

# Old Swinford Hospital School

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Heath Lane, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 1QX

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this boarding school

Old Swinford Hospital School offers 502 boarding places. At the time of this inspection, 404 pupils were resident. It is a voluntary aided boarding and day school for boys aged 11 years to 18 years, and for both boys and non-boarding girls in the sixth form. Year 13 boys reside in discrete accommodation that has been newly opened. Year 7 boys also live together in one boarding house. The school educates pupils from the local area, from further afield in the United Kingdom and from abroad. Some pupils join the school at times other than in Year 7. Although the background of most pupils is relatively advantaged, others are admitted and supported by charitable foundations and local authorities, enabling them to attend the school. A very small proportion of the pupils are selected on ability or aptitude. All boarders are selected following suitability to board interviews. Currently, there are 205 day pupils at the school.

**Inspection dates:** 18 to 20 June 2019

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The boarding school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Date of last inspection:** 17 January 2017

## Inspection judgements

### Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children and young people love their boarding experience and benefit hugely from an exceptionally supportive and nurturing environment. They said that the boarding provision is like a family and they make close and enduring friendships. Children and young people feel secure living away from home. Consequently, they excel in their school work, develop their independence, and realise their potential.

Children and young people engage enthusiastically in a wide range of stimulating and fun activities, which support their physical, social and emotional well-being. For example, some of the boarders who are in the school rugby team are touring South Africa this summer. Sport is enjoyed by many children and young people in the evenings and on weekends. For those who favour different activities, there are popular art and music clubs. Children and young people are having great fun rehearsing for and producing a talent show. The show involves singing and dancing, to raise funds for a children's hospital. As a result, their self-confidence has grown, and they have developed teamwork skills that enhance their life opportunities. One child explained that since he started boarding he can speak with more confidence in groups and social settings.

Diversity and individual identity are valued highly by children, young people and staff. The ethos of the boarding provision encourages children and young people to develop strong regard for others, valuing each other's contributions and strengths. Children and young people from ethnic minorities feel fully included in the boarding provision and embrace friendships with peers from different backgrounds and cultures.

Staff are ambitious for children and young people. They want them to excel in their education, but also in their emotional, physical and social development. Individual achievements are celebrated. Staff understand the individual needs of children and support them accordingly. Children and young people from other countries make excellent progress in their confidence and use of English as a second language.

When children and young people are admitted to the boarding provision, staff and other children and young people give them a warm welcome. This enables them to settle quickly and feel part of the close community. Older young people look after the younger children and make the boarding experience extremely positive for them, understanding what it is like to feel homesick.

A strength of the staff team is the emphasis that it places on children and young people's emotional well-being. A research-based programme supports the development of resilience and emotional regulation. The programme is based on the CHIPS (ChildLine in Partnership with Schools) initiative, which encourages peer mentoring run by and for young people, to tackle issues that affect their lives. Year 12 and 13 students, supported by the school counsellor, mentor new starters at a weekly meeting.

They build positive relationships and deliver small training sessions, for example on safeguarding and keeping safe. The mentors support and help younger children to improve their behaviour and develop their confidence. This creative approach to children and young people's well-being leads to sustained improvements in their lives and is worthy of dissemination to other residential provisions.

Staff listen to the children and young people, who said that they like and trust all the staff and can talk to them about anything that concerns them. The house masters consistently give children and young people feedback about issues they have discussed, and this includes things that are going well and not so well. Children and young people engage in decisions about how money should be spent in the houses and they make suggestions such as buying sports equipment. They know how to raise a complaint if necessary and who to go to when they need to escalate a particular matter. Children and young people are encouraged to respond to a school survey. A newly appointed independent listener in the boarding provision is a good addition to the support already offered to children and young people. Once fully established, this role will benefit children and young people even more.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

Staff keep children and young people safe. Prior to admission, information is sought from families, the children and young people themselves and their previous school. This ensures that all of the children's and young people's safeguarding needs are included in their excellent individual welfare plans. This proactive approach ensures that staff understand any risks and that planning for children and young people is highly effective.

Staff and managers are all fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities and escalate matters of concern to the appropriate agencies immediately. Multi-agency collaboration is extremely strong and effective. For example, the police praise the work of the staff, their communication and their responses to any issues or concerns. There have been no incidents of children and young people going missing from the boarding provision and no child or young person has been subject to child sexual exploitation.

Exceptional support for their emotional well-being helps children and young people to develop strategies for managing their anxieties and behaviour. Staff have an in-depth understanding of children's and young people's vulnerabilities and provide them with clear expectations of their behaviour in the boarding provision. This enables staff to manage situations calmly and without the use of restraint.

Staff undertake creative work with children and young people to educate them about risks and how to keep themselves safe. Staff constantly revisit other important issues, including appropriate relationships and behaviour. Children and young people become increasingly safe because of the support that they get from staff.

Activity-based risk assessments are relevant and up to date. Staff use these to skilfully ensure that children and young people are enabled to explore challenging new activities

and experiences safely, such as archery. Increasing numbers of young people also undertake the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, which helps them to develop leadership and teamwork skills.

Vetting of new staff is careful and rigorous and the single central register is managed very effectively. Governors and managers have an excellent overview of, and regularly audit, the quality of the safeguarding arrangements. Parents are confident that their children are safe at the school and that any issues are dealt with appropriately.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The senior leadership team is inspirational and passionate about providing the best care possible for children and young people. Its approach is child focused, and its members lead by example and promote their caring ethos throughout the boarding provision. The appointment of the deputy pastoral head, since the last inspection, has contributed to an increased consistency in the management of the provision. He has clear plans to further raise standards for the benefit of children and young people.

Matrons demonstrate in-depth knowledge and understanding of each child and young person's needs. Staff are enthusiastic about changing the lives of children and young people who are disadvantaged and take pride in seeing them develop and meet their potential.

The headmaster and head of boarding work closely and effectively with a highly committed and involved governing body. Shortfalls in meeting the national minimum standards, identified at the last inspection, have been addressed. There is evidence of ongoing improvement and innovation. Since the last inspection new systems have been introduced, including 'my concern'. This is an electronic system which enables staff to send safeguarding concerns directly to the designated safeguarding lead, for review and relevant action. The matter is not closed on the system until it has been dealt with appropriately. This means that children's and young people's safety is prioritised, rapidly acted on and clearly remains the responsibility of all staff.

A new maintenance alert system has improved the rate at which repairs are identified and completed in the houses. The governors have contributed significantly to improvements being made to the houses and they recognise the importance of the environment in supporting the emotional well-being and happiness of children and young people.

Staff are highly skilled, and well trained. Staff receive specialist training to meet the specific needs of children and young people when required. For example, staff have received training about diabetes and autism spectrum disorders. Teamwork and communication are excellent. Matrons meet for lunch together daily and the house masters meet for breakfast to exchange information and support one another. Leaders and managers know the strengths and areas for development in the staff team.

The headmaster, head of boarding and governing body understand and routinely track and review the progress of children and young people. Staff and managers carefully plan ways to offer more support when needed, to enable children and young people to be more effective in their school work. Effort and improvement are valued and praised, as well as specific achievements. Managerial oversight of systems and records is methodical and regular, and any concerns are addressed quickly and appropriately.

The headmaster, head of boarding and governors are all keen to explore new ways to further improve the service. The inspection found that information about changes in staffing is not always effectively communicated to parents. For example, one parent found out via her child that the school nurse had left, rather than hearing from the school. This means that parents miss an opportunity to ask questions that might be relevant to the needs of their child or young person, as soon as possible, when there are staff changes.

The matrons feel that more frequent formal meetings held between them and the house masters to share ideas and practice would benefit the provision. This could further aid communication between staff and ensure that ideas for innovation and improvements do not get missed or overlooked.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Consider ways to improve communication with parents when staff leave or take up new posts.
- Provide more opportunities for house masters and matrons to engage in formal meetings outside the houses to discuss practice.
- Continue to embed the role of the independent listener for children and young people.

### **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Boarding school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC042055

**Headteacher:** Paul Kilbride

**Type of school:** Boarding School

**Telephone number:** 01384 817 300

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## **Inspectors**

Louise Whittle, social care inspector (lead)

Dave Carrigan, social care inspector

Patrick McIntosh, social care inspector



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