

St Edward's School

Woodstock Road, Oxford, Oxfordshire, OX2 7NN

Date of visit 08 March 2016

Purpose of visit

This was an unannounced visit carried out at the request of the DfE to check that the school has fully implemented the action plan submitted following an emergency visit on the 2nd March 2015. The focus of the visit was on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs) and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding, particularly those relating to welfare, health and safety of pupils.

Characteristics of the School

St Edwards is a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged between 13 and 18, located close to the city centre in Oxford. It is a registered charity, with the members of the governing body acting as trustees. A number of committees, including a welfare committee, report to the main board. A compliance and safeguarding committee was established in 2012. At the time of the visit there were 663 pupils (410 boys; 253 girls), including 557 full-boarders. There are 12 boarding houses; 6 located on the main school site and 6 located on the adjacent playing field site, with direct and private access from the school. No pupil has a statement of educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Thirty-four pupils are identified by the school as needing additional support for special educational needs and/or disability (SEND); and 18 pupils have English as an additional language (EAL).

Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paras. 7 and 8 and NMS 11]

The school meets the Regulations and Standard.

The current safeguarding policy on the school's website reflects the latest statutory guidance, in particular the requirements for Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) July 2015. The policy is monitored by both the school's senior leadership team and the governing board. There is now a mechanism to ensure that the school's policy is updated on a regular basis to reflect the latest regulations, with updated policies being promptly published on the school's website. All staff have signed that they have received and read a copy of part 1 of KCSIE July 2015. The safeguarding policy refers appropriately to specific safeguarding concerns, such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and preventing radicalisation, as required by DfE guidance.

A sample of the single central register was scrutinised, which included recent appointments, boarding staff, teaching staff, governors and volunteers. All were found to be correctly recorded and it was noted that the school now includes the full date on which governors took up their appointments, which addresses a recommendation from the previous emergency visit.

The Compliance and Safeguarding sub-committee of the governing body was established in 2012. It looks at all aspects of pupil and staff welfare and safeguarding. The sub-committee, consisting of both governors and senior staff monitors all data linked to pupil and staff safety and well-being. It has played an important role in developing the 'speak-up' culture which is now well known by both staff and pupils. Members of the governing board check safeguarding procedures on a regular basis and this includes visits to the school, including the boarding houses, together with discussions with both staff and pupils. Governors also conduct annual checks on the single central register and review the safeguarding policy annually as a full board. Safeguarding is a standing item at all full governing board meetings.

All staff have appropriate induction training, which includes the safeguarding and whistleblowing procedures. A check list ensures that all areas of induction are recorded; this is monitored by senior leaders. New boarding staff, whether internally or externally appointed, spend time shadowing existing staff, and have a mentor when they take up their appointment.

Safeguarding training for all staff is a focus of termly in-service training and the leadership team take care to ensure that weekly staff briefings regularly include reminders of safeguarding and staff code of conduct procedures. All staff have recently received local authority recognised safeguarding training in consultation with the local authority designated officer (LADO). Careful records are kept of all training and staff briefings in which aspects of safeguarding or codes of conduct are discussed. Additionally, clear reference is made to the duty to prevent and to report the spread of extremist views. The school was able to produce evidence of regular consultation with the LADO and had followed advice given by the LADO to support the training of non-teaching staff, as well as suggestions for matters for inclusion in staff briefings. Staff absent from any training session are identified, and follow up training is put in place, as soon as is practically possible, to ensure that all staff are fully briefed. This addresses the recommendation from the previous emergency visit report. These arrangements were confirmed by a scrutiny of records and a meeting with a group of house staff.

Tours of four boarding houses, undertaken with pupils, confirmed that the welfare health and safety of boarders is given a high priority. Regular fire practices take place, including in silent hours. Contact details on noticeboards indicate both school and external agency pupil support is available, including that of the independent listener. Pupils feel safe in their boarding houses, their location does not allow public access and entrance into houses is through coded entry systems. Pupils are required to sign in and out when they are off-site and require houseparent permission to go into the city of Oxford. Such visits are subject to appropriate age-specific conditions in terms of the degree of supervision.

Discussions with boarding pupils indicate that they were clear on the methods by which they could raise concerns and they are confident that issues would be listened to and dealt with. House councils have representation from all year groups and pupils could point out where discussion had prompted changes, for example, in the design of house sports' kit and the provision of table-tennis tables. Peer listeners, who receive safeguarding training, are appointed across all houses and older pupils act as peer mentors for the younger pupils. During discussions with boarders, they expressed appreciation of both these support mechanisms and younger pupils feel that there is always an older pupil they could talk to if

they had a concern. They are also confident about approaching house staff with their concerns.

Pupils confirmed that there are no inappropriate initiations to life in the boarding houses and that they feel well looked after in their boarding house. All pupils have tutors who are attached to the boarding houses and they have regular meetings with their tutees, which allow welfare issues and academic progress to be effectively monitored. Pupils are clear that they require permission to be off-site, including the need to sign in and out of the boarding houses and older pupils are well aware of the school limitations and regulations in respect of alcohol consumption.

Discussions with both boarding and teaching staff found that there is now an increased focus on the importance of safeguarding issues and all staff are well informed on the relevant policies and procedures. All staff carry an information card with internal and external contact numbers, as well as advice on how to deal with potential safeguarding issues. The revised code of conduct for staff is clear and all staff are aware of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in terms of staff–pupil relationships. There is an appropriate code of conduct on the role of spouses in boarding houses and house staff are clear on the access limitations of boarders to staff accommodation. In discussion, staff were familiar with and supported the ‘speak up culture’ and understood that the welfare, health and safety of pupils is the responsibility of all staff. It was evident that much work had been undertaken in developing the whistleblowing culture, to the point where staff felt comfortable to self-refer when there was an element of doubt about the suitability of their actions. Senior leadership and governors both expressed a growing confidence in handling safeguarding issues, as they felt that staff were more informed of procedures and more responsive to the potential risks related to challenging pupil welfare issues.

The school has made significant improvements to their welfare, health and safety procedures and fully implemented the action plan which was submitted in August 2015.

Regulatory action points

The school meets all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015.