

# Stanbridge Earls School

Stanbridge Earls School, Stanbridge Earls, ROMSEY, Hampshire, SO51 0ZS

## Inspection dates

30/04/2013 to 02/05/2013

## Reason for inspection

The Department for Education (DfE) instructed Ofsted to undertake an emergency unannounced inspection in January 2013 following receipt of serious safeguarding concerns identified in a Special Educational Needs and Disability First-Tier Tribunal. These concerns included the failure to protect children and young people from serious sexual assault. In response to the January 2013 inspection, the school produced an action plan that was rejected by the DfE. Ofsted was then instructed to undertake a second emergency inspection to commence on 30 April 2013 and report on the effectiveness of child protection arrangements, leadership and governance within the school.

This inspection coincided with an Independent Schools Inspectorate inspection, a visit to the school by an officer representing the Children's Commissioner and an investigatory visit by the Charity Commission.

## Conclusions

This inspection was completed over three days. Senior staff, including the newly appointed Chair of Governors and a group of external consultants, were interviewed. Ofsted toured the premises, spoke with young people and examined key records and policies.

The DfE rejected the school's original action plan following the January 2013 Ofsted inspection. The school has worked to strengthen and implement an updated action plan to address safeguarding failures. In some areas progress has been made, management structures revised and practice improved. However, serious weaknesses remain.

A team of appropriately qualified and experienced consultants are now in place and are working with the school to complete baseline audits of safeguarding, leadership, boarding provision, policies and associated guidance. Consequently, the school's awareness of its own strengths and weaknesses is increasing and action plans that may support improvement are being developed. This is, however, a recent development given that the full team of consultants was not appointed until March 2013.

Child protection and safeguarding now have a higher profile across the school and the governing body. A secure centralised system to record all child protection concerns is in place and includes a record of any interview, meeting or discussion and a chronology of actions. Internal safeguarding systems and procedures have been strengthened through the establishment of a safeguarding standing committee and regular weekly internal safeguarding meetings. Consequently, inspectors found evidence of improved communication between academic and care staff in some of the cases tracked, with increased levels of supervision by senior managers and governors.

Pupil placement plans have been developed with clearer linkage to the Pupils of Particular Interest system (PPI). This structure informs staff of individual needs to guide daily interventions and care provided to children.

The school is now in a stronger position to monitor children and manage their care throughout the whole school. However, the above systems and plans are still being developed and are not yet fully embedded. Evidence of impact thus remains limited.

The National Autistic Society (NAS) has audited the school, identifying the need for staff to attend basic awareness training in autistic spectrum disorders. The NAS has been commissioned to deliver this training by the end of the summer term. Further training is planned for the autumn term to provide intermediate skills and knowledge training for staff who have frequent or intensive contact with children. More detailed training will be provided for identified staff, including house parents.

The school has updated and issued revised guidance on how staff in the health centre will respond to child protection concerns. There is evidence of this working effectively so that house parents and others are informed appropriately of concerns. Health centre staff are clear about the limits that will be placed on patient confidentiality where there are concerns that a child may be at risk.

Hampshire County Council Children's Services Department have confirmed that all contacts received from the school since the last inspection in January have been managed well by the school, thus enabling statutory agencies to discharge their safeguarding functions appropriately.

While the County Council report that the school has acted appropriately in the cases that have come to their attention, in other circumstances reviewed by inspectors, it has not. Two significant incidents that have occurred since the last inspection have not been managed effectively by the school leaving children at potential risk of harm. In both these cases significant risks have not been recognised or fully assessed by staff, including senior managers within the school.

Staffing arrangements are inadequate. For example, junior and inexperienced staff are left in charge of large groups of pupils. In the one boarding house, a new houseparent who has no relevant residential experience was left in charge of 39 boys within a week of starting to work at the school. His induction had included basic child protection instruction, but he had not been given an overview of individual young people's needs or directed to read risk assessments.

As stated within the school's original and updated action plans submitted following the January 2013 inspection, risk assessments and pupil placement plans are now in place for the majority of children. These do not provide any detailed guidance or instruction to staff on how individual needs, including critical health needs, must be met.

Since the inspection in January 2013, six new staff started working at the school prior to receipt of a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check. At the time of appointment for five of these staff, there was no documented risk assessment to confirm that the headteacher had given permission for them to commence working and to outline the necessary additional supervision arrangements. The continued failure here is a real concern and indicative of weakness in the leadership of the school. Where the school have received information that calls into question the suitability of a member of staff, leaders in the school have not taken urgent action to assess risk or decide whether to restrict or remove staff from duty.

There are now clearer protocols to guide communication between the school and health centre staff, which the school report as working effectively. There are, however, no systems to provide aggregated data from the health centre that would help inform a school development plan. For example, the health centre does not provide data on the number of children who ask for contraceptive advice or raise concerns about peer relationships. The nurses working in the health

centre no longer have access to clinical supervision and any decisions in relation to 'Gillick' competence are made without reference to a senior clinician.

In the absence of a development plan, the school is unable to articulate plans beyond the immediate steps that it is taking to improve safeguarding. Girls already make up less than 20% of the pupil population. This will reduce further in the next two years as a significant proportion of girls are in the sixth form and about to leave. At the end of this term, a girls' house will close. The one remaining girls' house will include a much wider age range, which will increase the complexity of house dynamics. The reducing number of girls attending and boarding at the school has not been subject to detailed review to analyse the impact this will have on culture and practice within the school, or to set out how the school can effectively meet the needs of those girls who will remain at the school.

There remains a lack of clear leadership within the school to enable them to take forward the post-inspection action plan despite the appointment of a team of consultants. This is preventing rapid improvement, clear prioritisation and resource allocation on a systematic basis. During the inspection, the Chair of Governors accepted that the management arrangements were inadequate and would not secure the urgent improvements required. The Chair of Governors reported that the school are working to appoint a new interim head to lead the school through to the end of the academic year and until a permanent head can be appointed. No appointment had been made by the end of the inspection.

In conclusion the school has not made the urgent improvements required by Ofsted in January 2013 because leadership is not clear and incisive. Although this inspection has found evidence that there have been some improvements to safeguarding since the end of March, and particularly since the resignation of the previous headteacher, it is a concern that more significant improvement has not been secured in the three months since the last inspection. As a consequence of continuing weaknesses within leadership and governance, children remain unsafe at this residential special school.

In these circumstances, Ofsted recommends that the Department for Education take urgent action and intervene directly to ensure that leadership of the school is immediately improved. If this cannot be secured, the school should close.

The school is failing to meet the following national minimum standards and should undertake the actions outlined below:

#### NMS 11 Child protection

The school must improve its capacity to recognise risk factors so that these can be managed effectively.

Wherever there are child protection concerns, whether or not these are referred to external agencies, the school must complete a thorough and rigorous assessment of all risks. This must include assessment of the relative vulnerabilities of other children within the school. Any action taken to reduce or manage risk must be effective. It must be capable of delivery within the school environment and within the staffing levels available at the time.

#### NMS 13 Leadership and management

The school should ensure that there is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision.

Clearer communication systems between boarding, senior managers, academic and health staff are still urgently required. These should support the development of an accurate, permanent and accessible record of history and progress for each child.

The school's governing body is still required to immediately improve systems to monitor care and welfare provision within the school. All serious and significant incidents should be reviewed by a

suitably qualified and experienced member of the governing body to ensure that effective action is taken in every case.

#### NMS 14 Staff recruitment

Where new staff commence employment prior to receipt of a CRB, the school should ensure that an assessment is undertaken to confirm the level of supervision required. This should reflect what is known about the person concerned, their experience, the nature of their duties and the level of responsibility they will carry.

The school should vet staff in line with regulatory requirements. In particular, the school should take urgent action to review the suitability of staffing arrangements where information received raises concern about the suitability of individuals employed.

#### NMS 15 Staff deployment and supervision of children

The school must ensure that a sufficient number of competent staff are deployed appropriately on all shifts and across all boarding houses to meet the individual needs of all children resident in the school.

Staff members who are placed in charge of boarding houses must have substantial relevant experience and have successfully completed their induction and probationary periods.

#### NMS 19 Staff supervision, training and support

The school must ensure that nursing staff have immediate access to appropriate clinical supervision.

#### NMS 21 Placement planning and review

Pupil placement plans must identify the needs of each child that the school should meet and specify how the school will care for and promote their welfare on a day-to-day basis.

Pupil placement plans must be regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in her or his development.

## National minimum standards

The school must meet the following national minimum standards for residential special schools.

- The school ensures that: 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 (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 11)
- There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff. The school's governing body or proprietor has a system to monitor care and welfare provision in the school. (NMS 13.1)
- Schools operate safe recruitment procedures and vet staff in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State (as referenced in 'Residential Special Schools National Minimum Standards'). (NMS 14.1)
- There is a sufficient number of competent staff deployed appropriately, both as a staff group and on individual shifts, to fulfil the school's Statement of Purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the school. (NMS 15.1)
- Staff members who are placed in charge of the school and other staff at particular times (e.g. as leaders of staff shifts) have substantial relevant experience of working in the school and have successfully completed their induction and probationary periods. (NMS 15.4)
- All staff have access to support and advice for their role. They also have regular supervision and formal annual appraisal of their performance. (NMS 19.6)

- The school produces a written placement plan, agreed as far as is practicable with the child, the child's parents/carers and any placing authority for the child, unless the information is held elsewhere such as in the child's statement of special educational needs. The placement plan identifies the needs of that child that the school should meet and specifies how the school will care for the child and promote their welfare on a day to day basis. Where significant changes are made to the placement plan there is appropriate consultation. Where applicable the plan is consistent with the care plan of the placing authority for any child placed by a local authority. The placement plan is regularly reviewed and amended as necessary to reflect significant changes in the child's needs or progress in his or her development. Where feasible, children in the school are aware of the content of their placement plans, and confirm that the school is providing care for them that is consistent with the plans. (NMS 21.1)

## Inspection team

Martin Davis	Lead social care inspector
Lucy Martin	Social care inspector

## Information about this school

Stanbridge Earls is an independent co-educational day and residential special school for 192 pupils aged between 10 and 20 years. There are currently 189 pupils on the school roll, 153 boys and 36 girls; 159 are boarders. All pupils are identified as having special educational needs or disabilities (SEND); 79 have a statement of special educational need

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	116549
<b>Social care unique reference number</b>	SC012020
<b>DfE registration number</b>	850/6065

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted at the request of the Registration Authority. It was conducted under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

<b>Type of school</b>	Affiliated Independent
<b>Number of boarders on roll</b>	159
<b>Gender of boarders</b>	Mixed
<b>Age range of boarders</b>	10 to 20
<b>Headteacher</b>	Post Vacant
<b>Date of previous boarding inspection</b>	30/01/2012
<b>Telephone number</b>	01794 529400
<b>Email address</b>	admin@stanbridgeearls.co.uk

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