offers boarding and day places for boys and girls aged 11–18 years. Residential boarding is offered in four houses within the school grounds. Traditionally, the school has offered boarding to children with parents in the armed forces. Approximately 50% of the boarding population is made up from this group. The remaining boarders are a mixture of those who live locally, or who have parents who live overseas. The school is located in Woking, Surrey. The last inspection of the school's residential boarding provision took place in February 2013.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Residential boarders make exceptional progress in all aspects of their lives. Leaders, managers and all staff promote a culture of achievement. Not only academic success is valued; developing students' unique abilities and character are important and highly regarded. From Ofsted's Parent View responses, parents unanimously agree that their child makes good progress at the school. Residential boarders benefit from routines, structure and support, resulting in significant academic, social and emotional progress.

Mutually respectful, supportive and encouraging relationships between staff and residential boarders and peer-support systems promote a caring and tolerant ethos. Behaviour is commendable.

Residential boarders are overwhelmingly positive about their experience, describing it as 'exciting', 'like a long sleepover with your friends'. They also recognise that it provides stability and 'helps them to be independent'. As a result of their boarding experience, their confidence, self-esteem, individuality and maturity develop in preparation for a fulfilled adult life.

The welfare of residential boarders is at the heart of practice. Staff promote their well-being, creating a caring, nurturing and stable community where residential boarders receive the support they need to thrive and flourish.

Strong, aspirational leaders and managers and a committed staff team continuously strive to improve the residential boarding experience and enable residential boarders to be the best they can be.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Residential boarding staff are exceptionally caring and responsive, recognising boarders' individual needs and providing support so that they flourish, make excellent academic progress and utilise fully their talents and abilities to achieve their potential. Positive, warm and encouraging relationships between staff and residential boarders are at the heart of the community.

Residential boarders live in accommodation that is welcoming, comfortable and well maintained. They share sleeping accommodation and express their preference for room-mates. A generic risk assessment is in place for sleeping arrangements, but there is no specific risk assessment which demonstrates that staff have assessed the compatibility of the group in terms of known or potential risks. Boarding houses provide ample communal and study areas, with all meals eaten in the school dining room. The recently appointed catering manager is passionate about healthy eating and providing students with a variety of nutritious and wholesome food. Specific dietary requirements are very well catered for. Feedback from the residential boarders spoken to was very positive

about meals and they acknowledged a marked improvement in recent months.

Residential boarders have access to an extensive range of extra-curricular and recreational activities to support their character development, their identity and their holistic growth to sustain them through their future lives. They thoroughly enjoy the wide-ranging activity programme, which includes sport, outdoor pursuits, music, drama and the unique and famous Pipes and Drums band. The distinctive talent of individuals is also recognised, with appropriate staff support to help them achieve their potential. One student attends football training externally twice a week to support his specific ambition.

Arrangements to oversee the health needs of residential boarders are excellent. Three qualified nurses run the school medical centre and ensure that residential boarders receive appropriate support to maintain their health and lead healthy lifestyles. Students with specific health issues, such as diabetes, receive appropriate support. Liaison with external clinical nurse specialists further strengthens provision for residential boarders' health needs. Nurses are also involved in health promotion across the school through the curriculum. The emotional and psychological needs of residential boarders are a high priority. Staff have undertaken training to recognise early signs of emerging mental health issues and residential boarders have access to a counselling service within the school. A recent 'Bounce don't Break' initiative demonstrates a proactive approach to addressing the significant pressures faced by students, so that they develop emotional resilience and thrive. Individual welfare plans identify specific difficulties and vulnerabilities, with targeted action to support residential boarders and improve their well-being.

Residential boarders know that their views and opinions are important, welcomed and that staff listen. In addition to individual, informal interaction with staff and house committees, the boarders' council provides residential boarders with a forum to put forward ideas and contribute to the development of the school and boarding provision. Residential boarders reported that staff, at all levels within the school, actively listen to them, empower them to take on responsibilities and engage with decision-making processes throughout the school. Knowing that their views are taken seriously develops their confidence and self-esteem alongside building leadership skills.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

A strong commitment to protecting residential boarders from harm underpins practice in the boarding provision, with safeguarding at the centre of all practice. Residential boarders report that they feel safe and that they have an adult whom they trust and can talk to about any concerns.

Staff are well trained, alert and confident in their safeguarding role, with the necessary understanding of current issues that can present a risk, such as child sexual exploitation, e-safety and radicalisation. E-safety and using social media appropriately have high importance. Good social media awareness results in the effective management of handheld devices. A supporting policy guides staff and internet usage is monitored carefully. Parents are given a specific forum to raise e-safety concerns, which are captured and managed by a designated, trained member of staff.

The deputy head (pastoral) is the designated safeguarding lead with four deputies, all of whom have undertaken appropriate training to perform the role. Staff are diligent in informing the safeguarding team of any concerns and there is a robust procedure for considering any issues affecting the welfare of students. Appropriate action is taken including referral to, and consultation with, external authorities. However, the classification of what constitutes an allegation against a member of staff is not always clear and this has the potential to lead to a lack of transparency and a failure to act in accordance with school policies.

Staff have high expectations of conduct and an agreed code of behaviour is shared throughout the school. Behaviour is exemplary and students are a credit to the school. Respect, courtesy and consideration for others are embedded in the culture of the school. Staff are vigilant to any signs of bullying and take a robust and preventative approach. Anti-bullying strategies have a very high profile. Training programmes for students, anti-bullying assemblies and close monitoring of any incidents demonstrate a proactive approach to protecting students. Residential boarders report that bullying is not a worry or concern and are confident that staff deal with any issues immediately. There have been no incidents of residential boarders being missing from the boarding provision. Procedures are in place to protect them should such an incident occur. Behaviour incidents are monitored rigorously to identify residential boarders who require additional support.

Staff recruitment procedures minimise the potential for unsuitable adults being employed in the school. Meticulous records demonstrate that recruitment checks are in line with current safe recruitment practice.

Comprehensive health and safety measures protect residential boarders. Excellent managerial oversight of health and safety includes regular, robust risk assessments undertaken by an independent company. Appropriate fire safety checks are routinely applied, including regular fire drills. A thorough risk assessment system ensures that activities for residential boarders, both on the school site and externally, are well planned to protect their welfare. The management and security of the school site is extremely good, with security staff providing routine checks throughout the night.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

All staff share a passion and commitment to achieve the aim of providing every student with a thorough preparation for life that gives them the character, confidence and all-round education to be the best they can be, to achieve their potential and make a positive contribution to the communities in which they live and work. Led by an aspirational senior leadership team dedicated to providing students with a world-class education, boarding staff create a stable and nurturing environment in which residential boarders flourish.

Senior leaders strive continuously to improve the experience of residential boarders. Utilising feedback from surveys, focus groups and a rigorous review and evaluation of residential boarding, senior leaders have detailed plans to develop aspects of the

provision with outcomes for residential boarders at the centre of all practice. Their drive for improvement is demonstrated by numerous developments, including reforming tutor arrangements to provide integrated boarding and academic support, developing emotional resilience, the introduction of a boarders' council and enhanced catering arrangements. Governors maintain effective oversight and receive regular reports on boarding from the deputy head (pastoral), supporting the drive for continuous improvement.

Long-standing, well-established boarding staff work collaboratively with less experienced colleagues to create a warm and welcoming community where staff are dedicated to meeting the needs of residential boarders and promoting their welfare. Residential boarding staff are extremely positive about their roles and how they go above and beyond what is expected to support residential boarders. Staff training and development have a high priority directly linked to improving practice and outcomes for residential boarders. Managers support staff, through annual appraisals and regular reviews, to identify their training needs and develop their practice in areas of particular interest.

Feedback from parents and Ofsted's Parent View responses are very positive, with 100% of respondents stating that their child is happy at the school, makes good progress and they would recommend the school. 96% of respondents stated that the school responds well to any concerns raised. The school's policy relating to complaints distinguishes between formal and informal complaints. Examination of these records shows that not all complaints are categorised in line with the school's policy.

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 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 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 | 139151 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC013919 |
| DfE registration number | 936/5403 |

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.

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| Type of school | Boarding School |
| Number of boarders on roll | 224 |
| Gender of boarders | Mixed |
| Age range of boarders | 11 to 18 |
| Headteacher | Mr Andrew Moss |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 26/02/2013 |
| Telephone number | 01276 858084 |
| Email address | info@gordons.surrey.sch.uk |

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