

# St Michael's School

The Society of St Pius X

St. Michaels School, Harts Lane, Burghclere, Newbury, Berkshire RG20 9JW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this boarding school

This non-affiliated independent boarding school is registered for pupils aged from four to 18. It opened in 1991 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 26 full-time boarders.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

### Inspection dates: 26 to 28 September 2023

**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.

**Date of last inspection:** 15 October 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

Children benefit from the care and support of dedicated, passionate and professional staff. The strong ethos of the school informs practice in all areas of children's lives. Staff focus on the rounded development of the children. They place equal value on academic, personal, emotional and spiritual development. Staff aim to support children to become healthy, happy and successful adults whose lives are enriched by the spiritual values of the school.

Since the last inspection, staff have invested time in developing some sophisticated tools for tracking the progress of children through their school lives. This has been further enhanced by the introduction of a well-received programme of incentives and rewards that encourage children to think about their conduct, engagement and personal contribution to the school community.

Staff are able to demonstrate progress in children's education, behaviour and attitude. Children are positive about the impact of the school on their personal growth.

Staff share information effectively with colleagues across the school and work cohesively to support children through any challenges that they face.

Children feel well supported and express deep levels of trust in the staff. They feel confident that they can share any personal concerns and worries with them. They are confident that they will be listened to and that their views are taken seriously.

Children are given opportunities to engage in decision-making and express their views and opinions through formal channels, such as the school council and suggestion boxes, and informal opportunities, including day-to-day discussion with staff. Children gave examples of changes that have been made as a direct result of their feedback to senior staff.

Children have access to a wide range of age-appropriate recreational facilities on site. Outside school hours, children are active and busy (some children highlighted that it is also important to have unstructured time).

Some children approaching the end of their studies at the school talked about feelings of isolation from the local community and having limited chances to mix with children from other schools. They expressed the wish to make more use of resources in the local community.

The school environment is clean and well maintained. However, some of the spaces that children use after school are underdeveloped and could benefit from investment. In particular, the Year 11 senior common room needs updating and renovating.

Staff manage new admissions to the school well and new children and their parents are given high-quality resources that provide all the information they need to maximise chances of a successful transition into the school. Staff show a well-developed understanding of the emotional and practical challenges that children face as they arrive. Staff give much care and thought to helping children to settle into the community.

Children's behaviour and conduct are of a very high standard. In general, children support each other and demonstrate high levels of respect for staff, other children and the guiding principles of school life.

Parents express consistently high levels of regard for the quality of support that their children receive in the boarding provision.

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

Safeguarding arrangements are effective. When there are concerns, leaders take effective action to ensure that children are safe. Where appropriate, leaders seek advice from the relevant external safeguarding partners.

Children are confident that they can speak to any adult about concerns and that these will be acted on. They also have access to an independent visitor who visits and spends time with them every half term.

When a child briefly left the premises without authorisation, leaders took swift action to prevent recurrence. Staff worked closely with the child to help them feel more settled. These actions were well considered and, as a result, there have been no subsequent episodes of the child going missing.

Staff respond sensitively to the health and pastoral support needs of children, whether this is in helping homesick children to settle into the boarding provision or in supporting children with homework if they need additional help.

There is a strong sense of promoting positive behaviour. Where there are incidents of problematic behaviour, these are managed in a way that does not require physical intervention but instead focuses on positive dialogue and distraction.

Leaders have clear risk assessments and understand the vulnerabilities of the children well. They support children to learn to be safe through their education and through informal discussions with them during free time. Extra-curricular activities, such as cadets and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, help to consolidate this learning.

Staff recruitment processes are clear and follow safer recruitment principles, with robust checks being completed, ensuring that staff are safe to work in the boarding provision. On one occasion, the recording process outlining how references had been

sought was not clear. However, leaders made amendments to their recording processes during the inspection to resolve this.

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

Leaders share a clear vision for the school and are united in their desire to provide children with the best possible experience of school life. They role model their values to the whole boarding team, which helps to create shared values and a consistent approach to the support children receive as boarders.

Leaders have high expectations of their staff. Leaders use a process of professional appraisal to support the continuous development of the team. Staff have clear targets to work towards. Leaders also identify shared goals and ambitious aims for the continued improvement of the school. Leaders are child-focused and decisions they make always place the needs of children at the centre of their planning.

Staff feel well supported through a process of supervision and appraisal. Staff described their leaders as caring, supportive and always willing to share advice and learning opportunities throughout the year. Leaders ensure that staff have access to regular formal training. Staff also spoke about the importance of day-to-day conversations with leaders, which enhance their experience of learning and development.

Leaders demonstrate a good understanding of what the boarding provision does well and the areas that need improvement. There have been some very positive developments since the last inspection. These include progress tracking, evidencing the impact of staff on the personal development of children, and managing the operational infrastructure of the boarding provision.

Leaders ensure that children have lots of opportunities to learn about alternative faiths, belief systems and lifestyle choices, both formally through the school curriculum and informally. Leaders make time to create opportunities for informal dialogue with children and help children to think about important issues that affect them as they make their journey towards adulthood.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Leaders should review systems in place to support the personal growth and independence skills of older children and consider whether more could be done to prepare them for independence as they transition from the school.
- Leaders should continue to develop links to the local community and support children to have access to as wide a range of experiences as possible, including opportunities to meet and interact with children from outside the school environment.
- Leaders should engage children in discussions around effective ways to utilise available space at the school. In particular, consider ways that junior and senior children can have their own dedicated recreational spaces.

### **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:** Father John Brucciani

**Type of school:** Boarding school

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## **Inspectors**

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Jay Shekleton, Social Care Inspector

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