

Stanbridge Earls School

Stanbridge Earls School, Stanbridge Earls, ROMSEY, Hampshire, SO51 0ZS

Inspection dates

28/01/2013 to 30/01/2013

Reason for inspection

Ofsted were instructed by the Department for Education to undertake an emergency unannounced inspection following receipt of serious safeguarding concerns.

Conclusions

This HMI led inspection was completed over three days. Senior staff including the Headteacher and Chair of Governors were interviewed as well as a number of other key staff including the Governor with special responsibility for safeguarding.

A number of formal structures are in place to monitor the welfare of young people and report where concerns are found. The school has three designated child protection officers who are readily available to staff and know the children well. The Board of Governors have appointed one of their member to visit the school on a half-termly basis to monitor the quality of provision including the welfare of boarders. Governors receive an annual safeguarding report. Despite this structure safeguarding concerns are not consistently identified or always handled well.

Communication and assessment systems have not evolved at the speed required. Although a number of regular meetings between staff take place, there is an over reliance on informal discussion and little formal care planning. Individual case files lack any coherent structure, they are mainly used to store records of email discussion and they do not support staff to effectively plan and monitor the care provided to children and young people.

The school do not use individual placement plans to identify individual children's needs, or to specify how the school will care for each child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis. The school do not undertake individualised risk assessments even in cases where the risk of harm that a child poses to others or themselves is known to be high. In these cases there is an over reliance on discussion with parents and young people in which boundaries are simply reaffirmed or extended. While there is evidence that the school has at times sought guidance from external agencies including the police and children's services, the school has not critically evaluated the guidance received, assessed this against what they know about the child and the school environment, to reach decisions about the level of risk that a child may pose to others.

The school recognises many of these shortfalls and is taking action to improve communication systems and oversight of boarders who are particularly vulnerable. These new initiatives are not fully implemented or embedded and therefore their impact remains limited. For example, while the designated child protection lead officers hold regular safeguarding meetings there is no formal record of discussion or recorded actions. Therefore, it is difficult to determine how effectively guidance or instruction is cascaded to relevant staff, actions implemented or evaluated.

Child protection and safeguarding policies are in place and are reviewed on an annual basis. These identify the key designated child protection leads and clearly set out how staff must respond when concerned about a child's safety. These policies are known and understood by staff and are readily available to parents and carers. These policies do not identify that children may pose a risk to one another and therefore do not support or inform staff fully. Where there have been incidents between children that are a cause for concern, records do not confirm that these have always been considered under the child protection framework.

A sufficient number of staff are trained in safer recruitment so that all recruitment panels are appropriately constituted. Rigorous checks are in place to ensure the suitability of gap students and their number is kept low so as not to undermine the consistency of house parenting. However, some staff have recently started working at the school prior to receipt of a CRB and without a formal risk assessment in place to outline the limits or restrictions placed on their day to day duties.

While the Board of Governors ensure that half-termly welfare visits are undertaken, these have failed to identify the significance of limited care planning or the absence of formalised risk assessment. An annual safeguarding report is presented to the board but this fails to address significant safeguarding incidents, or outline the actions that are needed to ensure children are safeguarded and protected. The oversight and impact of the governing body is limited and they have failed to enact their duty of care to children effectively. Since the tribunal findings the Board of Governors have appointed a response group and commissioned an external expert to help develop and oversee implementation of an improvement plan. Specific and focused terms of reference have now been agreed.

The confidentiality and rights of children as patients are respected. Health centre staff can clearly articulate their responsibilities when undertaking 'Gillick Competent' assessments, these always include consultation with other health professionals including the link GP. Communication between health, care and academic staff has been discussed following recent events but this has not resulted in formal protocols or a clear working framework.

There is no formal mechanism for understanding or profiling the holistic needs of children at the school, as a result effective workforce planning is compromised. It is difficult to establish with any degree of confidence that the staffing arrangements in individual boarding houses are sufficient to meet the needs of all young people cared for.

Taken together these shortfalls demonstrate a failure on the part of the leadership and management team to take effective and timely remedial action to improve important safeguarding systems, structures and practice within the school.

Formal support is required to ensure that the senior management team take immediate and effective action to safeguard children and young people. This intervention must ensure that the oversight provided by the governing body is strengthened so that they discharge their safeguarding duties effectively. The Board of Governors must satisfy themselves that the current leadership team have sufficient skills and competence and are appropriately supported to oversee the urgent improvements that are required.

The school are failing to meet the following national minimum standards and should undertake the actions outlined below:

NMS 11 Child Protection

Where internal safeguarding meetings are held these should be formally minuted, clear action plans written and formal monitoring systems put in place to ensure required outcomes are achieved.

An agreed protocol between the school and health staff should be developed to inform all staff how potential child protection concerns will be handled, information shared and where required referral to external safeguarding agencies made.

Child protection policies and associated guidance must include reference to child on child abuse. These should set out clearly the safeguards that are in place to prevent incidents and the specific actions that will be followed wherever there are concerns of this nature.

Wherever there are child protection concerns, whether or not these are referred to external agencies, the school must maintain a clear and comprehensive record of all actions taken. These should clearly state the reasons why referral to safeguarding agencies have or have not been made, and include evidence to demonstrate that potential risk is identified, assessed and managed effectively.

NMS 13 Leadership and Management

The school should ensure that there is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision. It should urgently assess whether the management team currently committed to improving safeguarding practice are sufficiently resourced, supported and skilled to undertake this task.

Clear communication systems between boarding, senior managers, academic and health staff are urgently required. These should support the development of an accurate, permanent and accessible record of history and progress for each child.

The school's governing body should immediately improve its systems to monitor care and welfare provision within the school. It should ensure that the annual safeguarding report includes details and analysis of all serious incidents and comment on how effectively these have been managed.

NMS 14 Staff Recruitment and Checks on Other Adults

Where new staff commence employment prior to receipt of a CRB the school should ensure that an assessment is undertaken to confirm the level of supervision required. This should reflect what is known about the person concerned, their experience, the nature of their duties and the level of responsibility they will carry.

NMS 20 Monitoring by Independent Visitors

Ensure that the representative appointed by the governing body to undertake monitoring visits to the school has access to all relevant information to enable them to evaluate and report on the conduct of the school. This should include any cases where children have been excluded from the school following concerns about their behaviour.

NMS 21 Placement Planning and Review

The school should produce a written placement plan that identifies the needs of each child and how the school will ensure that these are met.

Written placement plans must set out how the child's welfare will be promoted and protected on a day to day basis. It should identify all known risks and include clear instruction to staff on how risk will be managed.

National minimum standards

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The school ensures that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance

issued by the Secretary of State (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 11)

- There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff. The school's governing body or proprietor has a system to monitor care and welfare provision in the school. (NMS 13.1)
- Schools operate safe recruitment procedures and vet staff in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 14.1)
- The governing body, trustees, partnership, or organisation responsible for carrying on the school arrange for one of their number, or a representative who does not work at, or directly manage, the school, to visit the school once every half term and complete a written report on the conduct of the school. Where the school has an individual proprietor, that person may carry out such visits personally if they are not also the Headteacher (or school equivalent). (NMS 20.1)
- The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible, children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans, and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans. (NMS 21.1)

Inspection team

Martin Davis HMI	Lead social care inspector
Lucy Martin HMI	Social care inspector

Information about this school

Stanbridge Earls is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for 195 pupils aged between 10 and 19 years old. 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.

School details

Unique reference number	116549
Social care unique reference number	SC012020
DfE registration number	850/6065

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted at the request of the Registration Authority. It was conducted under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school	Affiliated independent
Number of boarders on roll	165
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	10 to 19
Headteacher	Mr Peter Trythall
Date of previous boarding inspection	14/05/2012
Telephone number	01794 529400
Email address	admin@stanbridgeearls.co.uk

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