

# 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 490 boarding places. At the time of this inspection, 270 tailored boarders and 321 flexi boarders 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. 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 1040 pupils at the school.

### Inspection dates: 19 to 21 January 2026

**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:** 28 June 2022

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Boarders make exceptional progress and their experiences are excellent. Their confidence, self-esteem and emotional resilience grow. These positive experiences enrich their lives, support their personal development and broaden their future opportunities.

New boarders are warmly welcomed. Peer mentoring is a particular strength with senior boarders providing positive role modelling and thoughtful guidance to junior boarders which creates an inclusive and warm culture. The long-established mentoring and friendship in action programme offers structured peer support and promotes friendship. These approaches create a nurturing environment in which boarders feel secure.

The boarding house accommodation provides a homely environment, a view consistently shared by boarders. It is warm, welcoming and designed to support comfort and contributes to the strong sense of community. Bedrooms and dormitories are personalised with family photographs and treasured items, helping boarders to remain connected to loved ones. This personalisation strengthens a sense of belonging and ownership of these spaces.

Boarders are inspired to achieve and aim high. A strong aspirational ethos is evident in their motivation, pride and willingness to take on responsibility. They speak enthusiastically about their roles, particularly the valued prefect positions, which they view as a sign of trust and maturity. Matrons and housemasters use everyday interactions to model and reinforce expectations and values. As a result, boarders work hard, believe in themselves and develop into capable, resilient and responsible young people.

The views of boarders are listened to, respected and acted upon. The boarding council meets regularly and gives boarders an influential voice in shaping their experiences. Discussions during council meetings are followed up promptly and lead to change such as extending opportunities that boarders enjoy.

Cross-curricular activities are a notable strength. A parent reported, 'My son has had some wonderful opportunities through music.' Boarders speak very positively about the fantastic and wide range of opportunities available to them after school and at weekends, highlighting how much they enjoy and value them. Their positive feedback shows that the programme enables them to participate in enriching activities beyond the classroom.

Boarders' holistic needs are prioritised and well met. They receive sensitive and tailored support that promotes their emotional wellbeing and helps them understand

and manage their health conditions. Leaders ensure that boarders can access the health services that they need, and medication is managed safely in a way that promotes increasing independence. This enables boarders to develop important skills to take responsibility for their own health as they prepare for adulthood. Boarders also benefit from a proactive and innovative approach to managing sports-related concussion. Close collaboration with a specialist provider ensures boarders receive timely expert advice, supporting a well-coordinated recovery and safe return to playing sport following injury.

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

Boarders feel safe, and robust safeguarding practice is firmly embedded into all aspects of boarding life. Staff receive high-quality training that equips them well to identify, report and respond to concerns. Safeguarding responsibilities are understood and this culture of vigilance means boarders are protected from harm.

A dedicated, non-teaching designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is in post. Their social care background brings enhanced professional expertise and increased capacity to the senior leadership team. Their focused oversight has strengthened safeguarding arrangements further, ensuring that safeguarding concerns are managed to a high standard and contribute to improved outcomes for boarders.

Robust action is taken in response to safeguarding concerns, including serious incidents. Any concerns about staff are managed appropriately and effectively. Leaders reflect effectively on all incidents and take clear, constructive action when any learning is identified. This was demonstrated when boarders went missing on one occasion. Staff contacted the police promptly; however, an up-to-date photograph of the boarders was not available to support the search.

Boarders say bullying is not an issue. Staff maintain robust oversight of relationships and, and any incidents including low-level or emerging concerns are promptly recorded and monitored. This enables leaders to identify patterns at an early stage and take decisive action where needed. On the rare occasions when bullying does occur, staff respond swiftly and effectively. Boarders report that they feel safe, listened to and confident that any concerns they raise will be addressed appropriately.

Positive behaviour is consistently promoted by staff. Staff clearly understand their safeguarding responsibilities and there are established systems that provide a strong safeguarding culture. Staff consider the individual behaviours of boarders alongside the risks they face, enabling well-informed and proportionate responses. This approach ensures that if the behaviour of boarders falls below expectations it is managed fairly and consistently across the boarding houses. Clear procedures empower staff to act with appropriate autonomy, supporting a preventative and restorative approach that reduces escalation and promotes wellbeing and safety. As

a result, boarders experience a calm environment where risks are well understood and are effectively reduced.

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

The boarding provision is led by an exceptionally committed and ambitious senior leadership team who have high aspirations for every boarder. A parent reported, 'The headmaster is very personable and communicates the importance of striving for the being best version of yourself at all times which I feel is a very important message for young people.' Regardless of ability, all boarders are consistently encouraged, challenged and supported to achieve their potential. The provision is stable, nurturing and highly effective, with an unwavering focus on wellbeing and personal development. Governors maintain an active presence, engaging directly with staff, parents, carers and boarders, demonstrating informed oversight across the boarding houses.

The guidance and daily support provided by matrons is a particular strength and matrons are unanimously praised by parents and carers. Working seamlessly with housemasters, they create an environment where boarders flourish. Relationships between matrons, housemasters and boarders are characterised by warmth, respect and genuine care. As a result, boarders feel valued and well supported.

Leaders know the strengths and development areas of the provision well and can demonstrate improvements are sustained over time. Clear and purposeful plans are in place to drive continual development, ensuring that changes directly benefit boarders and further enhance their boarding experience.

A culture of learning is firmly embedded and underpinned by innovative, research-informed practice. This culture continues to develop from a strong and confident foundation, resulting in an exceptional difference to the boarders' experiences. The varied and well-structured staff training programme is responsive to the needs of the boarders. As a result, the workforce is skilled and knowledgeable. This means staff are consistently able to meet the boarders needs and this contributes positively to their development.

Complaints are well managed in line with the established complaints process. Records provide clear and detailed accounts of each concern, the actions taken and the outcomes achieved. Complaints are addressed promptly and effectively, ensuring that issues are resolved in a timely manner and that boarders, parents and carers feel listened to and supported.

Housemasters receive regular and structured supervision from the designated safeguarding lead, and plans are in place to extend this support to matrons. Although matrons do not yet have formalised supervision, they meet frequently with

the housemaster to discuss house routines and the individual needs of boarders, ensuring day-to-day practice remains well coordinated.

Some staff who have personal relationships work closely together. Leaders recognise that such arrangements can present a potential risk of a closed culture. This risk is not yet explored in sufficient depth within existing supervision. Leaders, demonstrate insight and oversight of closed cultures and they are actively strengthening supervision arrangements across the boarding provision.

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

### **Points for improvement**

- Ensure up to date photographs are available of boarders.
- Provide more opportunities for house masters and matrons to formally review their practice.

### **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:** Mr Paul Kilbride

**Type of school:** Boarding School

**Telephone number:** 01384 817300

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## **Inspectors**

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