

## St John's-on-the-Hill

Castleford Hill, Tutshill, Chepstow, Monmouthshire, NP16 7LE

**Date of visit** 10 March 2015

### Purpose of visit

This was an unannounced visit at the request of the Department for Education, and it focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations (ISSRs), particularly those concerned with safeguarding and complaints.

### Characteristics of the School

St John's-on-the-Hill was founded in 1923 and is a co-educational day and boarding preparatory school, with a day nursery on site and two satellite nurseries. It is situated in extensive grounds on the edge of Chepstow, close to Gloucestershire and the Welsh border. At the time of the visit the school operated as a charitable trust with a board of trustee governors. The school was subsequently acquired by Dean Close School, Cheltenham, in July 2015 and governance has transferred to the board of trustees who govern the schools under their ownership. Pupils are aged from three months to thirteen years. Most of the pupils are white British. The total number of pupils is 524 (273 boys and 251 girls). Five hundred and three are day pupils and 21 are boarders. Three hundred and twenty-one children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The school has identified 40 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The previous ISI inspection was in October 2012.

### Inspection findings

#### **Welfare, health and safety of pupils [Independent School Standards Regulations (ISSRs), Part 3, paragraphs 7(a) and (b) and 8(a) and (b) and NMS 11]**

The regulation is not met.

The safeguarding policy does not fully match the requirements of *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE), although many of the necessary requirements are included. Monitoring by senior staff and governors has been light touch and the governors' minutes of their annual review are extremely brief.

However, safeguarding is a major priority of the school and contact with children's services is well documented. It indicates conspicuous sensitivity and care, and the designated staff have the necessary advanced training. A wide range of suitable risk assessments is available and updated as necessary. The code of conduct for staff is comprehensive and

included in the safeguarding policy. The interview group of teachers showed strong awareness of issues relating to safeguarding and electronic safety. These are taught in the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum and have been emphasised through professional presentations to pupils, staff and parents. The pupils too had a good, age-appropriate understanding of safeguarding issues and the dangers of electronic communication. They regarded themselves as safe in the school and reported good relationships with staff and other pupils. The pupils interviewed were open and communicative. Day and boarding pupils readily expressed their enjoyment of life at school and its friendly atmosphere. They were appreciative of the opportunities it provides not only in sports and other activities but also in subjects of the curriculum. They regarded their teachers as helpful and approachable. Older pupils have responsibility as 'support officers' to help younger pupils to resolve difficulties. The children in the EYFS are looked after with the correct ratios of staff and sleeping arrangements appropriate to needs and safety, with babies and toddlers sleeping in cots, while the older children have mats on the floor. Decisive action has been taken in relation to the small number of incidents which have related to potential welfare concerns.

#### **Single Central Register of Appointments (SCRA) [ISSRs Part 4, paragraph 21 and NMS 14.1]**

The regulation is not met.

The method of checking staff is a combination of a system of individual sheets (as used by the Independent Schools' Bursars Association) and an electronic spreadsheet for the single central register. The two systems are largely compatible but the spreadsheet needs an additional column for the CV/application form and fuller use of the notes column. Much detailed checking takes place but not all checks are dated on the spreadsheet before the start of work, and the medical questionnaire is appropriate for use after rather than before an appointment. However the school was able to show from the ISBA system and the personal files that the missing checks had been made.

#### **Manner in which complaints are to be handled [ISSRs Part 7, paragraph 33 and NMS 18]**

The regulation is not met.

In the written complaints procedure, the time scales are not sufficiently clear and the requirements from January 2015 have not been included.

#### **Quality of leadership in and management of schools [ISSRs Part 8, paragraph 34(1)(b)]**

The regulation is not met.

The leadership and management have not ensured that the ISSRs are consistently met. Governors and senior leaders have not been fully involved in the monitoring of policy formulation and implementation.

### **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 therefore it is required to:

### **ISSRs Part 3, Welfare, Health and Safety, paragraph 7(a) and (b) and paragraph 8(a) and (b) and National Minimum Standard 11**

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

- [a] either place a full recruitment policy inside the safeguarding policy or refer to such a written policy, ensuring that it includes the procedure for allowing an applicant to start work before receipt of the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate;
- [b] indicate that the school contributes to inter-agency working;
- [c] clarify that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and that anyone can make a referral to children's social care;
- [d] give the date of the annual review and indicate that it is signed-off by the chairman of governors;
- [e] ensure that the nominated governor's role includes liaison with the local authority on issues of child protection or in case of allegations against the head or a member of the governing body;
- [f] ensure that the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has the necessary status and authority by virtue of membership of the school's senior leadership team;
- [g] clarify that the DSL makes prompt contact (i) with children's social care where there are concerns that a child may be in need of help or at risk, or (ii) with the LADO in relation to allegations against someone working in the school, or (iii) with the police if a criminal offence is suspected;
- [h] state that, if at any time there is a risk of serious harm to a child, a referral should be made to children's social care immediately;
- [i] give contact details for the LADO and describe the function of the LADO in providing advice and presiding over the investigation of any allegation or suspicion of abuse directed against anyone working in the school;
- [j] state that all allegations are reported to the LADO immediately and within one working day at the latest for advice;
- [k] provide definitions of the different kinds of child abuse and a list of possible signs, in line with KCSIE;
- [l] in dealing with possible abuse by one or more pupils against another pupil, stress the need to refer such abuse to an external safeguarding agency [internal disciplinary procedures would not be sufficient];
- [m] indicate by what provision safeguarding and e-safety are taught to pupils.

### **Single Central Register of Appointments (SCRA) [ISSRs Part 4, paragraph 21 and NMS 14.1]**

Ensure that, before an applicant starts work, all columns of the single central register are completed and the check of physical and mental fitness is in the form of a declaration related to the post in question.

### **Manner in which complaints are to be handled [ISSRs Part 7, paragraph 33 and NMS 18]**

The written procedure needs amendment and updating as follows:

- [c] [under TIMEFRAME] provide clear timescales for stages 2 and 3 of the procedure [the terms 'target' and 'as soon as practicable' are not sufficiently clear];
- [i][iii] specify that the findings and recommendations are available to the chairman of governors (proprietor) and the headmaster on the school premises;

- [j] undertake to keep a written record of all formal complaints (stages 2 and 3) [while the school could optionally undertake to keep all complaints, this is no longer necessary by the latest requirements];
- [j] remove the wording suggesting that ‘additional records may be kept’, since the quoted items include details which are naturally kept to identify the complaint in question;
- [j][i] provide for the written record to show whether complaints were resolved at stage 2 (formal) or proceeded to a panel hearing [it is no longer necessary to retain records of all complaints];
- [j][iii] provide for the record to include the action taken as a result of the complaints (whether upheld or not);
- [k] change the wording to accommodate as an exception to confidentiality ‘an inspection body under section 109 of the 2008 Act’.

Amend the reference to the information requirement under Part 6 of the Independent School Standards Regulations, so that it reads ‘paragraph 32(3)(f) of the 2014 requirements’.

Delete the reference to a child raising a complaint, since this procedure is intended for parents.

It is recommended, in addition to the given telephone number, to include the Ofsted postal address: Piccadilly Gate, Manchester M1 2WD.

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

Ensure that rigorous attention is given to the drafting of regulatory policies and to the related monitoring of school policies, in particular those for safeguarding and recruitment procedures.

### **Other Recommendations**

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

1. Ensure that the governors’ monitoring role is strengthened to include first-hand awareness of regulatory requirements and their implementation and that the annual review of safeguarding policy and implementation is clearly recorded in the governors’ minutes, with reference to monitoring activity and discussion of safeguarding issues.