

## St Edward's School

St Edward's School, Woodstock Road, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX2 7NN

**Date of visit** 02 March 2015

**Chair of Governors** Mr Mike Stanfield

### Purpose of visit

This was an unannounced emergency visit carried out at the request of the DfE, to assess compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs) and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2013 (NMS), focusing on boarding provision and care, in particular, those standards concerning safeguarding, including staff recruitment and suitability, welfare and leadership and management.

### Characteristics of the School

St Edward's is a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged between 12 and 18, located close to the town centre of Oxford. It is a registered charity, with 13 members of the governing body acting as trustees. There are seven sub-committees, all of which report to the main board at every meeting. At the time of the visit there were 660 pupils (394 boys; 266 girls), including 553 full boarders. There are 12 boarding houses – 6 located amongst the teaching buildings; 6 located on the playing fields site. No pupil has a statement of special educational need and/or disability (SEND); 29 pupils are identified by the school as needing additional learning support, and 16 pupils have English as an additional language (EAL).

### Inspection findings

#### **Welfare, Health & Safety of Pupils (ISSR Part 3, paras. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 & 16; NMS 2, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14 & 15)**

The school does not meet ISSR paragraphs 7 and 8, and NMS 11.

**Safeguarding Policy** - The safeguarding policy on the school's website indicates concern for pupils but the arrangements described in it do not fully reflect the latest statutory guidance, in particular the requirements of Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) issued in April 2014. The policy requires amendment as follows:

- Include that all staff read at least Part 1 of KCSIE. [The school did issue this document to staff in September 2014. At the time of this visit,

confirmation that this had been read had been received from most, but not all, staff.]

- Make clear that the school contributes to inter-agency working.
- Confirm that any person may make a direct referral of a safeguarding concern and display contact details for local agencies more prominently.
- Include a definition of safeguarding and the forms of abuse outlined in KCSIE.
- Differentiate between the reporting routes for children who have suffered or who are likely to suffer significant harm and those who are in need of additional support.
- Include advice on dealing with abuse by pupils.
- Ensure that the arrangements for dealing with allegations of abuse fully conform to the latest guidance.
- Clarify the induction programme for new staff and the arrangements for training of all staff.

A revised policy was presented at the start of the visit which included the contents specified above but this had not yet been presented to the full board for approval at their next meeting. This was due to take place within two weeks of the visit.

**Arrangements for Training in Safeguarding** – The school has made good arrangements for the training of all staff in safeguarding. The most recent training in January 2015 was conducted by an officer from the local authority and all staff were requested to attend. The school plans to update those staff who were not able to attend but has not yet done so. A sufficient number of staff, including the DSL and the medical staff, have received training at level 2, which includes the necessary content for acting as DSL. Interviews with staff confirmed their understanding of each individual's responsibility for safeguarding and of the process for reporting any concerns. A new and comprehensive policy on safe working practice is provided to all staff, who confirm that they have also received recent training on appropriate boundaries when working with boarders.

**Handling and recording of safeguarding concerns:** Scrutiny of recent safeguarding concerns demonstrate that the school communicates swiftly with the local safeguarding agency if an allegation of abuse is made. Records of recent safeguarding concerns are comprehensive, detailing a step-by-step approach which conforms to the school's latest policy. In interview, the DSL confirmed that the school has good links with local agencies, including using them as a training resource.

Documentation pertaining to the resignation of a member of staff following an allegation of inappropriate conduct was carefully scrutinised. The evidence showed that the school followed appropriate procedures once it became aware of allegations. The school's file notes show that the advice of the LADO was closely followed. As advised by the LADO, the school began an investigation but this was taken over by the police. DBS and NCTL were notified promptly and acknowledged receipt. Subsequent allegations were made by parents and some staff. File notes showed that all allegations were recorded and detailed to the LADO and to the police.

Following the reporting of the incidents, the governing body responded by initiating a programme of self-reflection of policies and practice. These included a succession of meetings of the safeguarding and compliance committee to review the school's response. The review involved a person independent of the school so that governors could be assured of an objective opinion and advice.

A range of school policies were revised in the light of the concerns, and there has been reorganisation of the leadership team to ensure greater supervision of boarding matters and house staff and retraining for all staff.

The outcome of these meetings and reviews included a summary of 'lessons learned' and amended policies and practice in boarding, which represents a significant improvement in the supervision and organisation of boarding provision and care.

Minutes from meetings between governors and senior managers demonstrate that the school has taken seriously comments made by the LADO that on previous occasions staff have not been sufficiently proactive in raising issues which should have been recognised as inappropriate and to warrant a referral to the DSL. The measures taken are positive attempts by the school to improve their practice.

In conversation with current staff, they confirm that they understand the crucial importance of their role in reporting all concerns and are more familiar with the safeguarding procedures than they were previously. In meetings with boarders, they state that they understand the systems in place to keep them safe. The current situation therefore is that there are now sufficient policies and procedures in place so that the safety of pupils should not be compromised. The school has demonstrated a swift and appropriate response to the latest incident reported in order to mitigate the possibility of a re-occurrence.

**Whistle-blowing Policy** – The revised safeguarding policy emphasizes the importance of reporting concerns. This addition was made in response to an earlier safeguarding concern where staff did not report concerns until after an initial allegation had been made. In conversations with boarding staff, which included domestic and maintenance staff as well as house tutors, all were clear about their responsibility to speak up.

**Induction Procedures and House Activities** – Boarders confirm that they are given strong support and guidance when they join the school. In addition to comprehensive booklets detailing house routines, each boarder is allocated a peer mentor, who has received appropriate training in this role. Boarders speak warmly of the friendly welcome from both staff and other boarders. A wide range of activities are planned for the evening and weekends which are appropriate in range and variety.

**The Views of Boarders** – In two meetings and other discussions with boarders, pupils confirmed that they are happy with the standard of boarding care and were confident that they had a range of people to turn to if they had a concern. Boarders in the sixth form can apply to be prefects as well as peer mentors and are offered training and on-going support. Two younger boarders said that they appreciated the support offered by older pupils. Boarders also stated that relationships with boarding staff are warm and friendly. The need for privacy is respected. Should they have a concern which cannot be addressed by boarding staff, boarders have ready access to medical care, a counsellor, an independent listener and a chaplain. Boarders state that there are few bullying issues and that sanctions are appropriate and fairly implemented. The programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) shows that boarders receive information about safeguarding and personal safety which is appropriate to their age.

**Measures to promote good behaviour and guard against bullying** – The school has comprehensive policies in place to promote good behaviour and includes carefully worded guidance on who to contact if they are being bullied or a witness to bullying. Boarders discussed with confidence the guidance they are given on keeping safe through assemblies, PSHE and external speakers. Careful records are kept of major incidents and sanctions so that trends or patterns can be tracked and monitored.

**Welfare, Health & Safety** – Appropriate policies comply with relevant regulations and are implemented effectively. Risk assessments are centrally stored and cover all major incidents.

**Supervision of Pupils** – Each house has a team of staff, appropriately qualified and experienced, who are charged with the supervision of the whereabouts of boarders. A clear policy is in place, understood by both staff and boarders, and implemented.

**Suitability of Staff, Supply Staff and Proprietors (ISSR Part 4, NMS 14)**

The regulations and standard in relation to staff recruitment are met.

Arrangements for checking staff before appointment include appropriate Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks on all staff and, where appropriate, volunteers. This represents an improved position from that noted during the previous inspection in January 2014, when the school did not meet the requirement to make all required checks before the appointment of staff. A comprehensive recruitment policy is in place and records show that it is carefully implemented. This includes appropriate arrangements should the DBS certificate be delayed. Entries on the SCR are well organised and clear and include the name of the checker and dates of checks. On a few occasions the month, rather than the precise date of appointment was recorded. However, in each case, the DBS check arrived before the month of appointment so that the safety of pupils was not in question. Staff in charge of maintaining the SCR confirm that regular ‘spot checks’ are undertaken by governors.

DBS checks are made on all family members of boarding staff resident on the same premises as the boarding accommodation but not employed by the school. There is a written agreement between the school and any person over the age of 16 which specifies the terms of their accommodation. Clear guidance is given in this and in an additional document on appropriate contact with boarders. The letter of agreement is signed and retained by the school.

**Premises of and Accommodation at Schools (ISSR Part 5, para 25; NMS 5)**

The school meets this regulation and standard.

There are 12 boarding houses, each of which has a distinctive character. Boarding policies are common to all so that there is no inequality of provision and care. All are furnished and maintained appropriately. Washroom facilities offer suitable privacy and are sufficient in quantity and quality. Provision for medical care is excellent. Qualified staff are available at all times. Additional support is provided through an on-site counselling team. Arrangements to involve other medical services are arranged as required. All houses have suitable areas for social and recreational purposes. Access requires authorisation and boarders state that they feel safe.

## **Quality of Leadership and Management of Schools (ISSR Part 8, para 34; NMS 1, 13, 17 & 19)**

The school meets the regulation and standards.

Governors and senior leaders acted swiftly and appropriately following a recent incident so that subsequently, and at the time of this visit, oversight had been substantially improved. The school has a clear vision for the promotion and development of boarding principles and practice. Since the previous boarding inspection, responsibility for leadership of boarding, formerly the responsibility of the sub-warden, has now passed to the deputy head (pastoral). Evidence from meetings with the senior leadership team and from scrutiny of minutes of meetings show that there is a significant increase in the level of monitoring of practice in the boarding houses because of this reorganisation of responsibilities.

The governors of the school understand the importance of their role in overseeing boarding provision and care. One governor has designated responsibility for boarding and visits each house in turn on a regular basis, talking to staff and boarders and scrutinising records.

All staff involved in boarding have the requisite skills and knowledge appropriate to their role. In meetings, they show a sincere desire to establish a homely and welcoming atmosphere, so that they actively promote the well-being of pupils.

### **Regulatory action points**

The school does not meet all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2013, and therefore it is required to:

- Immediately update policies to reflect the latest requirements, making them accessible to parents as required. [ISSR Part 3 para. 7 (a) and (b) and 8 (a) and (b) under Welfare, health and safety of pupils and NMS 11];
- Confirm that all staff read KCSIE Part 1. [ISSR Part 3 para. 7 (a) and (b) and 8 (a) and (b) under Welfare, health and safety of pupils and NMS 11];

### **Other Recommendations**

In addition to the above regulatory points, the school is advised to make the following improvements:

1. Always include the date of appointment of staff as well as the month on the SCR.
2. Ensure that any staff absent from training in safeguarding receive prompt updates.