

Stanbridge Earls School

Inspection report for residential special school

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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 seven 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 was undertaken to assess all key standards. No recommendations were raised resulting from the previous inspection or this inspection. The school's boarding provision is judged as outstanding overall with outstanding outcomes in all areas. Feedback from boarders and parents has been taken into account while carrying out the inspection. All boarders had the opportunity to complete a questionnaire and numerous boarders were spoken with throughout the inspection.

Stanbridge Earls School excels in offering its boarding students a safe and nurturing environment. Students receive excellent health care from the school's nurses in the new purpose built health centre. Boarders' health and well-being are promoted to an excellent degree. There is a positive and confident focus on child protection and safeguarding that results in the students feeling safe at the school. Behavioural guidelines are clearly known and understood by the boarding community with staff focusing on rewards and praise to encourage students to achieve their potential. The school has extremely robust health and safety measures in place to promote the safety of the boarding community. Recruitment practice fully adheres to Safer Recruitment in Education guidance.

Systems for students to achieve and enjoy are excellent, with invaluable support from the independent counsellor, and dedicated houseparent's and matrons. Opportunities for boarders to have a voice and input into their lives at the school are actively engaged in by students, whose opinions are listened to and acted on. The continued development and refurbishment of the boarding houses and new purpose built boarding house for the 6th form boys has resulted in students being provided with excellent facilities. The dynamic and enthusiastic Head of Pastoral care is extremely committed to continuing to raise the welfare and care standards throughout the school. The management of the school and boarding community is

extremely effective and coordinated, with a dedicated boarding staff team committed to ensure the boarding experience is positive and enjoyable. Boarders' comments include: 'I love boarding, this school has really helped me with my education and my confidence, I was failing in my other schools but here I am doing really well, the staff are always available to help you when you need it, I was bullied before I came to this school but now I am happy and I've made friends.' The vast majority of parent responses were equally positive with comments such as: 'We are very pleased with all that we have experienced with the school and it has met our hopes and expectations. The boarding house team are exceptional and a real asset to the school. I couldn't praise them too highly. The school is fantastic in every way with my sons being happy, thriving and succeeding educationally.'

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations made at the previous inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders have access to excellent quality medical treatment and first aid provision. The new purpose built health centre is ideally situated in the school grounds and is easily accessible for all boarders. The new health centre provides excellent provision for students when they are ill, including facilities for students should they need to be monitored overnight. It is efficiently run by the school's qualified nurses, who are available and on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All procedures and policies relating to health matters are maintained effectively. The boarders are positive about the care given and expressed a view that their health and well-being are well looked after.

Health information for each boarder is requested from parents including permission for first aid, medical, dental or optical treatment should there be a need. Excellent care plans are maintained and regularly reviewed for all students who have significant medical or health needs. Communication between the health centre staff and boarding staff is excellent. Information is shared on a need-to-know basis further promoting the health of students to a high degree. Record keeping throughout the medical centre is excellent with information securely recorded on the school database and within the health centre for each individual. The boarders have access to local General Practitioners who attend the health centre on a weekly basis.

The schools excellent personal, social and health education and citizenship programme fully meets the diverse needs of the students. The curriculum involves aspects of health, well-being and provides education for pupils on how to keep themselves safe. The programme covers a wealth of health and safety education including cyber bullying and keeping students safe and well. Boarders commented that the ongoing support in all areas of personal and social health have enabled them to become more independent and self-confident.

The catering staff have a good understanding of boarders' dietary needs and wishes, and provide a varied balanced diet. Mixed reviews were received through questionnaires from the boarding community and parents about the quality of the food. However speaking to students on inspection the majority confirmed the food had improved and generally they were happy with the choices on offer. The catering team are proactive in responding to students particular eating habits, mainly associated with their special needs. The school is actively addressing the need to further monitor student's dietary intake especially at supper times. There is an abundance of fresh fruit available to the boarding community throughout the day and evenings with salad and vegetables on offer at meal times. The school caters for many different diets, for example cultural and medical reasons if needed. Boarders have the opportunity to prepare or make snacks in the boarding house kitchens with students being able to prepare meals to support their independent living skills. The boarders are actively involved in the food provision via the school council, boarders' meetings and the newly set up food committee. Suggestions by the boarders are routinely sought and acted upon. The school staff and the nurses are committed to educate the students about healthy eating with work being undertaken with students that have particular rigid eating habits.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Students live in an environment which they reported makes them feel safe. The school is extremely thorough in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the boarding pupils.

Boarders reported that all staff are respectful of their privacy. 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 easily accessible to boarders and parents. Boarders are empowered to have a voice and have a range of skilled staff sensitive to their needs that can manage any concerns or anxieties raised by the students.

The school has a clear and responsive anti-bullying policy which is known by boarding pupils. The boarders feel confident that issues associated with bullying would be rigorously addressed. Boarders commented that there are rarely any incidents of bullying behaviour with comments such as: 'sometimes there is name calling or we just fall out.' Staff are extremely vigilant about such interactions and are quick to respond if any issues arise. Boarders also commented that they had been bullied at previous schools, but since joining Standbridge Earls they were happier and had made friends. The school provides excellent education to boarders in relation to cyber bullying and internet safety and does not allow social networking sites to be accessed at the school to ensure the students are appropriately safeguarded.

The boarders are protected from the risk of harm or abuse by appropriately trained and experienced staff that follow robust policies and procedures. Suitable child protection training is provided on a regular basis to all staff employed at the school including non-teaching staff. The staff have a clear understanding of key child protection matters and the action they need to take if they suspect a student is at risk of, or is being harmed. There is a real and clear focus on safeguarding and child protection, with competent and experienced designated staff taking overall responsibility for this. The boarders reported that they feel safe at the school and have a variety of adults they can talk to. There have been no child protection referrals since the previous inspection a year ago.

The behaviour of the students seen throughout the inspection was exemplary. The students were relaxed and very open about their experiences as a boarder, with comments such as: 'the school has really helped me become more mature and confident.' Staff have an excellent understanding of the individual complex needs of the students and manage behaviours effectively. Inappropriate or negative behaviour is addressed in a positive manner; with clear guidelines known by students should they go against the school's rules and guidelines. The school's ethos is based on promoting students to take responsibility for their actions and to contribute positively to their own personal development through praise and rewards. The boarders understand what sanctions may be implemented and feel these are fair and only used when necessary. Students do not go absent without authority. Excellent measures are in place with role call in the evenings to ensure all students are accounted for. Effective policies are in place should a student be absent without authority, although this has not had to be implemented in practice.

Health and safety are given high regard at the school with excellent measures to ensure all areas are fully risk assessed and reviewed regularly. Excellent fire safety measures ensure mechanisms are in place to continually safeguard the boarding community. Boarders confirmed they routinely practice the evacuation procedure and are well versed with all exit routes from their boarding houses. Boarders were very clear about areas within the school site which are out of bounds. Security across the campus is excellent. The introduction of fingerprint recognition on all boarding houses strengthens security, only allowing staff and student access to their individual boarding houses.

Boarders are protected by robust and thorough recruitment procedures. Key staff involved in the recruitment process have attended Safer Recruitment in Education training. Staff demonstrated a thorough understanding of safer recruitment procedures and maintain well-organised personnel files on all staff. All visitors are checked and supervised if moving around the school, providing enhanced protection for students.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The schools residential provision actively supports the student's educational progress. Staff support students in evening prep sessions and are always on hand to support with any concerns aired by the students. Boarding staff ensure they maintain excellent links with the teaching staff and housemasters to ensure there is continuity across the education and boarding hours. Boarders spoken to were extremely positive about the huge achievements they have made since joining the school. Comments such as: 'before I started at this school I was failing and didn't think I could achieve educationally, now I am doing really well, the school has made such a difference to my life.' Parents were equally positive with comments such as: 'my sons are happy thriving and succeeding educationally; an outstanding school.'

Personal support to individual students is an area in which the school excels. A cohesive committed staff team ensures all boarders have someone to talk to if they need to and this is confirmed by the boarders. The school actively supports each student as an individual and works to ensure their individual needs are met. The additional support of an independent counsellor whom students can contact readily is an invaluable resource for the boarding community. The boarders also have access to two independent visitors that understand the needs of the students well. Comments from parents were extremely positive about the support and care offered to their children while boarding at the school. Throughout the inspection the boarding community were very positive, happy and relaxed and spoke freely about life at the school. Feedback from boarders confirmed the variety of staff they would go to for support.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders are considered an integral aspect of the school, with their views and wishes being acknowledged and acted upon. They are encouraged and supported to contribute their views through the school council, boarding meetings and open discussion with a range of staff during boarding hours as well as the newly set up food committee. The boarders reported their views and opinions are always listened to, with actions being clearly communicated to them through notices and the school council. Boarders also have many informal and formal opportunities to express their views.

The boarders are assisted to maintain contact with their families and friends. Mobile phones are allowed, and there are private telephones for them to use. Overseas boarders are able to use Skype to contact family and this is facilitated at times convenient to both students and their family, taking into account time differences. The school maintains excellent communication links with parents, especially through telephone, discussions, email, school events and regular newsletters.

New boarders are helped to settle into the school through the schools thorough induction and assessment process. Boarders act as peer support for new students and are keen to help them feel at ease at the school. Boarders reported they are made to feel very welcome when they start boarding, by existing students and staff, and this helps them settle in quickly. There is clear information relating to boarding available for parents and students, outlining what to expect from boarding at the school.

Boarders' assessed care needs are clearly identified in a care plan, which is monitored and regularly reviewed by 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. Extensive information is gained prior to students starting at the school in order for the school to have a full picture of the needs of the students and to drive forward the aims and objectives of their placement. All boarding staff work holistically with other professionals to meet any identified need whether it is a health, educational or speech, language and communication need.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders are provided with excellent accommodation that is well organised and supervised. Boarders are accommodated in seven boarding houses separated by gender and age. Boarding students are supervised by a resident Houseparent, a resident Assistant Houseparent and a non-resident daytime Matron, ensuring there is somebody available in the boarding house at all times. Boarding houses are well designed and pleasant providing students with space and facilities that meet their needs. More recent changes to some boarding houses allow students single occupancy rooms, as opposed to small dormitory living in other boarding houses. Continued development of boarding environments includes updating bathing and showering facilities and an excellent new purpose built 6th Form boarding house. Boarders are able to personalise their rooms and bring in home comforts. All areas are maintained and cleaned to a high standard. Common rooms allow students space to socialise and enjoy activities in the evenings. The Head of Pastoral Care is committed to ensuring boarding students have the best possible boarding experience and works closely with houseparent's if issues such as overcrowding are raised. Boarders are consulted about dormitory preferences and staff work to ensure students are able to reside in rooms with their friends. Comments from parents include: 'The school offers a real family feel away from home.' Boarders were very complimentary about their boarding houses especially the 6th Form students residing in the new purpose built boarding house.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Individual needs are very well catered for, from religious and cultural to dietary needs. Students are able to explore a range of cultural topics in sessions such as personal, social, health and citizenship, sparking debate and open discussion amongst students.

The management of the school is extremely effective and coordinated. The school has recently appointed a new headteacher in September 2010 whom has vast experience in boarding welfare. The Head of Pastoral Care demonstrates an outstanding commitment to his role, with a genuine passion to continue to drive improvement and raise boarding welfare standards further. Comments from parents include: 'the staff are superb, caring and will go out of their way to listen and help my children. Stanbridge has given them confidence and hope and a future that prior to starting at the school would not have been a reality. An outstanding school'. There is a well-structured senior management team which is well informed of its roles and responsibilities and effective in delivery. The boarders are cared for by good numbers of staff who are trained and sensitive to their needs. The staff interviewed and observed during the inspection were extremely committed to providing boarders with a positive experience.

The monitoring of all areas and records is excellent. Effective monitoring of the current practice is taking place on a weekly basis, with key boarding staff meeting to discuss any issues relating to boarding welfare. An annual report on the 'Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare in the Community' is presented to the full governing body each year with the school continually reflecting on boarding welfare practice.

The school provides a wealth of information to parents and boarders about the boarding practices and principles of the school. The school's website has clear and updated information for parents and prospective parents to view. A boarders' handbook is in place that fully informs boarders of what to expect from their boarding experience.

The boarding houses are well organised and provide a safe and secure environment for boarders. The boarders report they have no difficulty in finding a member of staff when they need to. The staff receive appropriate training commencing with induction and regular updates, and have guidance on boarding policies and practice which are regularly updated. Staff are extremely well versed on the individual needs of the students and how best to manage students with speech, language and communication difficulties.

The relationships between staff and boarders are relaxed, friendly and respectful. Positive comments received from parents and boarders were that boarding at Stanbridge Earls School has really helped individuals gain confidence and independence and to succeed educationally to their full potential.

