

Stanbridge Earls School

Inspection report for Residential Special School

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Inspector	Roy Bega
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good: this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

Stanbridge Earls is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged 10 years to 19 years. The school specialises in providing education for young people with a range of special educational needs, most notably those with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dyspraxia. The school has specialist and experienced teaching staff and high teacher to pupil ratios.

The school is located in 50 acres of landscaped grounds close to the small town of Romsey. The majority of pupils are boarders and the boarding provision is organised by year group into eight residential units of varying size.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This announced annual social care inspection took place over a period of two days with all key standards being assessed. It happened at the same time as the Independent School's Inspectorate's visit who produce an independent report.

No recommendations were raised resulting from the previous and this inspection.

Stanbridge Earls School is efficiently run by an experienced senior management team that is led by an enthusiastic headteacher. The overall standard of care for boarders at the school is outstanding. They are cared for by a committed and highly motivated integrated team. There is excellent provision for consulting with boarders and for celebrating their achievements. Management has a strong commitment to professional development. Staff are constantly engaged in training that enables them to reflect and update their practice, skills and knowledge required for working with young people within a therapeutic community. The staff team demonstrate an informed awareness of their responsibilities in safeguarding and are fully aware of the vulnerability of the young people they care for. Parents, carers and significant others comment positively on the emphasis that the school places on ensuring young people are safe at all times. Boarders are encouraged to help and consider others and to reflect on the impact their behaviour has on all members of the community. They express their confidence in the staff that listen to them and help sort out their issues and concerns. The school is currently in the process of a refurbishment and building programme which is improving boarding facilities. The promotion of equality and diversity throughout the school is outstanding. Management and staff create an atmosphere and ethos where meeting individual needs is paramount.

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations were raised resulting from the previous inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school provides an excellent level of support for boarders' health care needs in liaison with parents and placing authorities. All medical and health care needs are rigorously overseen and monitored by the school's health care manager. Good information is received on health care needs as part of referral and admission processes and incorporated into health care plans and records maintained by the health care manager. This helps to ensure consistent meeting of needs during boarders' stays. Medication is safely received, administered and stored in the central medical room. Comments from parents include, 'Medical staff are excellent and keep us informed of any problems' and 'The health care of our daughter is second to none'.

Boarders benefit from 24 hour cover by the school nurses and regular health clinics. The school medical officer visits weekly. There is excellent liaison with the local health centre where boarders have independent access to a male or female doctor. The school also provides on site confidential counselling service for pupils to which they can self-refer. Pupils spoken with confirm having good access to the nurses, counsellor and doctor. They also confirm when unwell all staff are kind and helpful. Comments include, 'When I'm not well the nurses listen and look after me' and 'I can see the councillor and nurses at any time'.

Stanbridge Earls School provides excellent arrangements for health promotion. This includes citizenship programmes which are fully supported by tutors and the school's nurses and where applicable external agencies. Information is also available direct from the school nurses and displayed around the school. Boarders confirm the citizenship programmes cover a wide range of health related topics which helps them to understand things.

The concept of healthy living is well promoted throughout the school. Boarders are encouraged to eat wisely and take regular exercise. The catering provision is an outstanding aspect of the school which clearly demonstrates the importance placed on providing young people with healthy nutritious meals that meet their dietary and cultural needs. The catering manager has an open door policy where young people are enabled to approach them direct with particular needs and requests. Catering staff know individual young people's differing dietary requirements and are sensitive in ensuring they are met. The ambiance during meal times is relaxed and sociable. Boarders are fully aware of the school's emphasis on healthy eating and offer positive comments about this and the standard and choice of food. Also they are more than satisfied with the refurbished dining facilities and new catering systems. Comments made to the inspector include, 'Can ask cook for meals that I like', 'I have to have special meals which cook provides' and 'Food has improved, can go for

seconds'.

Recently young people participated in a cooking competition organised by teaching staff and the catering manager, which was held in the main dining room. The resulting culinary delights produced by the young people are now included as part of the menu plan.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders state that the school respects their privacy and confidentiality. Staff ensure that boarders' privacy is respected by modelling and teaching appropriate sensitive practice. This is reflected in the school's policies, procedures and guidance to staff. Confidential information about boarders is appropriately stored.

The school has an effective complaints procedure and information about this is available to boarders and parents in a range of formats. Boarders know how to complain and can name a range of people they are confident to speak with. Boarders and staff feel because issues are raised quickly and are proactively addressed there is little need for people to use the formal complaints procedure.

Stanbridge Earls School has a safeguarding procedure that is reviewed and updated annually. Staff are well informed and have up-to-date information on local safeguarding procedures. The school has nominated safeguarding officers who have attended the local authority's safeguarding training. A nominated school governor maintains an oversight of safeguarding matters within the school and feeds back regularly to the governing body. The school refers appropriate cases to the relevant authorities and notifies parents and other agencies in line with their safeguarding procedures.

Boarders identify a range of staff they can contact to discuss any worries about bullying and any concerns raised are quickly addressed. The school is proactive in reviewing practice to reduce incidents of bullying. The school's policy and procedure on unauthorised absences are clear and staff are aware of them. There have been no incidents since the last inspection.

Staff have outstanding understanding of young people who have complex communication difficulties. Staff are successful in achieving high standards of behaviour through developing an atmosphere, which is calm, orderly and purposeful and an ethos, which is positive and celebrates achievement. Boarders are encouraged, guided and taught how to understand what conduct is expected of them in various situations. For example, control and management of their own conduct and actions, and employing appropriate strategies when they experience difficulties.

Boarders express confidence in how to keep safe and secure within the school. For example, through regular fire drills they know what to do in case of a fire and if they see someone on the campus not known to them or without a visitor's badge their

response is to inform staff straight away. Safe procedures are in place to protect boarders through tests on fire systems and other electrical equipment at appropriate intervals. Environmental risk assessments are in place and systematically ensure that all potential hazards are identified and reduced.

The school continues to operate a robust staff vetting procedure. Staff recruitment files contain clear evidence of recruitment checks that have taken place prior to staff being employed. This includes an appropriate enhanced Criminal Record Bureau check. All adults who visit the boarding accommodation are supervised by staff. This excellent practice ensures that boarders are appropriately safeguarded.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The residential provision's contribution and support to the young people's education is well established. Care staff ensure young people regularly attend and arrive punctually at the school. Care staff are aware of the young people's educational needs and routinely contribute and attend reviews. There is excellent liaison between care and school staff. Comments from parents include, 'Boarding has been one of the most influential aspects of the positive progress for our son' and 'We have 100% confidence in the house parents'.

All boarders have evening prep within the education setting where they are supervised and supported by specialist subject teachers. Protected computer access in all boarding houses including boarders' own laptops provides additional access to the internet and educational resources. There is excellent support for boarders whose second language is English. Boarders confirm all staff at the school are very approachable with whom they are able to discuss personal or welfare problems.

Several upper school boarders spoken with confirm their lives have been turned around since attending the school. They provided the inspector with amazing accounts of their experiences. One example of a comment made is, 'Since coming here my life has been turned upside down for the right reason'. Another is, 'Before coming here I got excluded now I am doing 'A' levels'.

Although not a key standard it is important to recognise the quality and extensive range of activities on offer to boarding pupils. Both active and more sedate activities are on offer within the school to accommodate the needs and interests of most boarders'. This is supplemented by regular weekend off-site activities and trips to places of interest, recreation and entertainment. However comments from girl boarders indicate they would like more activities appropriate to their gender.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and influence the way the school operates. The staff are continuing to develop forums and communication tools that promote boarders' independence, social skills and community involvement. A boarder's right to communicate and express a view is key to the school's values and ethos and runs throughout their policies, procedures, staff guidance and information for parents and local education authorities. Boarders are consulted about every aspect of their care and education as well as activities and social events. They are also enabled to raise issues through formal structures such as the student councils and house meetings or informally through staff or the headteacher. It is identified by members of the school council that junior boarders experience difficulty in expressing their opinions within the current system. Therefore plans are in progress to develop an upper and lower school council. The opinions and views of boarders are proactively taken into account when decisions affecting welfare and the development of boarding are made.

Boarders' experience of admission to the school, transition during schooling and leaving is positive and well planned. There are clear policies, procedures and staff guidance that are well known to staff and proactively put into practice. Boarders feel well supported by staff and peers when they first arrive. One boarder said, 'Other children helped me. I didn't get lost because they showed me where I needed to go'. During this inspection junior boarders were observed to be very supportive in mentoring a young person visiting the school as part of their initial assessment. They assisted the new young person with routines around the campus, communal living within the boarding house and encouraging the participation in activities. The boarders who took on this role are to be commended regarding their support and enthusiasm in making the young person feel welcome and one of the group.

Staff are well informed of boarders' needs due to the collation of detailed information prior to placement and throughout a young person's education. This information is then sensitively and appropriately shared between departments and with external professionals. The school undertakes excellent work to promote the rights of young people with speech, language or communication difficulties to have equal access to work experience, further education and employment. This is achieved in partnership with parents who are geographically dispersed.

Boarders' assessed care needs are identified in a care plan, which is monitored and regularly reviewed by the core team of staff. This is a detailed plan, which sits alongside other documentation and specifically states how the school will care for each boarding pupil in accordance with his or her assessed needs and wishes. Each boarder has a key worker within the school who provides individual guidance and support in addition to the team of boarding staff also available to them. Boarders are supported to be meaningfully involved in their care plan and annual review by their key workers. All care workers work holistically with other professionals to meet any identified need whether it be a health, educational or speech, language and

communication need.

Boarders' relationships and contact with parents, family and friends is actively promoted by staff at Stanbridge Earls School. Meetings and discussions are held prior to a child's placement and open contact is maintained throughout a boarder's life at the school to discuss key issues. For example, progress, any concerns, achievements, to explore work experience placements near to home or support with transition either within school or on to employment or further education.

The school promotes contact with parents through telephone calls, newsletters home, regular individual reports, social events and parents days. Parents are welcome to telephone the school to speak to members of staff and there are pay phones available for boarders to call family and friends if they have not got their own mobile phone.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

All boarding areas are suitably restricted and protected. A number of bedrooms are shared and others provide single occupancy. All are furnished, maintained and cleaned to a very high standard. Young people are able to personalise their rooms and bring in their own possessions. Communal living areas are spacious, well maintained, equipped and cleaned to a very high standard. Boarders are able to wear their own clothes outside of school time and are encouraged to look after their own personal possessions. Senior boarders are suitably supported in the units to prepare for leaving school. The school continues to work hard to access appropriate and meaningful work experience placements.

The school continues to keep on course with its maintenance, refurbishment and new build improvement plan. Refurbishment and redecoration of the boys' John Attlee boarding house is completed, with the boys having an input into the colour schemes. This has involved the move away from four bedded dormitories and separate bathrooms, to new three and two bedded en-suite bedrooms. Refurbishments have been completed in other boarding houses with further work planned throughout 2010. The recently refurbished main kitchen and dining area is also utilised for a big screen cinema and other communal activities and receptions.

The school's latest building project to construct a 38 bedded senior boarding house is well underway and planned to be ready for the September 2010 term. This is a purpose built accommodation with single study bedrooms with en suite facilities. The building has the ability to be divided if necessary to provide both male and female senior accommodation with two bedrooms being equipped for young people who have a physical disability.

The school has its own well-equipped and well-staffed maintenance department to ensure any defects are swiftly rectified.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school's written statement of care principles and practices for boarders clearly describes what it sets out to do for the young people it accommodates, and the manner in which care is provided. Parents, staff and boarders have access to a range of detailed informative information, policies and procedures, available in a range of mediums and formats.

Boarders are looked after by staff who they feel understand their needs and promote their rights. Staff have excellent knowledge and experience of boarders who have speech, language and communication difficulties. Staff proactively support boarders in reaching their full potential by providing guidance, promoting their welfare and ensuring they are safeguarded. All staff receive a comprehensive induction, regular supervision and annual appraisals. All staff are provided with comprehensive policies, procedures and guidance that promotes the strong values and ethos of the school. Training events are frequent and staff comment positively on the quality of the courses.

Stanbridge Earls School has substantial strengths and where areas for improvement emerge the school recognises and manages them well. There are very clear lines of management and communication. The senior management team provide effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as complaints, safeguarding of children and discipline logs.

Consultation and regular communication ensures proper scrutiny and advancement of all aspects of a boarder's care. Any shortfalls in these areas are identified and addressed very quickly. This quality monitoring and other similar initiatives contribute to the school's overall strategic aims and their implementation.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The environment promotes the individual and diverse identities of boarders and this uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and understanding. All staff are sensitive to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of boarders and this is promoted through the school curriculum, assemblies and daily discussions. Boarders' enriched care and educational experience is underpinned by the school's coherent philosophy, values and strong management team. Stanbridge Earls School succeeds in meeting their stated objective to promote a learning environment which enables all boarders to fulfil their potential and which reflects in a positive way, the range of cultures and experiences of the whole community.