

Sexey's School

Sexey's School

Cole Road, Bruton, Somerset BA10 0DF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Sexey's school is a maintained, mixed-gender boarding school for boarders aged 11 to 18 years. The school admits pupils from all over the United Kingdom and overseas, and offers termly and weekly boarding. The boarding accommodation is currently provided in two houses which are located on the school site. At the time of this visit, there were 98 boarders.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting virtually, on 14 and 15 October 2020, to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 November 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Overall judgement at last inspection: inadequate

Date of last inspection: 19 March 2019

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Boarders reported that boarding at the school feels like belonging to a big family. There is a very diverse group of boarders. However, a strength of the boarding provision is the way in which boarders learn to make friendships and support each other in a nurturing and caring environment.

Boarders benefit from experiencing trusting relationships with the boarding staff. Routines in the boarding houses run smoothly. Boarders commented that most of the time, any changes that affect them are communicated to them. However, sometimes communication with the boarders, about staff changes or changes of their boarding house, is not timely or effective.

Boarders are treated with dignity and respect. They receive help with overcoming any previous trauma or any concerns that they have, and are helped and supported to build emotional resilience. The school engages effectively with a wide range of agencies and other professionals to provide a variety of resources for the boarders, to enable them to increase their resilience and well-being. For example, specialist sessions and groups on bereavement have been set up for children.

Boarders clearly benefit from boarding, both academically and socially. Examination results show that boarders' academic achievement is positive as a result of them boarding at the school. Boarders learn to make friends, and improve their confidence and social skills. There is effective liaison between the education staff and the boarding staff. Information about vulnerable boarders is shared between education and boarding staff, if appropriate, to ensure that boarders receive the support that they need.

Activities are varied and boarders enjoy swimming in the school pool and travelling to football matches, firework displays and the cinema. Boarders are encouraged to join the school's cadet force or undertake community service. These activities support boarders to learn new skills, make friends and access the local community.

The emotional and health needs of the boarders are met. The school has an on-site health centre, and boarders have regular access to health professionals. Medication is safely managed and administered. Dietary needs and preferences are catered for, and the meals offered are nutritious and varied.

The boarding houses are warm and comfortable. The boarders enjoy relaxing and socialising in the large communal areas, where they have access to computers, games, a kitchen area and a gym. The corridor in one house that has recently been re-furnished does detract from the otherwise homely appearance of the boarding houses. There are no pictures displayed in the corridor, only the boarding house rules.

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

Children reported that they feel safe when boarding. Their safety is promoted by the boarding staff, who understand how to manage risks and keep the boarders safe. The boarders reported that they are comfortable about speaking to all staff members. They trust the staff and have confidence that they will listen. The staff know the boarders well, and show professional curiosity and vigilance that alert them to any small changes in the behaviour of a boarder which may indicate that they are worried or upset.

Leaders and managers create comprehensive assessments of risk to promote the safety of the boarders. Any individual vulnerabilities are promptly identified and a support plan and a comprehensive individual risk assessment are put in place. These documents are reviewed at daily staff meetings, and are accessible on the case management system across the school to keep all staff informed. The headteacher holds other agencies to account if information is not promptly shared.

A comprehensive missing-from-care procedure is in place. Incidents of boarders going missing are very rare and are well managed to ensure the safety of the boarders. Leaders and managers have procedures and services in place which identify and reduce any risks to boarders effectively, including online support, mentoring staff and a pastoral service.

Positive behaviour is promoted through a system of praise for the boarders' achievements and supporting them to learn from their mistakes. Boarders reported that rules are consistently applied by the staff, and are fair. Incidents of bullying are rare and are promptly dealt with.

Safer recruitment systems and procedures ensure that only suitable people are employed in the boarding houses. Disciplinary procedures are effective, and any incidents or concerns around staff are promptly dealt with and referred to the appropriate safeguarding professionals as necessary.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers have an ambitious vision for boarding, and have high expectations and aspirations for the boarders. The headteacher and head of boarding provide strong leadership and a rigorous approach that has led to improvements in the quality of boarding. They are relentless in their pursuit of improvement and development.

A comprehensive development plan for boarding is in place. The strengths and any areas identified for improvement are clearly identified and acted upon by leaders and managers. There are effective systems in place for monitoring the quality of the boarding provision. Feedback is gained from boarders to ensure that their views and wishes are known and met if possible. The boarding provision benefits from having

robust external scrutiny from the governors and an independent listener, who visits the boarding houses regularly. Any issues raised are taken seriously by the headteacher and addressed.

Staff turnover in boarding has been relatively high recently. Boarders initially found the changes in the boarding staff unsettling. However, the recently appointed staff are experienced in boarding and working with children, and are quickly forming trusting and positive relationships with the boarders.

The boarding staff benefit from regular supervision and an annual appraisal, as well as a comprehensive training programme which ensures that they have the skills they need to offer effective care and support to the boarders.

Feedback from the boarders, their parents and professionals about the quality of boarding was broadly very positive. For example, 100% of parents commented that they would recommend the school's boarding provision to other parents.

Leaders and managers have the necessary skills and experience to give effective help and support to children and their families and carers. For example, the school's sessions on understanding and responding to children's behaviour are very popular with parents and carers. When COVID-19 restrictions were in place in 2020 and 2021, boarding staff supported the boarders and their parents by offering a comprehensive programme of regular communication and support.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure that communication with boarders about any changes to boarding routines and accommodation is timely and comprehensive.
- Ensure that the boarding houses are made as homely as possible. In particular, this relates to the corridors in Lisbury House.

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: SC039847

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mrs Helen Cullen

Type of school: Boarding school

Telephone number: 01749 813 393

Email address: hcullen@sexey.somerset.sch.uk

Inspectors

Tina Maddison, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Justine Hosking, Social Care Inspector

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