

Reading School

Reading School, Main House, Erleigh Road, Reading RG1 5LW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Reading school is a selective maintained school with academy status for boys aged 11 to 18 years. There are 88 pupils who are boarders. Boarders are accommodated in two separate boarding houses, South House and East Wing. The school does not offer weekend boarding. The school is situated close to the centre of Reading, Berkshire and has good access to all facilities in the local area.

This inspection was carried out at the same time as an inspection of the school.

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 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: 4 February 2020

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thrive because of the warm and caring relationships that they have with staff. They are enthusiastic when talking about the staff who care for them, the social aspect of boarding, and the extra support that they have for their academic studies. Staff support children to become rounded individuals academically and socially.

Staff know each child extremely well. Parents praise the support, commitment and dedication of the boarding staff. They are pleased with the level of care that their children receive and how much progress their children make.

Children feel heard by staff. If they raise an issue, they know that it will not be disregarded. As well as talking to staff, children can share their ideas through 'student voice', the opinions and suggestions box, and the student-led survey. Children say that the school leaders respond positively to any requests that they make.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities both on site and in the community. They learn new skills, such as cooking and how to share communal kitchens in preparation for going to university. Half-termly 'big trips' are particularly enjoyed. Children talked excitedly about canoeing and going to France, among many other experiences.

The staff are flexible in their approach to meeting the children's individual needs, with a highly effective transition process prior to children moving in. While places are allocated on merit, there is some flexibility regarding who can access the boarding provision. Children say that they know exactly what to expect when they arrive, and are welcomed by other children. Children's experiences are valued and they learn from their older peers. Year 8 children help to prepare the new Year 7 children, and they relish this responsibility.

Children enjoy supporting community projects, charities and visiting local primary schools to help other children realise what they can achieve. The boarding provision is part of the community. Leaders have helped the neighbouring hospital by offering emergency helicopter landing space.

Children's health and well-being needs are well met. Matrons are central to understanding and meeting the health needs of the children. Children are well looked after and supported to understand healthy lifestyles and what this means for them. Medication is appropriately stored and monitored. Links with emotional well-being specialists are excellent, including the school's counsellor. Children with specific health needs are all known to staff who have training in how to respond should there be a medical emergency.

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

The staff in the boarding houses have an exceptional understanding of the children's needs and their family dynamics. Children all identify staff who they would approach if they were worried or upset. They talk enthusiastically about boarding and the time they spend with residential staff and the house masters. Older children help younger children and model how to behave, while recognising their limitations and when staff support is required.

There is a strong safeguarding culture and staff recognise that any child could be at risk. Staff respond promptly and sensitively when any safeguarding concerns arise. They support children and families to be part of safeguarding processes, being transparent in their actions. Prefects know their responsibilities should a child raise a safeguarding concern and are proud to help other children to feel safe.

Staff know the local area and risks that children may be subject to in the community. Children are afforded the opportunity to take age-appropriate risks. Children say that they feel safe due to the increased site security and signing-in electronically to lessons, boarding, and activities throughout the day.

Staff have a keen focus on and understanding of the importance of relationships. They are attuned to social concerns and issues that impact the wider community. These include female safety in the community and how males can be respectful of these concerns. Staff support children to welcome refugees into the school.

Children are thoughtful of their peers and staff. They are respectful of each other, and from early in their boarding experience, learn how to live alongside each other in a shared community. Boundaries and expectations are clear but not rigid, allowing space for individual personalities to shine. Children are given responsibility to adopt a positive presence within the home and are allowed to take age-appropriate risks.

Bullying is infrequent. When concerns are raised, all parties are supported to reflect on and understand how each other felt. The restorative approach to behaviour management and the subsequent rebuilding of relationships are a key strength. This approach helps children to learn how to manage relationships and live alongside each other.

Staff demonstrate an exceptional understanding of and support for children who are at risk of harm due to their emotional well-being. There are clear monitoring systems and 'check ins' for children, ensuring that staff act in a timely way. Effective engagement with parents is key to the effectiveness of this approach.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The boarding staff are highly aspirational and want the best for children. They are dedicated, tenacious and genuinely care about the children, beyond the expectations of their role.

Leaders regularly monitor children's progress both academically and socially. They review how they are getting along with their peers, as well as having oversight of any emotional or behavioural issues that may be arising. Children's plans are clear in the support needed and detail how the child can develop their own coping mechanisms and resilience.

Staff feel well supported by the senior leaders and the rest of the team in boarding. Many staff have grown and developed into these roles and understand the ethos of the boarding provision.

The monitoring of the boarding provision is effective. Leaders are constantly reviewing all aspects of the care provided. There is a culture of improvement. Leaders are not complacent, and always want to do more. Governance structures are clear and effective.

Complaints are dealt with sensitively and proactively. They are responded to swiftly, and independent investigators are used when needed.

Promoting tolerance and diversity is a particular strength in the boarding provision. Children know that they can be themselves, and talk enthusiastically about this. Discriminatory language is not tolerated. Children are educated on why this is wrong, and diversity and difference are championed. There are proportionate responses to indiscretions, which is something that children value.

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: SC054201

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Ashley Robson

Type of school: Boarding School

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Inspectors

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector (lead)
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