

Stanbridge Earls School

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

Inspection dates

18/06/2013 to 20/06/2013

Reason for inspection

The Department for Education (DfE) instructed Ofsted to undertake an emergency unannounced inspection in January 2013 following receipt of serious safeguarding concerns identified in a Special Educational Needs and Disability First-Tier Tribunal. These concerns included the failure to protect children and young people from serious sexual assault.

The school produced an action plan following the inspection that was rejected by the DfE. Ofsted was then instructed to undertake a second emergency inspection to commence on 30 April 2013 and to report on the effectiveness of child protection arrangements, leadership and governance within the school. This coincided with an Independent Schools Inspectorate inspection, a visit to the school by an officer representing the Children's Commissioner and an investigatory visit by the Charity Commission. The April inspection identified continued significant failings.

The DfE has instructed Ofsted to undertake this inspection to examine and report on:

1. the effectiveness of the leadership and governance of the school
2. progress made by the school in meeting those national minimum standards for which failings were identified in Ofsted's reports of inspections held in January and/or April 2013
3. the school's adherence to any other national minimum standards affecting pupil welfare and safety.

Conclusions

There have been a number of significant changes to the leadership and governance arrangements since Ofsted's inspection in April 2013.

Governors are currently working with the Trustees of another school with the aim of agreeing a formal takeover of Stanbridge Earls School. If successful Stanbridge Earls School will close and re-open with new leadership and governance arrangements.

Since the school was inspected in April, governors at Stanbridge Earls have undertaken a detailed and critical self-evaluation and have commissioned a review by the Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools. These reports indicate that governors accept that their oversight of the school and their monitoring of the effectiveness of child protection arrangements have previously been inadequate. In response, the governing body has taken a number of actions, including identifying five governors who will step down to allow the appointment of new governors with experience of special educational needs. The self-evaluation also identified the need for female governors to be recruited; one female governor has now been appointed.

The current Chair of Governors plans to step aside, if Stanbridge Earls is not removed from the

school register. The Chair elect is a management consultant and governor of another school. The new chair will be tasked with overseeing the proposed takeover of the school.

Maggie McMurray took up post as interim headteacher on 14 May 2013. Mrs McMurray is an experienced assistant headteacher from the state sector but does not have experience of managing within the residential sector and is not SEN qualified. To support Mrs McMurray, external consultants with both boarding and SEN experience have been employed. The headteacher of another residential special school will provide mentoring support to Mrs McMurray.

There is now evidence to show that leadership and governance within the school is improving. Clear and incisive decision-making is now more apparent with swift action being taken by the new headteacher to:

1. review and improve staffing levels within boarding houses
2. use disciplinary procedures when staff have failed in their duty of care towards children
3. ensure that the views of children, especially girls, inform decision making
4. intervene directly to ensure children's behaviour is managed effectively
5. provide critical challenge to the governing body.

However, despite these improvements safeguarding concerns remain.

On a recent school trip children were allowed to remove their clothing during an organised activity. Disciplinary action is ongoing but it is already apparent that:

1. supervising staff failed to intervene to prevent children from removing their clothing
2. one member of staff took photographs of the children
3. the leader of the group, a housemaster and teacher from Stanbridge Earls, failed to take appropriate action, including notifying staff at the school when he became aware of the incident
4. staff failed to immediately report this incident on their return to the school, even after attending an inset safeguarding workshop.

The risk assessment completed by the trip organiser and counter-signed by a senior manager from the school, is inadequate because it fails to cover a number of key issues including staffing levels. This is worrying given that a catering employee from Stanbridge Earls joined the trip as a member of staff with responsibility for supervising children. Failures to safeguard children in this instance are not limited to the inappropriate actions of a single member of staff. There are also structural failures in planning and leadership.

When this incident was reported to the school, a prompt referral was made to Hampshire County Council and the Police. As a result, the headteacher is using disciplinary procedures within the school which have already led to the resignation of two staff. The actions taken by the headteacher after she became aware of the incident are appropriate.

Staffing levels within the school have increased. All boarding houses now have a minimum of two care staff on duty at key times and are supported in their work by academic staff spending time in the boarding houses. Additional agency staff have been recruited and deployed carefully so that continuity and consistency for children is provided.

There are tangible benefits from increased staffing levels for children who are now more closely supervised. Children now report that they enjoy having access to more staff with the greater opportunities for learning that this brings. A consultant is working with the senior leadership team to develop proposals for a new staffing structure to be adopted in September.

Improved recruitment practice is now evident with appropriate risk assessments in place where

staff have started to work or live at the school prior to receipt of a DBS check. Where concerns are raised about existing staff members the school takes appropriate action to assess risk and take necessary action.

While improved supervision and support arrangements are in place for House Parents and House Assistants, the nursing team has yet to receive clinical supervision. The school reports that arrangements are in place to introduce clinical and safeguarding supervision from September. Nursing staff still do not undertake a formal audit of prescribed medication administered within boarding houses, and secondary dispensing has continued. This must stop.

Oversight and management of known child protection concerns have improved, including referral to children's services and other agencies. The newly appointed DP for child protection has good oversight and maintains appropriate case records. Any delay within external agencies is challenged effectively so that appropriate action is taken to safeguard children. However, both the DP and the governor with lead responsibility for safeguarding are new appointments. Therefore, the role of the headteacher remains critical.

In some areas, Pupil Placement Plans (PPP) and risk assessment have improved. Advice from the Speech and Language Therapy Department appears more consistently within PPPs so that staff are now better informed about individual communication styles and needs. Chronologies, via Working Action Points (WAP), are now also being maintained for each child.

However, the school continues to suffer from a legacy of inadequate record keeping, risk assessments and Pupil Placement Plans. Historical concerns, including concerns about inappropriate sexualised behaviour among children have not been extracted from children's records and used within current PPPs to inform staff of any risks that remain and to guide care planning.

The school has a number of emotionally vulnerable young people and so staff need to be particularly vigilant and well informed. The continued absence of sufficiently detailed PPPs and risk assessments is a structural weakness. While it is clear that care staff know the children well, the school's reliance on verbal handovers does not replace the need for formal written assessment and guidance. This is especially relevant given the number of children who board and the number of new agency staff currently employed by the school.

Conclusions:

The incident that occurred on the recent school trip is serious and demonstrates that the school cannot yet be considered a safe institution. The internal response to this has been robust, including the headteacher sending a clear message to staff about expected conduct and standards.

Following the appointment of the interim headteacher and the decision by the governing body that the school cannot continue to operate in its current form, more significant progress has been made. Children are now safer within the school than when Ofsted inspected in January and in April 2013. However, events between inspections demonstrate that inherent weaknesses remain in how the school promotes the safety and welfare of all pupils.

Many of the structural changes and developments in the last five weeks have been geared towards supporting the proposed takeover of the school. If this takeover were to fall through, or be significantly delayed, then the capacity of the school to maintain progress and continue to make the required changes would need to be assessed.

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

NMS 3 Health and well-being

The school must issue and implement an appropriate policy for the administration of medication to children. The school must ensure that secondary dispensing does not occur and that suitable audit arrangements are in place to monitor the administration of medication in each boarding house.

NMS 11 Child protection

The school should ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school at all times. This includes children who are involved in off-site activities

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. All members of the senior management team are responsible for ensuring that children's welfare is protected and promoted at all times. They must always discharge this duty with required due diligence.

NMS 19 Staff supervision, training and support

All staff must have access to support and advice appropriate to their role. The school must ensure that nursing staff have immediate access to appropriate clinical supervision.

NMS 21 Placement planning and review

Pupil Placement Plans must identify the needs of each child so that the school can meet these needs and specify how it will care for and promote the welfare of children on a day-to-day basis.

Pupil Placement Plans must be regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in her or his development.

National minimum standards

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

- Children's physical, emotional and social development needs are promoted. (NMS 3.1)
- 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)
- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)
- 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	Lead social care inspector
Helen Humphreys	Social care inspector

Information about this school

Stanbridge Earls is an independent co-educational day and residential special school for 192 pupils aged between 10 and 20 years. There are currently 189 pupils on the school roll, 153 boys and 36 girls; 159 are boarders. All pupils are identified as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND); 79 have a statement of special educational need

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	
Number of boarders on roll	192
Gender of boarders	Mixed
Age range of boarders	10 to 20
Headteacher	Maggie McMurray
Date of previous boarding inspection	14/05/2012
Telephone number	01794 529400
Email address	admin@stanbridgeearls.co.uk

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