

Steyning Grammar School

West Sussex County Council

Steyning Grammar School, Lower School, Church Street, Steyning, West Sussex
BN44 3LB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Steyning Grammar is a Church of England voluntary controlled, secondary comprehensive school maintained by West Sussex County Council. It is situated in the rural Sussex countryside across three sites. Boarding is located on the Church Street campus near Steyning town centre. There are three boarding houses across four buildings. The school states that the aim of boarding is 'to contribute to the development of positive, independent and fully engaged citizens of our global community, equipped with the character to flourish in their future'.

At the time of the inspection there were 124 boarders ranging in age from 13 to 18 years. The residential provision was last inspected in September 2015.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 November 2018

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: 22 September 2015

Key findings from this inspection

This boarding school is outstanding because:

- Students from 30 different countries live in a harmonious environment, enjoying each other's company and celebrating their different cultures.
- Students' welfare is the beating heart of the school.
- Safeguarding practice is outstanding and embedded in practice. Staff are tenacious in their approach to keeping students safe.
- Staff hear the voice of the student, and respond positively to their views, wishes and feelings.
- Exceptional leaders manage the school. They gain national awards and help other schools. They are ambitious for continual improvement, welcoming professional critique and advice.
- Students make exceptional progress. They develop social and independent skills as well as academic success.
- The underlying values of the Christian faith permeate throughout the school.
- Governance is strong. A well-qualified and experienced board of governors is effective in holding senior leaders to account and driving forward improvement.
- Key staff are recognised as national leaders in education and boarding. They provide advice and guidance to other schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Boarding has a hugely positive impact on students. They describe learning new skills, celebrating different cultures and increasing their independence. They feel more confident, have improved ability to manage social relationships and feel equipped for university life. All students confirmed that there are staff who they trust and can approach about any difficulties or concerns. Staff respond without judgement, their focus being on resolving the issues and supporting the students sensitively and wholeheartedly. Staff go the extra mile for the students. Pastoral care embodies all that a first-rate parent would do. Staff act as advocates where other services fall short. Their high aspirations are evident in their tenacity in ensuring the best possible care for the students. A parent said, 'I have watched my children grow and develop into strong, confident, independent and thriving teenagers.'

Christian values of love, compassion, acceptance, forgiveness, truthfulness, joy, peace and giving permeate through students and staff. There is a lovely, warm, accepting and loving environment where students from a vast range of different nations and cultures live in harmony. The passion to accept everyone, no matter

what their background, starts with the headteacher. His desire to see every person be the best they can be is infectious, creating a culture in which students are confident to express their individuality. There is not merely an acceptance of each other, but rather a celebration of equality, diversity and what it means to be human growing up in different cultures. A parent said, 'We are very comfortable with the culture, environment, educational structure, integration, motivation and self-development the school offers its students.'

Students care for each other, the community and the wider world. For example, they ran a boarding remembrance service and reflected on the ultimate sacrifice that some former students had made; they host local parishioners for refreshments after services in the local church; they raised a significant sum of money for a hurricane appeal after meeting with the high commissioner of the country affected. Students apply the underlying Christian principle of 'faith with works'.

A strength of the school is the voice of the student. A student said, 'I can express my voice freely without any limitations,' and another said, 'Even the smallest complaints are taken care of.' Staff work with parents to help them understand any issues.

Students say that they are grateful that the staff consider them worthy of respect, supporting them through any challenges, for example their emerging identity. The quality of the staff support means that students are emotionally in a place to learn. They go on to academic success. One student said, 'I never thought I would get my GCSEs, now I am in the sixth form.' Students spoke about how well prepared they are for university. The vast majority of leavers go on to their first choice of university. A student who had gone on to university reflected on how well she had been prepared for university life, especially independent living skills.

Students are in excellent health. There is a warm and comfortable health centre where students can go to receive immediate attention if they feel unwell. They say they can approach matron, who responds to their needs. She advocates for them, for example challenging other professionals why they have prescribed a particular medication for migraine or why follow-up support was not offered for a student who was struggling with mental health issues.

Boarding students are fully integrated into the life of the school. Day students might come over to boarding, for example, year nine students run an after-school club for year seven and year eight students as part of their Duke of Edinburgh's Award volunteering.

Students enjoy a variety of activities such as horse-riding, various sports, cinema and ice-skating. Students said that they enjoy the trips into local towns to do shopping.

The catering is of a high standard with a wide variety of food. Students can contribute to the menu through the food council. Students can learn about traditional dishes from other countries as well as enjoying their own cuisine.

The accommodation is of a high standard, well maintained and decorated, with students able to personalise their rooms as much as they want. There is an ongoing development programme to ensure that the high standards are maintained.

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

Students' welfare is the beating heart of the school. Staff consider their emotional well-being as paramount to the underlying principle of the school for 'every person to be the best they can be'. Staff demonstrate an emotional intelligence and an ongoing commitment and awareness of how to best care for students, such as those who are bereaved of significant people in their life. Staff note upcoming anniversaries when students will especially miss their loved ones and offer additional support. A parent said, 'The tremendous support my daughter had was overwhelming.'

Safeguarding practice is embedded in the fabric of the school. There is an open, transparent and accountable culture that keeps students safe. Staff are free to challenge each other and have professional dialogue about any safeguarding matter. They are perceptive to emerging concerns and take swift, decisive action to ensure that students are safe. A member of staff said, 'We have a strong safeguarding policy and we all know the method of dealing with child protection issues and the chain of command if an issue is raised.'

Designated safeguarding leads are tenacious in their approach. They challenge other safeguarding professionals when they believe they are not working to the highest possible standards to fully protect students.

The director of boarding uses an optimism and vulnerability index to identify any students who could be struggling. This works exceptionally well. He ensures that welfare plans clearly identify the student's vulnerability and the people responsible for implementing the strategies to keep them safe. Staff keep an ongoing record as to the actions they take and review them for effectiveness. Students who have had welfare plans valued the support given and the positive difference it has made to their lives. The positive and caring culture is evident in the daily life of students. They care for one another; older students pass on their experience and words of advice to younger students. Students describe themselves as being part of the 'Steining family'.

The frequent presence of the chaplain is another friendly face that gives a consistent message to the students that they are loved, accepted and cared for. The chaplain shows an innovative and creative approach, for example he carries 'playing cards' with questions for impromptu discussions with students to consider life, identity and spirituality.

Student behaviour is exceptional. The rules make sense, they are reasonable, and students feel no need to rebel against them. On rare occasions that staff use sanctions, they are proportionate, relevant and have the desired effect. Staff use

restorative justice so that students learn to be responsible for their own behaviour, reflecting on the impact on others and repairing any damage as a result. They use reward systems to promote good behaviour and encourage students to take responsibility, such as for the cleanliness of their rooms. The school goes to considerable effort to make sure the reward takes place, a notable example being a helicopter ride.

There is an excellent approach to e-safety. Staff and students are aware of the boundaries and rules. Key staff ensure that all staff are up to date with the technology, such as the risks in students using a virtual private network on their smart devices. Staff are very clear on the action to take if they observe such applications on an electronic device.

Recruitment practices are strong and highly organised. The human resources team adopts a safer recruitment practice. It plays close attention to detail. There are clear agreements for partners and children of staff who are living on site. Some play an active part as volunteers in boarding. The Chair of Governors expressed some concerns to Ofsted about the quality of advice that the school has received from other bodies which could impact the effectiveness of safeguarding policies and procedures at the school. Ofsted has undertaken further enquiries with those bodies.

The director of boarding uses a vulnerability index to inform a boarding passport, and this informs which students may share a room.

The physical environment is safe with all the necessary health and safety checks and certification in place, including the arrangements for fire safety.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The headteacher is an exceptional leader. He is ambitious and confident, eager for professional dialogue and challenge. He forms partnerships, for example with the private sector, to share exceptional practice and generate ideas for improvement. The school has received awards for transformational leadership in the categories of in the categories of 'engaging with evidence and research' and 'leadership through moral purpose'. The headteacher has developed relationships with a range of other professionals, for example the police, the Friends and Family Travellers' network and Sussex boarding partnership. He models innovative and entrepreneurial approaches and welcomes strong governance. His peers, through the challenge and support initiatives, stated, 'It is exciting to see courageous leadership supporting the intelligent, practical implementation of a profound philosophical approach in Steyning Grammar School.' The headteacher adopts an approach based on a research model on positive psychology. The model focuses on eight character strengths to underpin progression towards happy, engaged, meaningful and successful lives. The model clearly informs practice throughout the school.

Equally, the director of boarding is of the same calibre. He is providing outstanding leadership and has won the support of his team, which is confident that he is leading them in the right direction. He demonstrates a thorough understanding of safeguarding issues and especially within the boarding context. Examples are the

careful consideration of room sharing, the arrangements to keep students safe at night, and a briefing paper for staff on safeguarding in a boarding context.

The competent boarding staff are well trained, motivated and supported. The director of boarding ensures that staff receive training relevant to students' needs. Staff receive further support and challenge through the strategic meeting and review process as well as their annual appraisal. They provide exceptional care and support so that every student can be the best that they can be. One boarding staff member won a national boarding achievement reward.

The school is the county representative for a national charity that supports vulnerable children to attend boarding and day schools. A parent said, 'They are an excellent team of professionals that provide excellent care for our children.' Another parent said, 'I think it is an amazingly enriching environment.'

There is an exceptional board of governors consisting of individuals with a range of experience and skills. The governors take an active interest in boarding, regularly consulting with students face to face and asking questions linked to the national minimum standards. Students know the boarding governors, they welcome them into their boarding houses and engage with them in a mature way, confident that their views are important. Governors use their expertise to improve boarding, for example a retired general practitioner audits the health practice within boarding. The governing board is exceptional in its safeguarding approach. It is at the core of what the board does, ensuring that it holds the headteacher and senior leadership team to account for their safeguarding responsibilities. The governors provide valuable support for school leaders when they have to make difficult decisions.

Parents spoke positively about the school. They said that the communication is excellent, and staff are responsive to their queries and requests. They spoke of staff as co-parents and that staff have a can-do attitude. One parent said, 'My daughter absolutely loves the boarding experience.'

Admissions are well planned, including bespoke training for staff, if required, such as in autistic spectrum disorder. Potential boarders can visit and have a trial overnight stay. Students spoke positively of their induction into boarding and especially the team-building exercises. Staff ensure that children have an orientation process and get to know the school and the local area.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: SC042673

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Nick Wergan

Type of school: Boarding School

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Inspectors

Keith Riley: lead social care inspector

Jan Hunnam: social care inspector

Sarah Olliver: social care inspector



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