

Old Swinford Hospital School

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Old Swinford Hospital School, 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 470 boarding places. At the time of this inspection, 377 pupils were resident. It is a voluntary aided boarding and day school for boys and girls aged 11 years to 18 years. 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 small proportion of the pupils are selected on ability or aptitude. Currently, there are 313 day pupils at the school.

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 June 2022

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.

Date of last inspection: 18 June 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Outcomes for children who use the boarding provision are outstanding. Children make excellent and sustained progress in many areas of their lives. Children learn to become more responsible, to be trusted to be self-disciplined and commit to the daily routines of boarding life. Their experiences contribute to a marked improvement in confidence, social skills and independence, which will be a strong benefit for later life.

Mutually respectful, supportive and encouraging relationships between staff and children promote a caring and tolerant ethos. All members of staff in the boarding houses, as well as the wider school community, have excellent insight into children's needs and circumstances. Staff are all aware which individuals, at any given time, need additional support; this leads to a strong sense of belonging and stability. One child said, 'I love it here. Activities are great, and you get to spend time with your friends.'

Meticulous attention is paid to the promotion of children's health and well-being, including their emotional and mental health. The school medical team is readily available to offer treatment or advice on any issues. Children receive emotional support through the on-site therapist when required. Should children require external specialist help, this is quickly sourced and provided. Systems are in place to ensure medication is administered and stored safely. Where required, detailed welfare plans are in place to support children's specific needs. These are kept under close review to ensure that they reflect the child's current situation and needs.

Charity work has been completed by a member of staff to support children in receiving chest screening to identify cardiac deficiencies at an early stage, which further enhances children's health. Furthermore, this work is proving so popular that the school is supporting the expansion of this to the wider community. This shows that the school places a high priority on reaching out into the community and involving children in projects which benefit those in wider society.

Many children that the inspectors met had exceptional qualities: ambition, empathy, a desire to make the most of their opportunities and personal confidence. There is strong evidence that the school has generated these qualities, and that the children's potential has accelerated because of their experience of boarding.

Children are confident that their views are taken seriously. There is a firm commitment to listening to children and responding to any collective and individual concerns. Children have a strong voice in boarding, and they have many opportunities to put their views across. They have been influential in making changes to the boarding provision. For example, when children asked for a cooking club, this was implemented a short time later and now runs regularly.

Children can contact their families and friends using personal mobile phones or the phones in the staff office. Because of this, they can maintain frequent communication with key figures in their lives.

Children are enabled to prepare for the transition to adulthood through learning and developing independence skills in accordance with their age and ability. One parent reported, 'My children are challenged and supported academically, are encouraged to be well-rounded young people with a great balance between focus on strong academics and focus on personal skills and well-being.'

The provision of activities on and off the school site is excellent and includes opportunities for children to attend local clubs and community events. The wide choice of activities caters for all interests, enabling children to pursue their own hobbies and to try new ones.

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

A strong commitment to protecting children from harm underpins practice in the boarding provision, with safeguarding at the centre of all practice. Children report that they feel safe and that they have an adult whom they trust and can talk to about any concerns. There is also a secure post box where they can share confidential concerns with the house parents directly.

Safeguarding concerns are thoroughly addressed with partner agencies, such as the local authority children's services and the police. This results in excellent multi-agency planning that protects all children. Children learn how to look after themselves, and the staff closely monitor the impact of welfare plans to keep everyone safe. When home life becomes increasingly difficult, the school provides additional support to children to see them through a challenging period.

Designated safeguarding leads use a safeguarding software tool to provide an oversight of the key issues and trends across the whole school environment. All staff are diligent in adding any concerns about children's well-being. Children trust staff and tell them of any concerns they have about themselves, others or situations at home. The comprehensive monitoring and recording systems allow leaders to build up a picture of each child's needs. They are able to direct resources, such as referring to on-site support or signposting to other agencies. Leaders maximise the opportunities from the trends and patterns they identify to promote children's welfare to the highest possible standard.

Children act as excellent ambassadors for their school. Behaviour is of an exemplary standard and all children are clearly aware of the rules, routines and high expectations. Sanctions, when used, are appropriate and proportionate. Children were unanimous in their feedback that they are treated fairly. Additionally, leaders

use a software tool to examine any disciplinary records to see if there are any themes developing and to ensure that they are fair.

Serious sanctions, such as fixed or permanent exclusions, are carefully considered and scrutinised by both the headteacher and governors. This ensures that due process is followed and that the decision made is justified and proportionate.

The day-to-day safety of children is managed using regularly reviewed risk assessments. These cover activities at the premises and activities away from the school. Management of fire safety is good, with regular evacuation drills and testing of equipment. Staff undertake regular, recorded checks of the safety of the premises and outside contractors certify the safety of crucial equipment, such as fire appliances. Risk assessments of the buildings consider patterns and trends to address any emerging problems.

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.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The senior management team is a strong and effective outward-looking management team that provides strong and decisive leadership. This is a school team that strives for continuous improvement and excellence. Staff say that their work is 'massively rewarding'. They have a very positive attitude towards the children and are ambitious and aspirational for the children. All staff are highly skilled in communicating with and engaging children. All children and parents report that they have positive relationships with staff, and children say they enjoy their boarding experiences.

Staff undertake a high-quality induction programme and a wide range of training. There is a high level of training about safeguarding matters such as whistle-blowing and radicalisation. In addition, staff receive specific training about children's individual health conditions. Consequently, staff are equipped with the skills and knowledge to meet the needs of children.

Teachers also work as boarding staff. This provides additional support for children with homework and revision. Communication between boarding and teaching staff is also enhanced by this crossover of roles. Combined with the effective role of the house matrons, children receive a very supportive wraparound service.

Members of the governing body maintain a visible presence in the school. Governors undertake independent visits to the boarding accommodation and produce clear reports on their findings. There are systems in place to ensure that the governing body is kept fully informed of any safeguarding matters. This allows the governors to maintain good oversight of safeguarding practice at the school.

Feedback from parents is overwhelmingly positive. One parent reported, 'The school goes above and beyond in providing the support to enable pupils to achieve their potential. I feel that staff know my child well and that there is a feeling of mutual respect between staff and pupils.'

Staff are valued equally and respect each other's roles in contributing to promoting the best outcomes for children. Collaborative working and a willingness to try new support strategies result in children receiving appropriate and responsive guidance to advance their development.

Leaders have good relationships with professionals in local health services, parents and the local authority safeguarding teams. This gives children the best possible support when needed.

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/teacher in charge: Paul Kilbride

Type of school: Boarding school

Telephone number: 01384 817300

Email address: pkilbride@oshsch.com

Inspectors

Dave Carrigan, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Jodie Lewis, Social Care Inspector

Karol Keenan, Social Care Inspector

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