

School inspection report

14 to 16 November 2023

Stoke College

Ashen Lane
Stoke-by-Clare
Sudbury
CO10 8JE

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The current proprietorial arrangements do not provide adequate oversight of the school. Recent changes to the school leadership team and the advisory council mean that there is currently no effective strategic direction or self-evaluation and a limited understanding of the regulatory requirements.
2. Leaders currently manage situations as they arise. Strategic planning has been absent, and leadership roles and responsibilities are not always fully understood. As a result, the school does not meet the Standards relating to governance, leadership and management, safeguarding and risk management.
3. There is no risk assessment policy, and the proprietor and leaders have a limited understanding of risk management. This includes the contextual risk of a new leadership structure which does not have clearly understood responsibilities.
4. At the start of the inspection, there were errors in policies and in other information provided to parents which required rectification.
5. School leaders enable pupils to develop their skills and self-confidence in line with the school's aims. Pupils at the school typically make good progress and there are positive and supportive relationships between pupils and teachers.
6. Most teachers have good subject knowledge. Relationships between teachers and pupils are positive and supportive, and in consequence, pupils generally apply themselves well. This can be seen in the effective support provided for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL), who make good progress with this aspect of their learning.
7. However, in some lessons, teachers do not plan activities which are matched effectively to the abilities of the pupils, particularly the more able.
8. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported by the learning support department and as a result make good progress from their starting points.
9. Incidents of bullying and of poor behaviour are few. Leaders address issues effectively when they occur and pupils are appropriately supported. However, bullying and behaviour records are not maintained in a format which enables the easy monitoring of patterns, allowing leaders to identify and address emerging issues for effectively.
10. Leaders ensure that effective supervision for the pupils and for boarding pupils is in place. Boarding pupils are supported by well-trained boarding house staff who promote their wellbeing and personal development. Pupils in the boarding houses are respectful to each other. The significant increase in temporary international boarders this term as part of an intensive English language programme is adequately managed but such a large increase is unsettling for the existing boarders.
11. The personal social and health education (PSHE) programme covers the required content which is matched to the ages and needs of pupils. Pupils progress well overall, but there is some variation in the quality of teaching.

12. The careers programme gives pupils guidance on subject choices and career options, but this is too limited. Pupils do not always feel fully prepared for the next stage of their education or career.
13. The proprietorial oversight of safeguarding is not effective. There has been no recent review of the school's safeguarding practice or policy. Records of staff training are incomplete, and staff are not always clear about how to refer concerns under the new leadership structure.
14. School leaders with responsibilities for safeguarding in the school liaise effectively with local agencies and safeguarding concerns are securely recorded. Minor errors in the recruitment records were addressed during the inspection.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance, are not met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met consistently.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are not met consistently.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are not met.

Areas for action

- The proprietor must ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities:
 - demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role
 - fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently, and
 - actively promote the wellbeing of pupils

by ensuring that:

- leaders have a strategic, comprehensive and inclusive approach to identifying and managing the risk of harm to pupils' wellbeing
- accurate information is made available about the school and its policies and procedures
- pupils are provided with adequate careers guidance that enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options in order to fulfil their potential
- there is effective proprietorial oversight of safeguarding, including an annual review
- safeguarding training is understood by all staff, in particular how to refer concerns; and
- accurate records of safeguarding training are maintained.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure teachers plan and deliver lessons that provide suitable challenge, particularly for more able pupils, to ensure they make consistent progress
- ensure that the teaching of PSHE enables pupils to make consistently good progress
- develop a more effective system for keeping records of bullying and behaviour so that trends and patterns can be more easily identified and addressed
- plan the induction of groups of temporary boarders effectively in order to minimise the disruption to the existing boarding community
- Ensure the single central record of recruitment checks is accurately maintained.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

15. The current governance arrangements do not provide adequate oversight of the school. Recent changes in leadership and an absence of agreed job descriptions at the senior team level mean there is a lack of clarity about where responsibilities lie.
16. Senior leaders and members of the advisory board have recently left their roles. The advisory board currently has only one member; there is no board oversight of safeguarding, and the annual review of safeguarding policy has not taken place. There is no strategic planning, self-evaluation and a limited understanding of how the school meets regulatory standards.
17. Leaders manage the school on a day-to-day basis, and they seek to ensure the wellbeing of pupils, but their understanding of the regulatory requirements is too limited. Whilst pupils make good progress overall, leaders' oversight of teaching does not ensure that activities are consistently matched to the abilities of pupils. The PSHE curriculum is not always well matched to the needs of pupils and there is no consistent oversight of the delivery of careers provision.
18. There is no risk assessment policy, and no oversight of risk management at board or senior leadership level. The lack of a whole school self-evaluation process by senior leaders means that leaders do not effectively challenge each other and fail to consider contextual risks and manage unintended consequences. For example, recent changes to the leadership team mean that their new roles and responsibilities are not clear. The impact on boarding routines of a large cohort of temporary international pupils who were resident in the school at the time of the inspection is not fully considered. Risk assessments for educational visits, boarding and for aspects of health, safety and maintenance are satisfactory.
19. At the start of the inspection, information about the school, its policies and procedures made available was incomplete or inaccurate. The website did not properly identify the proprietor, implied that the former principal was still in post and did not show the most recent year's examination results. These defects were remedied during the course of the inspection.
20. The absence of a systematic review of policies and the lack of an internal audit process or school self-evaluation, meant that some policies did not reflect current practice. For instance, some still contained contact names of members of staff who are no longer employed in the school and had not been fully adjusted from generic templates to fit the context of the school. Others were made available not on the website as required. These errors were rectified during the course of the inspection.
21. Leaders have a limited oversight of records of bullying and behaviour. Although adequate logs exist, they do not enable leader to easily look for trends or patterns in order to take steps to address them.
22. Complaints are handled appropriately, and the log of complaints shows that these are managed in a timely fashion. The requirements of the Equality Act are met and an appropriate accessibility plan is in place.
23. Admission and attendance registers are correctly maintained, and the school notifies the relevant authorities when pupils join or leave the school.

24. There is no oversight of safeguarding at board level. Staff training records are incomplete and some staff are uncertain about aspects of their training.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

25. Standards relating to governance, leadership and risk management are not met.

26. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

27. Overall, leaders plan the curriculum effectively and ensure that an appropriate programme of study is in place across the school. As a result, pupils gain knowledge and develop their skills across a range of areas. They are articulate and confident communicators. Pupils' mathematical skills develop well, alongside their practical and creative skills in art, music and technology. Almost all pupils attain grades at GCSE and A level in line with those predicted from their assessed starting points.
28. Pupils who have SEND often exceed predictions and make good progress. This is because of the individualised and effective support they receive from the learning support centre. In lessons, teachers plan activities which are matched to their personalised learning plans.
29. There is effective provision for pupils with EAL. These pupils make good progress as a result of well targeted specialist teaching. Pupils with EAL typically attain English language examination results that enable them to apply to their chosen universities.
30. A framework is in place to evaluate pupils' work regularly and provide effective feedback on how to improve future work. Most pupils take pride in their work. A systematic process of assessment monitors pupils' progress against their target grade, and school leaders intervene and support effectively if pupils are achieving at levels below their target.
31. Most teachers have good subject knowledge and plan their lessons carefully. Teachers demonstrate a calm, supportive and encouraging manner. Positive relationships between teachers and pupils mean that pupils are well motivated and apply themselves well.
32. Teaching activities and planning are generally matched to pupils' needs and teachers adapt lesson plans if required. The recent high turnover of teaching staff has resulted in a lack of continuity in some learning, and less consistent progress for some pupils. In particular, activities are not always matched to the needs of the more able pupils, and as a result these pupils do not always make consistent progress.
33. School leaders have designed a broad and varied programme of extra-curricular activities for both boarders and day pupils. These include a variety of sports and creative activities, as well as opportunities to extend their academic studies. Pupils can develop a wide range of skills and follow new interests and hobbies in areas such as chess, debating, fencing and judo.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

- 34. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

35. Leaders provide a programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education to support pupils' personal development. In conjunction with the range of sports and physical activities available, it enables pupils to understand the importance of physical fitness to both their physical and mental wellbeing. The PSHE programme informs pupils adequately about topics such as drug and alcohol abuse. While the programme is covered at an adequate level there is inconsistency in the standards of teaching in this subject.
36. An appropriate relationships, sex and health education programme (RSHE) helps pupils to consider such areas as the features of a healthy relationship and how to stay safe online.
37. As part of the PSHE programme, leaders aim to support pupils' emotional and mental wellbeing through activities such as themed assemblies or discussions in tutor time. These opportunities reinforce the key learning points and support pupils' spiritual, moral or cultural education.
38. The school premises, including the boarding houses, are in adequate condition. Urgent repairs are dealt with in a timely fashion. Suitable fire safety procedures are in place, including a fire risk assessment to mitigate any fire risks.
39. There are suitable arrangements and accommodation to care for pupils who are unwell or who have specific medical needs. Boarding house and pastoral staff ensure that pupils' mental health is effectively cared for and pupils benefit from individual support including from specialist staff.
40. Pupils behave well in lessons and there are positive relationships both with adults and with other pupils across year groups. There are few incidences of poor behaviour or bullying. Bullying is effectively dealt with when it is reported. Pupils feel there is a sense of community within the school.
41. However, the current system of recording incidents of poor behaviour does not enable managers to easily identify patterns and trends, and plan staff training to address such incidents in future.
42. Leaders' planning ensures that supervision for pupils and for boarding pupils is in place. Leaders have put in place well-trained boarding house staff as well as effective systems for ensuring the safety and privacy of boarding pupils. Boarders' views are sought through regular meetings and informal conversations. Boarders value the support given to them in their academic studies as well as in the promotion of their wellbeing and personal development.
43. However, the recent integration of a large cohort of new boarders into the boarding house has been unsettling for the existing boarders as it has led to changes in their accommodation and boarding routines.
44. Attendance and admission registers are properly maintained and stored. The destinations of pupils who leave are followed up and pupil attendance is carefully monitored.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

45. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

46. School leaders plan a curriculum which provides pupils with appropriate opportunities to develop their social and economic understanding and to learn about modern society and the wider world.
47. The programme for careers education lacks clear leadership and structure. As a result, some pupils receive only limited guidance about subject choices and careers. Pupils at the end of Year 9 and in Year 11 are supported in their subject choices and in the consideration of future pathways by talks and advice sessions. Pupils in the sixth form receive some guidance about choosing a university course and support for their applications. Overall, this support is too limited in both its scope and delivery to ensure pupils are aware and informed about a wide range of possible options.
48. Leaders ensure pupils have a suitable understanding and respect for public institutions and appreciate the need for rules and laws to govern society. Through activities such as the school council, they gain an understanding and respect for democracy. Senior pupils have opportunities to take responsibility as leaders through their roles as prefects for humanities, school events, performing arts, sports and in boarding.
49. The PSHE programme promotes respect for other cultures and diversity. Incidents of discrimination are rare, and promptly challenged if they occur. Pupils are tolerant and understanding of each other because leaders foster a sense of community and belonging. Pupils demonstrate effective interpersonal skills such as empathy.
50. Pupils from abroad attend the school for one term to develop their English language skills. These pupils undertake an intensive programme of visits to learn about different aspects of life in British society, such as its history and public institutions. They use these experiences to develop their spoken and written English.
51. Leaders ensure pupils have a sound understanding of personal finance and banking. Pupils in Year 12 follow a 'global competencies' programme which improve their skills, knowledge and understanding of the world in preparation for leaving school. These include economic and financial aspects.
52. Pupils are aware of their social responsibilities and welcome opportunities for partnership or charity work. Older pupils organise days to support national charities and pupils in Year 12 are responsible for running an annual charity week, through which they gain confidence as well as financial and organisational skills. Pupils contribute generously to the local food bank and the school choirs sing at local events.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

- 53. Standards relating to careers provision are not met.**
- 54. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.**

Safeguarding

55. Arrangements to safeguard pupils in the school are not effective. The proprietor does not undertake an effective review of safeguarding. There has been no review of the safeguarding policy or of safeguarding practice. Some staff are uncertain about how to refer concerns due to recent changes in roles within the leadership structure.
56. The designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) work effectively with external agencies to manage safeguarding risks and protect pupils from harm. They maintain detailed records of concerns. These show that referrals to other agencies are made in a timely manner.
57. Safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff and volunteers and a suitable central record of appointments is kept. A minor discrepancy in this record was rectified during the course of the inspection.
58. The effectiveness of staff training could not be verified as training records were incomplete at the start of the inspection. Whilst all staff understand that 'it could happen here', some staff are uncertain about practical aspects of school safeguarding policies, such as referral processes and the recording of low-level concerns. However, they do understand how to report child-on-child abuse and recognise the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism.
59. Pupils learn about online safety, and there are suitable processes to monitor and filter access to the internet.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 60. The standards relating to safeguarding and safeguarding of boarders are not met.**
- 61. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.**

Schedule of unmet Standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The relevant Standards are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 3 paragraph 16(a) and (b)	The standard is met if the proprietor ensures that – (a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and (b) appropriate action is taken to reduce the risks that are identified
NMS 9.3	The school ensures that the welfare of boarders at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
ISSR Part 6 paragraph 32(1)(a), (b) and (c)	The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that: (a) the information specified in sub-paragraph (2) is provided* to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate (b) the information specified in sub-paragraph (3) is made available* to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate (c) particulars of the arrangements for meeting the standard contained in paragraph 7 are published on the school’s internet website or, where no such website exists, are provided to parents on request.
ISSR Part 6 paragraph 32(2)(b)(i) and (ii) and (c)	(b) either – (i) where the proprietor is an individual, the proprietor’s full name, address for correspondence during both term-time and holidays and a telephone number or numbers on which the proprietor may be contacted, or (ii) where the proprietor is a body of persons, the address and telephone number of its registered or principal office (c) where there is a governing body, the name and address for correspondence of its Chair.
ISSR Part 6 paragraph 32(3)(e) (f)	(e) particulars of the school’s academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (f) details of the complaints procedure referred to in paragraph 33, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure

	during the preceding school year.
ISSR Part 8 paragraph 34(1) (a), (b) and (c)	The standard is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school – (a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently (b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and (c) actively promotes the well-being of pupils.
NMS 2.1	The school’s governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and takes appropriate action where necessary.
NMS 2.2	The school’s leadership and management, including its governing body where appropriate, demonstrate good skills and knowledge, appropriate to their role and undertake appropriate training as required.
NMS 2.4	The school’s leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met.
NMS 2.5	The school’s leadership and management and governance actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.
NMS 2.7	The school follows and maintains the policies and documents described in Appendix A.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

The relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils’ physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

The relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils’ social and economic education and contribution to society

The relevant Standards are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 1, paragraph 2(1)	The standard in this paragraph is met if –
ISSR Part 1, paragraph (2)(1)(a)	(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively; and
ISSR Part 1 paragraph 2(2)(e) (ii) (iii)	(e) for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that – (ii) enables them to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; and (iii) helps to encourage them to fulfil their potential.

Safeguarding

The relevant Standards are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 3 paragraph 7(a) and (b)	<p>The standard is met if the proprietor ensures that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and (b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
ISSR Part 3 paragraph 8(a) and (b)	<p>Where section 87(1) of the Children Act 1989 applies in relation to a school the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders while they are accommodated at the school; and (b) such arrangements have regard to National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools.
NMS 8.1	<p>The school should ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.

School details

School	Stoke College
Department for Education number	935/6003
Address	Ashen Lane Stoke-by-Clare Sudbury CO10 8JE
Phone number	01223 776226
Email address	info@stokecollege.co.uk
Website	www.stokecollege.co.uk
Proprietor	Mrs Zhao Jie Guo
CEO and acting principal	Mr Mark Logan
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	147
Number of boarding pupils	33
Date of previous inspection	March 2023

Information about the school

62. Stoke College is a co-educational day and boarding school located in Suffolk, offering both flexible and full boarding. In addition, it offers short-term English language and cultural courses for international pupils. At the time of the inspection, 22 pupils from China were boarding in the school.
63. The school is owned by a sole proprietor and oversight is provided through a board of directors, which is supported by a local advisory board.
64. Boarders are accommodated in two boarding houses, one for male and the other for female pupils.
65. The school has identified 29 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
66. English is an additional language (EAL) for 28 pupils.
67. The school states that its aims are to allow pupils to realise their potential to become academic achievers, emotionally intelligent, excellent communicators, highly resilient and community focused.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 November 2023

68. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

69. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with a member of the board of directors
- discussions with the CEO/acting principal, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school

70. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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For more information, please visit isi.net