

Gordon's School

Gordon's School Academy Trust

Gordon's School, Bagshot Road, West End, Woking, Surrey GU24 9PT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Gordon's School is a co-educational academy which offers residential and day boarding for students aged from 11 to 18 years. Residential boarding is offered in five houses within the school grounds. Traditionally, the school has offered boarding to children with parents in the Armed Forces, in addition to children who live locally, or whose parents live further away or overseas.

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

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 January 2024

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: 18 June 2019

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students are exemplary, and they are a credit to this boarding school. Students thrive and make excellent progress because of the genuine and nurturing relationships they have with boarding staff. Staff encourage students to develop new talents and skills and to participate in invigorating opportunities. The boarding accommodation is of a very high standard and provides a homely feel. One student said, 'It is like home from home.'

Leaders creatively group students into 'house families' to help create the feel of an extended family. Students say that this helps them to feel included and gives them opportunities to join in with house games and competitions and to access mentoring support. Older students who excel in their academic studies actively support younger students with their work. Students say that this helps them to prepare for the days ahead.

Students' views are central to the development of the boarding provision and improvements are made that are important to them. The student boarding council, and several different committees, champion students' views, wishes and feelings. When changes cannot be made, students still feel that their views have been heard and they receive feedback on the decision.

Staff are inquisitive about students' mental health. They are alert to changes in their presentation, have regular 'check ins' and talk with students about their worries and feelings. Staff consider students' home lives and the time that they spend away from boarding to help enhance students' boarding experiences.

Staff celebrate students' individuality and respect their freedom to explore their identities. Staff act as positive role models and encourage open discussions. They organise meetings with students to discuss identity and provide a safe space for conversation.

House parents quickly identify students' needs and go above and beyond in helping them to receive specialist support, such as clinical assessments to help them receive services without delay. This helps students get the support needed to ensure continued progress.

Students with special educational needs receive a high level of individualised support. The special educational needs coordinator has excellent oversight of students' needs. Staff are well trained. They understand students' needs and use research-based approaches to help them to achieve.

Parents are unanimous in their praise of the support and kindness that students receive from staff. One parent said, 'I can't thank the staff enough.'

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

Through exceptional support, students have developed trusting relationships with staff. These relationships help to keep children safe because they can communicate their worries to staff, who respond appropriately and have their best interests at heart.

There is a dedicated safeguarding lead who ensures that all staff understand their roles and responsibilities in keeping students safe. She is well supported by the leadership team, which meets regularly and shares safeguarding responsibilities when the safeguarding lead is not available. Immediate risk assessments are implemented when a safeguarding concern arises, and referrals are made to the local authority designated officer when appropriate. Learning from every situation is identified to reduce future risks.

There is a strong anti-bullying culture in the school. Staff have empowered students to take on anti-bullying ambassador roles. Students are provided with training to prepare them for this. These students offer support to others and raise concerns with teaching staff. Students have regular meetings about bullying and report that things change as a result. Students educate peers on bullying through awareness weeks, assemblies and discussions in boarding houses.

Staff provide consistent guidance and boundaries that students follow. Students are clear about the consequences should they not follow the rules. Students believe that the rules are clear and fair and that they are well balanced with rewards that they receive for positive behaviours.

Students feel safe and are well supported in the boarding provision. They can raise any concerns with a wide range of people, including senior students, house parents or the independent person. They can also raise concerns anonymously should they wish. Students are confident that their concerns will be listened to and addressed.

Staff understand the risks that students may face online. The school's internet has robust filtering systems. When students are searching for subjects of concern, staff are immediately alerted. This means that they can provide additional support and raise any safeguarding concerns as necessary. Students understand the rules that govern the use of electronic devices in the boarding houses.

Staff and on-site registered nurses prioritise students' medical needs. Nurses are always available to students, and they work collaboratively with external consultants and local health services. This ensures that students' prescribed medication is regularly reviewed and that all health needs are met. Nurses are leading experts in many students' health conditions. They work collaboratively with other professionals to improve and strengthen students' health support systems.

Nurses assess whether students are confident and capable to administer their own medication. For some students, this is a significant achievement and promotes their self-awareness and independence.

Good sexual health is promoted. There is abundance of resources and workshops available for students to help strengthen their knowledge and understanding about how to keep safe in relationships. Further to this, key nurses are trained to ask students the right questions.

The school benefits from an experienced and competent facilities team. There are well-established recording and monitoring systems, which enables the boarding provision to remain safe and fit for purpose. The members of the facilities team fully understand their roles and carry them out with effort and attention to detail. Records are exceptionally well managed and effective actions are taken when needed.

Recruitment processes are clear and well established. They follow safer recruitment principles and ensure that staff are suitable to work with children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leadership in the school is excellent. Senior leaders have a very clear and shared vision that they are passionate about.

Leaders know the provision's strengths and weaknesses. They are committed to continuously improving the boarding provision to ensure that it meets the changing needs of the students who stay.

Staff receive high-quality training. They feel valued by the house parents and say that they go 'over and above' to support their personal and professional development. The systematic review of staff development means that staff are supported to continually develop and hone their skills. For example, leaders are funding a Master's degree in children's attachment and trauma for one member of boarding staff.

Staff benefit from excellent induction and development processes that allow them to settle into their new roles confidently. Existing team members provide an added layer of guidance and support to new colleagues. This inclusive and welcoming environment results in excellent staff retention. Students benefit greatly from the stability and familiarity that this brings.

Staff speak enthusiastically about their roles and the support that they receive to be successful. The training and appraisal process helps them to feel valued and confident in delivering high-quality care to students. Staff have an excellent understanding of students' individual progress and take pride in celebrating how meaningful this is to each student.

The governors have strong oversight of the boarding provision. Governors meet with student groups and spend time in the boarding provision speaking with staff and students to understand their experiences. The governor for safeguarding and boarding is well trained and knowledgeable. Governors understand the diverse backgrounds of students and how leaders ensure that students' needs are met. The governors share the high aspirations of the senior leadership team and their aims for students to have the best preparation for adulthood. Governors scrutinise the senior leaders' work to ensure that the boarding provision is of the highest quality.

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

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