

Royal Grammar School

Royal Grammar School High Wycombe

Royal Grammar School, Amersham Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire HP13 6QT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

This school is a selective maintained school with academy status for boys aged 11 to 19 years. At the time of the inspection, there were 1,422 students on roll and 70 boarders. Accommodation for boarders is on the school site.

Only the residential provision was inspected at this inspection.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 November 2023

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: outstanding

Date of last inspection: 8 October 2019

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The boarding house is welcoming, vibrant and well maintained. There is ample space for the children to spend time socialising and playing games. The bedrooms are clean, well kept and provide space for children to study and relax.

Staff and leaders know the children's needs well. They are aware of their family dynamics and when further support may be needed. When difficult situations arise, staff support children and ensure that they can share their experiences. Concerns affecting children's welfare when away from the school are shared with external safeguarding professionals when required.

Information about children is readily sought prior to them moving into the boarding provision. Children partake in an in-depth interview with boarding staff which asks them about all areas of their lives. This includes sleep routines, social interactions, preferences and what their expectations of boarding are. This helps leaders and staff to understand children's needs prior to them moving in.

Children make significant progress from their starting points. For example, children new to boarding quickly grow in confidence, they go on to establish positive relationships, become more sociable and take part in many activities. One child started their boarding experience with high academic aspirations. However, they experienced personal challenges that could have disrupted their progress. In response, leaders advocated strongly for the child and devised a supportive plan to help them through their difficulties. Consequently, the child remained in education, built secure relationships and excelled in all aspects of their life. The child achieved even more than expected and is now well equipped for university.

Children help to create an independence plan with their boarding tutors. This supports children to develop their independence skills. Targets set in these plans are realistic and include all aspects of a child's life. This helps boarding tutors to engage with children and monitor not only progress, but also their well-being. Children's views and experiences are also captured well in meetings and reviews.

Children with additional responsibilities, such as prefects, are well equipped for the role. There is a leadership pathway for different opportunities in the boarding provision. This prepares children well for different roles, including mentoring, volunteering, leading house debates and representing the school. The experience obtained from these roles provides children with transferable skills for future positions when they leave. Prefects are rightly proud of their role and highlight how this has had a positive impact on them and the culture in the provision.

Children have ample opportunity to engage in a range of fun activities, including sports and games. There are regular boarding council meetings that have a positive

impact on the children's experiences and ensure that their voices are heard. The work of the boarding council has ensured improvements to the facilities and has influenced how the boarding budget is spent. All children benefit from the decisions made by this and other children's councils.

The children are overwhelmingly positive about their experiences as boarders. One child explained, 'It's really open and supportive; there is something great about everyone.'

A designated medical room is available to children, in which they can consult with a nurse and seek support if needed. The support is not just in relation to their physical health needs but also includes children's emotional well-being. The nurse's knowledge of the individual children helps her to support them in many aspects of their lives. There is good communication between the matron, the chef and boarding staff to ensure that they all have a holistic understanding of the children's needs.

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

Senior leaders and governors ensure that the safeguarding culture in the boarding house is exceptionally strong. Safeguarding is seen as everybody's responsibility, regardless of role. As a result, all staff, including domestic staff complete relevant safeguarding training. This supports staff to be extremely vigilant. Everyone works hard to ensure that children are safe. Consequently, children can, and do, speak up without fear if they are concerned.

Leaders and governors ensure that they keep up to date with changing legislation and policies that relate to safeguarding. This is further enhanced by the regular oversight, communication and input from the safeguarding governor, who describes the safeguarding culture as 'scrupulous, safe, constantly alert and caring'.

Children complete an annual safety survey that is devised and reviewed by leaders. Responses are overwhelmingly positive, and children consistently state that they feel safe.

Concerns reported by children are taken seriously. Effective leadership oversight ensures that the children's welfare is paramount. Children in prefect roles have received safeguarding training. Consequently, children have a range of people that they can approach with any concerns.

Referrals are made to the local authority safeguarding team in a timely way when required, appropriate investigations are carried out and action is taken when improvements are identified.

The staff promote positive behaviour through merits and praise. When a child's behaviour causes concern, staff are quick to speak with them and resolve any issues.

Vigorous safer recruitment procedures ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children. Highly effective systems allow leaders and the safeguarding governor to assess the fitness of all individuals who work in the boarding provision. Leaders also randomly sample staff records to ensure that the expected high standards are maintained.

COVID-19 was a huge challenge for the boarding provision. During the initial lockdown, the provision needed to close. This resulted in some international boarders being unable to return home. Leaders ensured that these children were supported emotionally and that suitable accommodation arrangements were made. Leaders and managers maintained contact with all children during the closure. This helped children to keep on making academic progress and experience a smooth move back to boarding when restrictions were lifted.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The members of the senior leadership team constantly look at how they can improve the experiences for the children, and they seek regular feedback from them, their families and carers. Research-informed practice is embedded throughout the boarding house. Senior leaders visit other boarding schools and share practice and learning. This has led to changes that enhance the children's progress and experiences.

The senior leadership team takes pride in the quality of care provided to the children and the progress that they make. They are aspirational for all the children and value the sense of community that the boarding experience brings. They place the children at the centre of all that they do, and the children feel this during their boarding experience.

There is effective communication between boarding staff, education staff and families. Regular updates are shared so that staff can meet children's needs. Senior leaders know the children very well and advocate for them. They challenge other professionals when this is needed. Parents' and carers' feedback is overwhelmingly positive. One parent stated that their child's boarding experience is 'absolutely brilliant'. They went on to say, '[Name of child] is the happiest that they have ever been. Staff are amazing, caring and nurturing.'

Boarding staff thoroughly enjoy their work and speak positively about the support that they and the children receive. Senior leaders are visible, approachable and supportive. Staff induction and training are bespoke and ensure that all staff have the relevant knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles.

Staff find their supervision and appraisals meaningful and effective. This is because they provide opportunities to focus on professional development, reflect on practice and discuss any issues. Staff say that they feel confident to share any concerns with leaders and managers.

The members of the governing body are provided with regular reports by the senior leadership team, and they ensure effective oversight of the boarding provision. Governors undertake regular visits to the boarding house and use their expertise to provide support in areas such as safeguarding practice and policy oversight.

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: SC049244

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspectors

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