

Gordon's School

Gordon's School Academy Trust

Bagshot Road, West End, Woking, Surrey GU24 9PT

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Gordon's School is a co-educational academy, which offers boarding and day places for boys and girls aged 11 to 18 years. Residential boarding is offered in four houses within the school grounds. Traditionally, the school has offered boarding to children with parents in the armed forces, in addition to children who live locally, or whose parents live further away or overseas.

Inspection dates: 18 to 20 June 2019

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: 6 March 2017

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students who attend the boarding school provision exceed their predicted outcomes and consistently reach, and further, their potential. This is evidenced by staff tracking students' progress in all areas of their development. Day and boarding students access facilities together, including 'prep' until 7.30pm. The genuine whole school approach is unique and seamless.

Students demonstrate a maturity and responsibility above their age. They are keen to actively serve the wider community through local charities as well as through raising funds. Students show a concern for the environment, suggesting ways to promote recycling, reduce their impact on the environment and requesting that additional trees are planted. This is wholeheartedly enforced by senior managers.

The way staff listen to the views and wishes of students, expressed through the student governors meeting, is impressive. Student governors receive training for their role and support for shaping opinion, undertaking research and public speaking. They are able to articulate requests to affect a positive response. Examples are funding for 'chill out' rooms, initiating clubs such as the law and debate society and the opportunity to network with local youth councils. Staff explain clearly the reasons when requests cannot be agreed.

Students value their relationships with their house parents and other key people. They said that they can approach them and talk about any issues. One student said, 'They are like our parents,' while another said, 'They have done so much for us.' A house parent said, 'We are here to help them out, not catch them out.'

Excellent relationships with staff mean that students will go to them with any worries but also that staff instinctively know when a child needs additional support. Staff deal with issues fairly, recognising that children will make mistakes and need guidance. Restorative practice is effective, and students learn to take responsibility and show empathy and kindness to each other. This is a strong thread noticeable throughout the whole school.

There is a wealth of avenues for students' voices. Their opinions are heard, valued and acted on. In addition, the role modelling, mentoring and support from their peers and older children is heart-warming. Students fully embrace the benefits of boarding and are keen to assist those younger than themselves to have the same positive experience. The school helps them to develop skills which will support them in their future education and employment.

Healthcare and support for students' well-being are carefully reviewed and monitored. From the time that students arrive, the staff plan how to meet their

needs and ensure that they are appropriately linked to internal and local community services. The actions taken to promote health reduce the likelihood that difficulties will arise. The health staff effectively coordinate a multi-professional response to students' identified health needs.

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

Safeguarding practice is fully embedded throughout every aspect of the school. There is an open, transparent and accountable culture that keeps students safe. Staff are perceptive to emerging concerns and take swift, decisive action to ensure that students are safe.

The senior management team continually looks at ways to improve safeguarding practice and teach the students to keep themselves safe. Its members have strong links with community safeguarding initiatives and share good practice with other boarding provisions. They encourage scrutiny and employ specialist consultants to review their procedures and act on any advice. Key staff work with other schools and agencies, including the police, to share practice and local knowledge. Professionals agree strategies to keep the students as safe as possible.

Processes and procedures are in place to ensure that safeguarding concerns, however minor, are reported to the appropriate external professionals. The senior management team members have developed strong links with the designated officer. They learn from allegations and have identified when staff and children are vulnerable. They have reviewed risk assessments to provide the necessary guidance to staff about the actions to take to minimise any such risks.

All students have been trained in safeguarding along with the staff. This has raised their awareness of signs of abuse. This has improved their ability to recognise any risks to themselves and their peers.

Leaders and managers strive for the highest standard of behaviour from students, who are well supported to achieve this. Managers are constantly looking at different strategies to improve the support for individual students and help them manage their behaviour more appropriately and effectively. One example is the recent employment of a staff member who helps students with concerning behaviours. He provides a bespoke programme of support agreed with the student, parents and key staff. As a result of this intervention, there have been significant reductions of difficult behaviours.

There is an excellent approach to e-safety. Staff and students are aware of the boundaries and rules. The senior managers fund an external service which highlights any concerns immediately and alerts staff if any inappropriate or risky sites are accessed. Staff are clear on the action to take if they observe such applications on an electronic device.

Students are treated with dignity and respect; their views, wishes and ideas are integral to practice. Bullying is taken seriously, and a number of initiatives are in place to reduce the prevalence of this issue. Students told inspectors about the different ways to report and prevent bullying, such as through an anti-bullying ambassador and the comments box.

Security measures ensure that the students' whereabouts are tracked and staff know where they are. Missing protocols in place are followed on the rare occasion that this may occur.

The approach to health and safety is an exemplar of outstanding practice. Staff, responsible for the estate, are meticulous in their approach to ensure that students live and learn in a safe environment. Senior leaders have clear plans to refurbish and reconfigure buildings to meet the changing needs of students.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The senior management team is a strong and effective outward-looking management team that provides strong and decisive leadership. This is a school team that strives for continuous improvement and excellence. Embedded in the 'whole school approach' is the integration of education, care and therapeutic support for students, with the aim of developing the students' positive attitude to learning.

A strength of the school is leaders' and managers' knowledge of each student and how the boarding provision is making a positive impact. This is a child-focused school which sees the whole child and the child's future as its responsibility.

House parents write comprehensive self-assessments, based on the national minimum standards and social care common inspection framework, to analyse their strengths and weaknesses. This demonstrates ownership and transparency. They seek the views of students, parents and other stakeholders to produce an action plan to drive forward constant progress. Leaders' and managers' knowledge and clear understanding of what is happening in the school, and the actions and outcomes, stand out as exceptional, especially considering the size of the school and range of needs of the children.

A strong governing body provides effective scrutiny, challenge and oversight of the boarding provision. The knowledgeable, skilled and experienced chair of governors closely monitors safeguarding matters and regularly visits the school. Comprehensive reports of these visits, with any recommendations for improvement, assist leaders and managers in maintaining high standards of care.

The positive role of student leaders enhances the opportunities for students to talk to someone if they need to. The independent visitor is introduced to the students at the

beginning of each year. However, they were not able to demonstrate an awareness of who she was, and staff could not recall when she had last visited the houses.

Recruitment practices are subject to continual development. Any lessons learned are used to inform good practice and improve procedures. The human resources team adopts a safer recruitment practice. There are clear agreements for partners and children of staff who are living on-site.

Staff morale is high. The staff team values its senior management support. Weekly staff meetings, supervisions and appraisals are informative, child focused and allow time for reflection. Managers and staff evaluate the training for its effectiveness. Staff are well trained, and competency tests identify any gaps in understanding. The training is responsive to any emerging needs of the students accessing the school and boarding provision. The staff are, therefore, equipped to meet the students' needs and are able to provide excellent care for each child.

All staff are valued equally and respect each other's role in contributing to promoting the best outcomes for students. Cohesive working and a flexible approach to trying new support strategies result in students receiving appropriate and responsive assistance to advance their development.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure that the independent visitor is accessible and well known to the students and that her role is clear and promoted by the school.

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: SC013919

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Type of school: Boarding School

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