

Royal Alexandra & Albert School (The)

Royal Alexandra & Albert School, Gatton Park, Reigate, Surrey RH2 0TD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

The Royal Alexandra and Albert School is a co-educational, non-selective mixed state boarding school for children aged seven-18. There are currently 1125 children on the school roll.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 May 2022

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 6 March 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children are supported by passionate and dedicated staff. The sense of pride that staff have in the achievements of children is tangible. Children with some very complex and challenging starts in life have been supported to make great progress. Children's educational attainment frequently exceeds expectations. For example, one child reflected on the sense of pride she felt on being the first person in her family to attend university.

Staff and children enjoy warm and positive relationships in the boarding houses. One child who is new to the school said she had been made to feel immediately welcome by children and staff alike.

Parents are, on the whole, complimentary of the experiences of children at the school. They praise the child-focused, high-quality care provided by boarding staff. Some parents spoke about the emotional and social challenges that their children had been expertly and patiently supported to overcome. Some parents also reflected on the help and support that has been given to the whole family and welcomed this sense of partnership.

Children enjoy the benefits and natural amenities of the vast estate. Sports facilities, including a modern indoor swimming pool and large artificial turf complex, provide children with a wide range of recreational activities. Children have access to numerous activities and extra-curricular opportunities, including on-site music and riding lessons. These facilities provide children with a wide range of opportunities to enhance their boarding experience, promoting their mental and physical well-being.

Some children benefit from high-quality, clean, spacious and well-organised boarding houses. They are able to personalise their rooms and have been consulted on the decoration of communal areas. Some houses are not decorated or appointed to the same high standard, but leaders have an ambitious renovation plan which is already well under way.

Boarders do not always feel comfortable to make complaints, particularly to staff about another member of staff. They also express some feelings of frustration about not feeling heard, or that their complaints are not always taken seriously. These factors undermine their motivation to participate in the running of the boarding provision. Leaders recognise this and are already implementing sweeping changes to the way in which boarders are consulted about their views. They are looking at a range of different mechanisms for gathering feedback.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Staff demonstrate a well-developed understanding of the specific vulnerabilities of children in their care. They were able to give a range of examples of ways in which

they help children to learn to keep themselves safe, whether in the real or virtual world.

The safeguarding team, led by a skilled and enthusiastic designated lead, works across the school to provide a coherent and joined-up approach to keeping children safe. Inter-departmental working is generally effective and well managed. However, boarding staff highlighted that information-sharing between themselves and the education teams is not always clear. Boarding staff also feel that their contributions to student well-being are not always adequately acknowledged. Boarding staff highlight that decisions are sometimes made by teaching staff without adequate consultation with children.

The head of estates (HoE) demonstrates high levels of organisation and ability in managing a large and complex site. The HoE demonstrates a strong commitment to further improvements to standards of site management and health and safety. This is reflected in an expansion of the maintenance team and the appointment of a dedicated health and safety compliance manager.

Strong health and safety practice by staff resulted in no significant shortfalls being identified. Fire safety is taken very seriously and the requirements around fire safety assessments and fire drills are met. All these factors combine to create a safe physical environment which the children can enjoy.

The school has a public right of way through the grounds. To ensure the safety of children and members of the public, the estates team is working on a programme of more effective signage and demarcation of the school premises.

Children's behaviour is, on the whole, well managed and there are clear policies and boundaries in place to support this. However, children and staff revealed that there is some inconsistency in the application of rules and sanctions across the different boarding houses, creating a sense of unfairness and inequality among children. The senior leadership team sees this as a priority and has already made some significant progress in addressing consistency of practice across the school. Staff value this and are fully behind initiatives for change.

One example was identified where leaders and managers had failed to effectively address the conduct and performance of a member of staff about whom a pupil had made complaints. Some pupils feel not listened to and, in some cases, they have experienced incidents of insensitive use of language around race and gender.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Since the last inspection, there have been some significant changes to the leadership at the school. The boarding provision is now under the control of a skilled and passionate team of senior staff who have ambitious plans to improve the experience of children at the school.

A bold action plan includes tackling any perceived inequality or lack of inclusion at the school, renovating all boarding provision, improving inter-departmental integration and providing opportunities for the continual professional development of boarding staff.

Leaders also demonstrate forward-thinking strategies around environmental sustainability, including the installation of energy-saving heating and power generation systems.

Recent developments in the supervision of staff have included external safeguarding supervision for senior leaders and the introduction of regular one-to-one contact between heads of boarding and their staff. However, there are not yet consistent supervision structures in place across the boarding provision. This means that opportunities to enhance continual professional development and performance management have been lost.

Staff benefit from a range of training opportunities to support them to meet the specific needs of the children in their care. Leaders have plans to further enhance this programme with, for example, enhanced diversity training and trauma-informed practice.

Leaders work closely with a range of external professionals to ensure that children have access to the best possible support and care. Leaders gave examples of children with complex mental health issues who have been enabled to access specialist help from child and adolescent mental health services. Leaders also show a willingness to challenge when they feel decisions are made by external partners that are not in the interests of children.

An enthusiastic and active board of governors provides an additional level of scrutiny and expertise that supports the leaders' plans to enhance the experience of children at the school.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve? Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for boarding schools:

- The school has and consistently implements a written policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils. This policy includes: measures to combat bullying, including cyberbullying, and to promote positive behaviour; school rules; disciplinary sanctions; when restraint, including reasonable force, is to be used and how this will be recorded and managed; and arrangements for searching pupils and their possessions. (NMS 12.1)
- There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of boarding in the school, and effective links are made between academic and residential staff. (NMS 13.2)
- Boarders are actively encouraged to contribute views to the operation of boarding provision, are able to raise concerns and make complaints, and their views are given appropriate weight in decisions about the running of the school. Boarders are not penalised for raising a concern or making a complaint in good faith. (NMS 17.1)

Recommendations

- The registered person should continue to develop staff supervision processes, recognising the positive impact on professional development and performance management.
- The registered person should ensure that complaints processes work effectively for children and are in line with the expectations of the social care common inspection framework and relevant national minimum standards.
- The registered person should complete plans to manage the public right of way through the school grounds effectively, with clearer signage and demarcation of the school grounds.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Boarding school details

Social care unique reference number: SC013933

Headteacher/teacher in charge: James Malley (Interim Headteacher)

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspectors

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector (lead)

John Pledger, Social Care Inspector

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