

St Michael's School

The Society of St Pius X

St Michael's School, Harts Lane, Burghclere, Newbury, Berkshire RG20 9JW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

St Michael's School is located in Burghclere, near Newbury. This non-affiliated independent boarding school is registered for pupils aged from four to 18. It opened in 1991 in order to meet the needs and beliefs of the followers of the Society of St Pius X. The school is a registered charitable trust and its goals reflect those of the Catholic Society to which it belongs. There are currently 16 full-time boarders and three who stay one night a week in order to attend the school's cadet force.

Inspection dates: 15 to 17 October 2019

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Date of last inspection: 10 October 2017

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children form positive relationships with each other and staff. Children are positive in their actions and demeanour in boarding, and talk positively about their experiences. Those who have English as an additional language have adults who speak their first language to go to, and the other children support them and help them to integrate into boarding life.

Children are listened to and have opportunities to share their views. They work well as a group and all are able to have their voice heard. Individual meetings between boarders and the head of care provide a space to share views, and changes are made in response to requests where practical. Children are happy with the changes that have happened over recent years, including new bathrooms and the structure of how homework is set.

The school provides a range of socially and emotionally stimulating activities for children to enjoy, including clubs and activities off-site and their army cadet force. All children attend education as planned and religious observance is part of the children's day.

Staff encourage children to understand life away from the school, recognising it is a protective environment. They learn that others will have beliefs different to their own and that all have the right to express themselves. Diversity is considered through specific lessons but also in general discussion. As part of the boarders' questionnaire, they are asked to consider how others may not feel safe or cared for and how they can help. One member of staff described the ethos is 'to respect the tradition in respecting the modern world', and they support children to 'help to amend prejudices'.

Staff promote healthy living and lifestyles. Children are particularly enthusiastic about the chef, who makes homemade meals and her fresh porridge is very much applauded and appreciated. Children's emotional well-being is monitored and although no children in boarding currently require any specialist services, the staff are clear on who they can contact should this be required. Healthcare plans are in place for those who have specific conditions and staff are trained in supporting and administering emergency medication where needed. Medication for international students is clearly labelled and translated into English. However, the school does not routinely receive confirmation from the prescriber when a medication is altered.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Children say they feel safe in the boarding provision. They all identify who they would go to if they were worried or upset. This includes adults who speak their first language. Children say it is a big family, and recognise that they may fall out at

times. Children were keen to point out that they will try and sort out most issues within friendships themselves, but the adults will always support them if they cannot do this themselves.

Staff demonstrate a good knowledge of their safeguarding responsibilities, including who to report any concerns to within the school and externally. They have an increased understanding of vulnerabilities and upcoming training in county lines will help to strengthen their skills and knowledge. An area of improvement is to ensure that staff understand the full impact that wider social issues may have on the children who access the school from across the United Kingdom and Europe. Safeguarding concerns are managed swiftly and effectively. A delay in reporting a concern to the designated officer in the local authority was recognised as an oversight and there has not been a delay in reporting since.

Children have access to an independent listener, who visits the school termly and is available by phone should they want to talk to him. His reports to the headteacher show the type of subjects he has covered with children, including online safety.

Staff produce thoughtful and thorough risk assessments prior to any activity away from the school. The assessments consider all aspects of the trip, including the travelling there, access to facilities and the potential emotional impact on trips to museums, for example visits to museums that focus on armed conflicts. This approach shows a genuine consideration to children's needs and safety beyond just the physical risks.

Children's behaviour in boarding is mostly positive. All children are aware of the consequences of their actions and the new recording system ensures that staff are able to track and monitor any trends or patterns. The staff have a good understanding that the behaviour being displayed may be linked to another emotion, which has nothing to do with the current activity. They take time to explore this with the children involved. Children are keen and often excited about the prospect of earning badges and vouchers for positive behaviour.

Children are protected from avoidable risks through effective monitoring of health and safety across the site and engagement in fire evacuation drills. Safer recruitment is followed for all staff, whether they are paid or voluntary, and suitable checks are carried out on families where children stay for exeat weekends. However, there is no formal policy in relation to this. The school's single central record system is worthy of dissemination due to its ease of use and storage of original documentation.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers in the school have made wide-ranging, positive changes across the school as a response to the inadequate judgement at the last full inspection. The leadership team has been strengthened with the addition of a new house master and additional layers of accountability between the trustees and the

school.

The headteacher is acutely aware of what required improvements are needed and recognises that these are an ongoing task. The house master is keen to consider new ideas on how they can improve the boarding experience and capture children's progress. The leaders' and managers' evaluation of the school is reflective and accurate. Leaders and managers have ensured that their evaluation links to relevant policies, guidance and legislation.

Residential staff are aware of children's academic and social progress, although this is not always fully captured in records. They have weekly meetings where all boarders are discussed, and they identify those requiring extra support or guidance. The leaders form positive relationships with children's families and it is an inclusive environment.

Staff say that managers are suitably visible and that they regularly meet as a group. Staff say that it is a supportive environment in which to learn and develop and being a small team means that they understand each other's strengths. Appraisals are reviewed throughout the year and targets are clear, and progress is clearly evidenced. Training is wide and varied, and well documented.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Formally evaluate the quality of boarding provision.
- Ensure that any changes to medication are informed by the prescriber.
- Ensure that all safeguarding concerns which require referral to the designated officer in the local authority are reported without delay.
- Increase staff knowledge of social issues that have an impact on children away from the school.
- Produce a policy on the use of family stay for boarders during exeat weekends.

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: SC012016

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Fr John Brucciani

Type of school: Boarding School

Telephone number: 01635 278 137

Email address: headmaster@sanctusmichael.com

Inspector

Jennie Christopher, social care inspector



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M1 2WD

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