

Lancaster Royal Grammar School

East Road, Lancaster LA1 3EF

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

This is a boys' educational day and boarding school situated on the city edge. The sixth form has recently expanded to accept female day pupils. It is close to a range of local amenities and transportation. Full and weekly boarding is provided for pupils between the ages of 11 and 18 years. The school has academy status and has 155 boarders. There are four boarding houses, offering a mix of dormitory, single and en suite accommodation. The pupils are predominately white British, with many pupils reflecting other ethnic origins and countries of birth. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, enhanced by the extensive school grounds.

Inspection dates: 2 to 4 October 2019

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The boarding school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Date of last inspection: 24 January 2017

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

All boarders make excellent progress in education and enjoy their experiences. They arrive from a range of backgrounds and cultures. They make outstanding progress in learning social and functional independence skills. Boarding supports their academic, work and sporting life. Other children board to help them to learn about British values, which are part of their heritage.

Boarders have very good relationships with the boarding staff. Staff are on hand to guide them, listen to them and help them to grow in maturity. This helps boarders to make independent choices and decisions. When things go wrong, boarders and staff work together to discover how to put things right. Boarders understand that rules are necessary to help them to stay safe. They help everybody to make the most of their time at school. Boarders especially value the pastoral and nurturing approach that matrons provide. They said, 'This place would fall apart without matrons. They are always there to listen and to give advice.'

Staff give out a clear message that all boarders have a right to be happy and reach their full potential. Excellent induction programmes underpin a high quality of care. Staff and pupils work together to promote good mental health. They use a new, research-based programme that helps to build resilience. It provides tools for children to cope with life's ups and downs. Boarders' excellent behaviour and self-awareness show that it is an effective approach.

Boarders see themselves as partners in the school's support networks. They described with pride the part that they play in helping younger or more vulnerable boys. Staff encourage them to use their talents to offer an extra layer of support. For example, they tutor younger boarders to make academic progress. They befriend children to help them to find social groups. Sports enthusiasts model the benefits of healthy eating and active lifestyles. Boarders told inspectors that they like to help out, because they have been helped in the past. They knew when they would seek help from an adult. They also said that sometimes it is better to accept help from someone nearer their own age.

The boarding community is a welcoming and fun place to be. Children told inspectors what they like best about being a boarder. Friendships, activities, independence and the feeling of being a family were popular answers. Their friends are welcome to visit the boarding house. This reflects the strong sense of community and resilience demonstrated by boarders.

Parents are very positive about their child's experiences. They say that the support for children with special educational needs is 'excellent'. The quality of opportunity is 'second to none'. They say that their children are making excellent academic and

social progress. Staff provide the right balance of boundaries and freedom to encourage safe independence.

Inspectors were impressed by children's ability to express themselves and to listen to others. There are many opportunities for children to influence their boarding experience. For example, children nominate their choice of boarding house. They can ask to change if they feel that they or the staff have made a mistake. Sports and military cadet programmes are popular. Staff are working with boarders to review the activity programme. They want to broaden the range of activity choice, especially at weekends.

A proposal by the student food group means that the dining areas have become 'phone-free' zones. Older boarders organise and manage a football league. House meetings are times when boarders can share their plans for the week. These skills help boarders to build positive relationships. They support their future success.

The range of food available to boarders at teatime and weekends is under constant review. There is regular liaison between staff, caterers, governors and boarders. Boarders and a minority of parents expressed a lack of confidence in the menu choices. School leaders have used many initiatives to find a solution. Caterers have listened to boarder requests. They have launched themed cuisine nights. Leaders are considering an increased staff presence for younger boarders. Caterers are planning to help boarders to understand the impact of wasted food. This is a work in progress.

Boarders access the healthcare that they need to stay fit and well. The school nurse collects information about individual health needs. She ensures that staff have access to clear and person-centred guidance. She is working to minimise the occasional delays in information given to school.

Staff manage children's personal care needs with sensitivity. One boarder described the extra lengths that the school had gone to on his behalf. By installing special equipment, it had ensured that he could now wake up without help. He described this as one of many ways that his transfer to this school had helped him to feel like all the other boys. He had received help that did not stigmatise him. This sums up the staff approach to creating an environment where children can thrive.

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

All boarders say that they feel very safe. They attribute this in part to their friendships and the support that they give each other. They say that staff are kind, listen well and have fun with them. They take part in a range of activities that help to develop their self-esteem and social skills. From admission until they leave, children's strengths and vulnerabilities are identified by staff. They help children to experience growing independence. Boarders learn to problem-solve any difficulties that arise. Staff work hard to build warm, trusting and respectful relationships. Children flourish in the positive and safe environment of the boarding house.

Staff are not risk-averse. Opportunities for independent activity increase as children get older. This includes walking independently around the large site or to the local town. Older boarders volunteer in the community. They take on more responsibilities, such as league-table sports academies. Staff are patient in helping them to understand the consequences of breaking rules. Older boarders told inspectors that they value the extra responsibility. It helps them to prepare for life after school.

Male and female independent visitors and trained counsellors visit the school. Some are local religious leaders. This helps every child to feel comfortable to approach them. Governors visit the boarding houses and spend time talking with children. They take their views back to senior leadership meetings and discuss them. One child said, 'We asked the governor for a basketball hoop and we got it. We know we can ask for things.'

The special educational needs coordinator provides sensitive support to both staff and children. She helps staff to support autistic children well. They help them to make and sustain social relationships. This improves their emotional well-being. Children told inspectors that the boarding house is like a big family. There is always someone who can help them.

The school pastoral support team offers children a high-quality, bespoke service. Innovative practice overcomes barriers to emotional well-being and good mental health. There is effective communication between all school departments. Trained peer mentors and professional counsellors give children a range of support. Time-limited and reviewed interventions ensure that staff involve parents and external professionals. This can include temporary boarding. This offers stability when children suffer trauma in their personal lives and provides essential support to oversee children's welfare and safety.

Arrangements to safeguard children are effective. This includes rigorous recruitment of permanent staff and volunteers. The school has good links with the local protection agencies. They use these to explore extra support for boarders and take advice. There is a culture of tolerance in the boarding provision. It promotes inclusiveness and understanding. Children said that others respect their culture and ethnicity. They are given an opportunity to inform other boarders about the conflicts that afflict their home countries. Staff promote a free exchange of information and ideologies to promote discussion. This leads to a greater understanding of diversity.

The approach to keeping children safe starts by supporting children's emotional well-being. The designated safeguarding lead organises a team of deputy officers. The team includes the head of boarding and the pastoral and departmental leads. They have made significant changes to safeguarding policy and practice. They have used independent advice about their practice. They work hard to create a transparent culture. They promote professional curiosity and sharing of concerns. This has enhanced the safety and welfare of boarders.

Incidents are dealt with promptly, offering child-focused and creative resolutions. External safeguarding professionals describe the school as 'highly proactive'. They say that staff excel in partnership working. This has supported children with a range of problems in coping with domestic violence, self-harm, eating disorders, poor mental health and parent separation. Staff know that boys are vulnerable to all types of abuse and emotional harm. Staff help them to overcome any barriers to their long-term emotional health. In turn, this supports children's academic success and improves their life chances.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers show exceptional levels of competency and compassion. They model commitment, collaboration and dedication to the core values of the school. They continuously seek to refine and improve the service that they offer. This provides the very best experience for children. It improves their well-being, progress, achievement and attainment across a range of skills and attributes.

Leaders and managers put children first. They show commitment to the whole child. The school has at its heart the aim to help children to excel. Leaders do this by offering very high levels of holistic support and encouragement. Academic progress is important. Staff see this as one part of a toolbox of skills. These skills, including social skills, will help boarders in their future lives.

Leaders know about children's individual needs and their continuing progress. There are many systems that offer assessment and support across the whole site. Staff show professional collaboration and communication. Well-coordinated approaches give children the right amount of support to help them to thrive.

The whole-school pastoral care system emanates from the boarding provision. Staff use an innovative approach to empower children. Staff encourage them to speak out about injustice when they experience it. Leaders use staff reflection and professional development to review and extend this model of best practice. For example, they have launched a 'boarding walk' exercise. Prefects and staff undertake assessments to measure the quality of care in boarding. They use the results to make positive change. This demonstrates a drive for continuous improvement.

Staff attend very regular meetings and training opportunities. These support reflective practice and show a clear focus on children. Some staff have begun accredited childcare and boarding qualifications. The school nurse provides training on extra health needs. External professionals add specialist training to ensure that children are appropriately cared for. This results in confident, high-quality and trusting professional interpersonal relationships throughout the school.

Leaders and managers are well informed about the experiences of boarders. They have worked hard to improve the quality of the oversight of boarding life and the range of options available to children. New roles for governors include designated

officers for boarding. A boarding development plan has directed the improvements to the quality of accommodation provided. Much work has been identified to modernise some of the accommodation. There are clear plans in place to address the issues. Boarders say that they are happy with the quality of the buildings. One boarder said, 'It's not the building that makes it a home – it's the people in it, and I wouldn't want to stay anywhere else'. This is a school that creates extraordinarily positive experiences and maximises the progress of boarders.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Senior staff should continue to monitor and consult pupils and catering staff to further explore solutions to improve boarders' confidence in the menus for teatimes and weekends.
- Ensure that electronic communication systems are used effectively to gather and share health information promptly at the start of each academic year.

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: SC042778

Headteacher/teacher in charge:

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspector(s)

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