

Brockhurst and Marlston House Schools

Marlston House, Hermitage, Thatcham, Berks, RG18 9UL

Proprietor: Brockhurst and Marlston House Schools Ltd

Date of visit: 02 March 2015

Purpose of visit

This was an unannounced visit at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) which focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standard) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs), particularly those concerned with safeguarding and the recruitment of staff.

Characteristics of the School

Brockhurst and Marlston House Schools provide a single-sex and co-educational day and boarding education for pupils aged from three to thirteen years. Boys and girls are educated together in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and Year 1, and then separately until their final year, when they again come together. The schools are proprietorial, being owned by a family trust of which two members, together with the schools' senior management team, act as governors. The school is located in a Victorian mansion, with modern additions, within extensive grounds in rural Berkshire. Brockhurst, the boys' school, was founded in Shropshire in 1884 and moved to its present site in 1945. Marlston House, the girls' school, was established in 1995. The school offers full, weekly and occasional boarding to pupils from Year 5 onwards. At the time of the visit, there were 334 pupils in the school (156 boys and 178 girls) of whom 61 are in the EYFS and 77 are full, weekly or occasional boarders. The school has identified 61 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities and 29 with English as an additional language. The previous inspection was in May 2012.

Inspection findings

The pupils interviewed were polite and friendly and professed to be content with life at school. They felt that there were many opportunities for them to be involved in school life. They felt that this was a friendly community and that, by and large, day pupils and boarders got on well with each other. They stated that staff were approachable and supportive and that they felt well looked after. They considered that the quality and variety of food had recently improved significantly, but a few expressed some concern about the privacy of the arrangements for changing and showering. Inspectors subsequently visited the changing accommodation and boarders' bathroom provision, and agreed that aspects of privacy, although just adequate, could be improved.

Welfare, health and safety [ISSRs Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8 Safeguarding; NMS 11; EYFS requirements 3.4-3.8]

The Regulations and Standard are not met.

The safeguarding policy makes appropriate provision and sets out clear arrangements for child protection but does not have full regard to the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe In Education (KCSIE), nor does it demonstrate that the school is aware of its wider responsibilities for safeguarding or promoting pupils' welfare. There is a lack of clarity in the policy with respect to the roles of the designated lead person for safeguarding (DSL) and her deputy. Key responsibilities are not stated and they do not have senior leadership roles. Although the DSL has a clear grasp of child protection arrangements, it is not clear that she has sufficient authority to initiate school policy on dealing with emotional or mental health issues, or providing guidance on pupils' use of electronic technology. Oversight of safe staff recruitment is the responsibility of the headmaster.

The policy is unclear and inconsistent in setting out reporting procedures for allegations against staff, the DSL and the head. Several contradictory references appear in the policy, and there is no provision at all for an allegation against the proprietorial head (which needs to be referred directly to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO)).

Comprehensive training on safeguarding and child protection was recently carried out by an external provider from outside the local authority, but the school is not able to confirm that the content of this course is acceptable to and in line with the local authority's requirements. Not all members of staff attended this training in September 2014, and the school has not yet made arrangements to provide suitably detailed training for these and other staff who have joined the school in the last six months. Induction training in safeguarding has been provided to all new staff; the policy does not specify that this contains the four areas required by KCSIE.

Communication between staff and the DSL is efficient, and welfare concerns are carefully logged. The DSL readily communicates with local Children's Services for advice and support when needed and, currently, she has a small number of pupils with concerns about their pastoral development or welfare, some of which have met the agreed thresholds and have been shared with the local authority or other agencies. Of these, one has resulted in a formal referral.

The school has dealt with cases of self-harm and eating disorders in the past, although the school's safeguarding policy makes no mention of such emotional or mental health issues, or willingness to consult with other agencies in handling them. No specialist guidance has been provided to staff on recognising and dealing with such matters, although a member of staff has recently attended a specialist training course on self-harming behaviour. Other responsibilities for the promotion of internet safety have been discharged to a limited extent, but concerns over the safe use of social networking sites have not yet been addressed. Some teachers feel that this is not needed as most pupils are day pupils, and boarders have very restricted use of mobile phones.

The school's safe recruitment policy and guidance to staff on their conduct towards children would benefit from further amplification and exemplification.

Although the senior management team reviews welfare and pastoral matters regularly, such monitoring has not yet been sufficiently rigorous to identify the weaknesses and omissions in the safeguarding and staff recruitment process. Meetings of the proprietorial trust have not conducted the required annual review of the safeguarding policy or its efficient implementation in school.

No complaints from parents in respect of safeguarding concerns have been received in recent years. The complaints log contains just one entry of a serious sanction in the last three years, and the head confirmed that there have been no formal complaints in this period.

Suitability of staff [ISSRs Part 4, paragraphs 18 to 21; NMS 14; EYFS requirements 3.9-3.13]

The Regulations and Standard are not met.

Inspection of the single central register of staff appointments identified a number of inaccuracies and omissions, but many of these were recording issues, rather than a failure to carry out the required checks. Some entries indicated that checks had been done but failed to record the date on which they were completed. Some significantly late checks of previous employment history, receipt of references and medical fitness checks were identified, some up to 5 months late. The school was not able to satisfactorily explain how these staff were able to start work before all the required checks were completed. No overseas criminal records checks have been requested for staff recently recruited from overseas. Adults living on the school grounds who are not staff but have the potential for access to pupils are said to have been checked but no clear record to confirm this was forthcoming. The school doctor, who is also the independent listener for the boarders, is not included on the SCR, although the school had a note that a criminal record check through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) had been carried out by his medical practice. A recent member of staff who had started work pending the arrival of the disclosure from the DBS had a barred list check carried out and an appropriate assessment of risk, and suitable supervision arrangements have been put in place.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSRs Part 8, paragraph 34]

The Regulation is not met.

The school demonstrated full regulatory compliance at its previous inspection in 2012 but had recorded failures of recruitment procedures at its inspection in 2008. It also shows failures of other regulations that have occurred over a significant period, for example in relation to welfare health and safety. There are weaknesses in clarifying the accountability and monitoring responsibilities, both of proprietors and senior managers, to ensure that the safeguarding and staff recruitment regulations are met. Weaknesses in key written policies have allowed required actions to be misunderstood or not identified. Nevertheless, there is a clear commitment on the part of staff to meet the needs of pupils, and evidence indicates that staff actively promote their welfare in nearly all areas.

Regulatory action points

The school does not meet all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2013 and requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework.

Welfare, health and safety [ISSRs Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8 Safeguarding; NMS 11; EYFS requirements 3.4-3.8]

- ❖ Improve the wording and implementation of the safeguarding policy as follows:

Policy wording

- Remove the caveat that implies a threshold for reporting concerns to Children's Services only if "there is clear evidence of abuse or a disclosure".
- Clarify the procedures for reporting allegations against staff (to the DSL, who will keep the head informed), against the DSL (to the head), or against the head (to the LADO). In the first two situations, confirm that the LADO will be immediately contacted, and by whom.
- Give the job titles of the DSL and her deputy, and list the role and responsibilities of the DSL, as specified in KCSIE. Ensure that overall

safeguarding responsibility is taken on by someone with senior leadership authority.

- Clarify that the school has regard to its wider safeguarding responsibilities to children in need, as well as those at risk, and state its willingness to refer to different agencies to provide support for a child.
- Ensure that the policy is dated and indicate the date of its next formal review.
- Delete the obsolete reference to the DCSF and the out-of-date guidance *Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education (SCSRE)*.
- Identify the person with responsibility for safeguarding in the EYFS, and ensure that a restriction on the use of both mobile phones and cameras in the EYFS is included.
- Set out the school's commitment to dealing with emotional and mental health issues.
- Provide contact details for the DSL and her deputy.
- Specify that the police will be informed if the school has reason to believe that a criminal offence has been committed.
- Improve the safe recruitment policy by updating and providing clearer detail about who has responsibility for carrying out the required checks and allowing staff to start work; by including the requirement to carry out teacher prohibition and overseas checks when relevant; by providing confirmation that staff are only allowed to start work pending the DBS disclosure if a barred list check is carried out and appropriate supervision is put in place; and by clarifying the recruitment arrangements for supply staff and contractors.

Implementation

- Ensure that staff are informed about changes in the policy wording and procedures.
- Provide suitable arrangements for training in safeguarding and child protection for those staff who missed the training at the start of the academic year, and those starting work since then.
- Ensure that staff safeguarding training is in line with local authority procedures and that the content is approved by them.
- Ensure that the proprietors carry out the required annual review of the safeguarding policy and its efficient implementation.
- Ensure that omissions in the recruitment process are rectified, especially ensuring that checks of previous employment history are carried out, and satisfactory references received, before staff start work.

❖ ***Suitability of staff [ISSRs Part 4, paragraphs 18 to 21; NMS 14; EYFS requirements 3.9-3.13]***

- Ensure that checks of medical fitness and, where required, overseas criminal records checks are carried out before staff start work.
- Ensure that the dates of checks of identity, right to work in the UK, relevant qualifications, prohibition orders and barred list checks are accurately recorded in the SCR.
- Ensure that required checks carried out on adults not being members of staff but having potential unsupervised access to pupils are appropriately recorded.

❖ ***Quality of leadership in management of schools [ISSRs Part 8, paragraph 34 (a) and (b)]***

- Ensure that the persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

Other Recommendations

In addition to the above regulatory action points, the school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. To improve the staff code of conduct, provide further exemplification of one-to-one contact issues with pupils, such as supervision of boarders and changing rooms, individual music lessons, physical contact, and the care of the very youngest children.