

# Advice note for an emergency inspection – welfare only

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## **Stanbridge Earls School**

DfE registration number	116549
Unique reference number (URN)	
URN for social care	SC012020
Inspection number	
Dates	30 April – 2 May 2013
Lead inspector	Martin Davis HMI

## Information about the inspection

This inspection of residential provision was conducted by Ofsted at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. It was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

## Information about the 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. A recent audit by the National Autistic Society found that 25% of pupils have significant autistic traits. The school is located two miles north of Romsey, Hampshire.

## Purpose of the 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.

## Advice to the Department for Education

### Welfare

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.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents).

<sup>3</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

On 18 April 2013, 11 days before the start of this inspection, the Chair of Governors accepted the resignation of the Headteacher, Peter Trythall. At the start of the inspection, the Chair of Governors outlined the interim leadership arrangements as two deputy headteachers with responsibility for day-to-day management and a team of external consultants appointed to support improvement. The Chair of Governors reported that he had growing confidence in the leadership arrangements and, with closer monitoring from governors, anticipated that they would remain in place until the end of the summer term. He explained that the school's plan is to recruit an interim headteacher from September 2013 and then make a permanent appointment by the start of the 2014/15 academic year.

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. The above system 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.

On 3 May 2013, Hampshire County Council Children's Services Department confirmed that, since the January 2013 inspection, it has received five new contacts from Stanbridge Earls School. One progressed from referral to a child protection investigation. This did not relate to issues at the school. The school correctly identified concerns about the care provided by parents, which were duly investigated. In the remaining four cases, the County Council states that the school identified concerns about children in need appropriately and referred the concerns to external agencies to ensure access to assessment and support services. The County Council states that, in each of the cases referred by the school, it found the school to have acted 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.

On 26 April 2013, the school was informed that a boy who had previously boarded at Stanbridge Earls had made an allegation of serious sexual assault (oral rape) against another boy that occurred while they both attended the school. The alleged perpetrator is still a boarder at Stanbridge Earls. While the school worked promptly and sensitively to remove the alleged perpetrator from the establishment for the weekend, he was re-admitted as a boarder on 29 April 2013 without a full assessment of risk. This young person shares a bedroom with two other teenage boys. Until instructed to do so by inspectors, the school failed to assess the risk associated with allowing these three young people to share a bedroom. Given the wide range of needs of children who board, the failure to identify this risk factor is a significant omission. In this case, decision making, including risk assessment, was overseen by the Chair of Governors and a Deputy Headteacher; these individuals failed to fully recognise, assess and manage risk appropriately.

In a second case, the school was informed that a 14-year-old boy and 16-year-old girl had entered into a sexual relationship during the Easter holidays. On their return to school, following discussions with the parents, the Deputy Headteacher concluded that the relationship was consensual and therefore decided that it should not be referred to external agencies. There is no record of how this assessment was made and the instructions issued to staff were basic and unrealistic given staffing levels at the school.

Staffing arrangements are inadequate. For example, junior and inexperienced staff are left in sole charge of large groups of pupils. In the sixth form boarding house, a

new houseparent who has no relevant residential experience was left in sole 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. The sixth form boarding house includes at least one young person who was involved in the abuse reported to the Special Educational Needs and Disability First-Tier Tribunal. The school has not undertaken a minimum staffing assessment and, when challenged, the Deputy Headteacher explained that it is accepted custom and practice to allow inexperienced staff to take sole charge of the boarding houses.

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 must be met. Critical information is still absent from pupil placement plans. For example, in the case of a particular pupil with tachycardia, the house diary records an instruction from a cardiologist to seek medical treatment if the pupil feels unwell for 15 minutes or more. This information has not been transferred to the pupil placement plan or a specific health care plan and, as such, staff are not aware of this significant health concern. This system is inconsistent and, in some circumstances, dangerous.

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.

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.

On 29 April 2013, the Chair of Governors was notified that three members of staff working at the school had been referred to the DBS. This includes the Deputy Headteacher, who is the designated person for child protection and one of the most senior managers in the school. Although there was limited information from the DBS regarding the nature of the concerns, the Chair of Governors should have made urgent enquiries to identify whether there were any performance or conduct concerns known to the school that would require disclosure to DBS. Furthermore, the Chair has not assessed whether the removal or restriction of duties is warranted for any of the staff concerned.

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. The school does not have an overarching development plan and, while there is much work underway, the two deputy headteachers are working beyond their individual and collective capacity. The school's own performance assessment shows that, while the two deputy headteachers have potential, their ability to lead and manage the school is limited. They are unable to lead the school out of the crisis within which it is now operating.

During the inspection, the Chair of Governors accepted that the management arrangements were inadequate and would not secure the urgent improvements required. This is despite initially reporting a 'growing confidence' in the leadership team. The Chair of Governors informed inspectors that, for the previous two weeks, the governing body had been actively exploring two options to appoint an interim headteacher. These are detailed below.

■ Option A: the temporary appointment of Barry Hugget as Executive Head.

Barry Hugget is the Headteacher of More House School and Chair of the Independent School's Council, Special Education Needs expert group. More House School provides individualised learning programmes for boys who have specific learning difficulties and/or social communication/speech and language difficulties within the average range of ability. It has been judged 'outstanding' at successive Ofsted welfare inspections. Ofsted inspections report on the effectiveness of internal communication structures, including pupil profiles and risk assessments, and conclude that an orderly and safe environment is provided to boarders. These arrangements would also involve the current Deputy Head of More House moving to Stanbridge Earls until the end of term to take over day-to-day leadership.

■ Option B: the temporary appointment of Sue Gething as Acting Headteacher.

Sue Gething is currently employed as a consultant by Stanbridge Earls and is supporting the two deputy headteachers and overseeing immediate safeguarding improvements. She has significant previous experience working within residential special schools, including as Vice Principal and Headteacher at Coxlease School, Acting Headteacher at Waterside School, and Headteacher at Southlands School.

At the conclusion of the inspection, the Chair of Governors stated that Option A is the school's preferred option and that they would work to implement this. The Chair agreed to send an email to Ofsted on 7 May 2013 to update on progress made. This was received at 16.22 on 7 May 2013. Neither option outlined above has been implemented. The governing body has appointed, with immediate effect, Maggie McMurray as Interim Headteacher. The email states that Maggie McMurray retired at the end of the last academic year as Assistant Headteacher of Bay House School in Gosport where she was Head of the Senior School. It states that she has experience with pupils on the autistic spectrum and had overall responsibility as Head of Senior School for the SEN provision within the school, while not having specific qualifications in SEN. A copy of the email is attached as Annex A.

Bay House School recently converted to an academy. Prior to this, when last inspected by Ofsted in March 2011, it was judged 'outstanding'. The inspection report notes that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make at least good progress because of the very good individual support they receive. Bay House School does not offer boarding accommodation.

## **Recommendation**

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 must 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.

**Ofsted recommends that an inspection report is published.**



## **Annex A. Note from Stanbridge Earls to Ofsted, 7 May 2013**

Dear Martin

We promised to report to you today following our meetings this weekend and this morning. Nick Rogers and I had explained to you last week the negotiations we have been conducting during the last few weeks with More House School, a school of a similar genre to Stanbridge and 'outstanding' in its provision. The Head is Barry Hugget, one of the UK's leading specialists in SEN education and Chair of the Special Needs Committee of the ISC.

Barry has been assisting the School in its search for an interim Head to replace Peter Trythall who left the School by mutual agreement in light of the recent publicity the School has attracted. On the recommendation of Barry the School has today appointed Maggie McMurray as Interim Head of Stanbridge. Maggie will take up her position with almost immediate effect part time this week and full time with effect from 14 May. Maggie retired at the end of the last academic year as Assistant Head of Bay House School in Gosport where she was Head of the Senior School. She is presently undertaking a part time role with the School who have generously allowed to release her in view of the circumstances.

Bay House is one of the largest comprehensive schools in the UK and the largest in Hampshire with over 2000 on the pupil roll. It is an 'outstanding' school notwithstanding that it serves one of the most socially diverse towns in the country.

Maggie has had experience with pupils on the autistic spectrum and has had overall responsibility as Head of Senior School for the SEN provision within the school while not having specific qualifications in SEN.

We have met the Vice Chair of More House School this morning and agreed to start negotiations with a view to establishing a close partnership which will begin with 1. the availability of Barry Hugget to act as a mentor to Maggie, 2. Knowledge transfer involving exchanges of staff so that both sets of staff can gain knowledge of best practice with particular emphasis on safeguarding, 3. Access to the existing policies and procedures of More House and 4. Discussions about future business modelling and exploration of new market opportunities on a collaborative basis.

These discussions are at an early stage but we are confident that they will mature to mutual benefit and specifically will place the School in a much stronger position to meet the challenges it presently faces.

The School has also agreed to the appointment of several new governors to strengthen the existing trustee body which will include parent governors which we hope to have in place shortly. If you would like to discuss any of these points with me I shall be happy to do so; best to reach me on my mobile 07850953249.

Regards

Peter Goodship, Governor on behalf of the Chair