

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School Ltd

Elmfield School, Love Lane, Stourbridge, West Midlands DY8 2EA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Elmfield School is situated on a campus close to the centre of Stourbridge. It is an independent school for pupils who follow the Steiner Waldorf curriculum. There are currently 210 pupils on roll. Education at the school places an emphasis on personal responsibility and social awareness, through a balance of academic, artistic and practical activities. The majority of the pupils are day pupils. However, the school also welcomes a small number of pupils for short placements (between half a term and up to two terms) from schools overseas. Accommodation for these pupils is provided in the homes of host boarding families. Host families include two members of the school's teaching staff. There were no pupils boarding at the school during this inspection. The school was last inspected in June 2019 as part of an integrated inspection.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school. A separate inspection of the school took place at the same time as this inspection.

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 May 2023

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 requires improvement to be good

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

Date of last inspection: 11 June 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children at the school welcome children from other countries and enjoy sharing their homes and experiences with them. Children in the school recognise how much the exchange boarders enrich their lives and how they support the visitors' development. For example, children told inspectors how proud they were of boarders who have visited and how they helped them to build their confidence and English language skills. This sense of community, acceptance and support reflects the underpinning approach of the school. Staff, children and hosts are all an essential part of this community and this helps children make special relationships that continue after children leave. As a result, many children have repeat and reciprocal family visits.

Visiting children build excellent relationships with their host families because those families are supportive of the boarding experience and what the school can share during these visits. Children feel supported, cared for and part of the family. Visiting children enjoy numerous activities and trips out, and experience the wider culture during their stay. All of this means that children who come to board can make the most of their time at the school and benefit from the experience.

Boarders make good progress with their education and confidence while visiting the school. The school completes end-of-term reports that give an honest account of children's progress in school subjects. These are uniformly positive due to the progress children make. The school is currently introducing a system to collate feedback from boarders and their families to help them develop the boarding provision. This is in line with the school's philosophy where children's views are central.

Visiting children's families and host families communicate before children arrive at the school, to get to know each other and make travel and arrival arrangements. This communication helps children know what to expect and they are then supported to settle in by host families, school staff and the other children. The warm, welcoming atmosphere of the school means that children quickly make friends and settle. Relationships between children, their families and host families are often long lasting, and these relationships strengthen children's safety and experience.

Children's views are incorporated well into the work of the school. Most children write excellent letters outlining why they want to come and study at the school. When children have specific needs, leaders work well to adapt the education and home situation so that boarders can get the most out of their time at the school. Weekly pastoral meetings support children to develop their English skills but also give children the space to voice any concerns or worries. These measures help boarders to settle well and get the most from this experience.

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

The school has systems in place to safeguard children. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and hosts know how these systems work and they ensure that staff understand their responsibilities. The DSL reviews different parts of the system as part of the school's continual development. As a result, the DSL knows the areas to improve on and acts swiftly when necessary.

The school supports host families to put in place sensible boundaries for children regarding internet and phone use. These discussions happen between host families and children's families from the outset so that boundaries are clear. This helps the two families to work together so that children are clear about expectations from the start. As a result, there have not been any issues or incidents relating to internet or phone use.

Children who visit the school rarely experience difficulties, but the school has useful programmes in place in case of any worries. For example, the school has a 'hub' that children can access for different types of support if needed, as well as nurture groups and nurture practitioners. Boarders meet weekly with a member of the pastoral team, so they can raise any concerns. The school also has an independent person who meets all children when they arrive. In addition, staff quickly get to know children. These factors combine to form a wraparound service for children if they need it, although they rarely do.

Leaders recruit staff safely and the school has a clear, accurate single central record. Host parents are all checked through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and the school has a rolling programme for updates. In contrast, not all measures outlined by minimum standards are in place in relation to host families. For example, the school does not obtain references for all adults in the host families, and not all hosts were up to date with relevant training. During the inspection, leaders worked to carry out reference checks and verify them. This gives confidence about the responsiveness of the school.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

The families who host children when they visit the school are overwhelmingly pleased with the support they receive from the school. They know that senior leaders are there if they need them. Communication between the school, host families and children's families is excellent. Host families understand how the boarders' visits enrich their development and growth as individuals. But they also understand how this enriches their own family life and experience. The experience is praised by everyone involved.

The school promotes individuality, which is highly valued by everyone in the school community. Staff encourage boarders to share their culture with other children. For example, one boarder joined a younger class to teach them about Israel and for them to learn some Hebrew. As a result, boarders' confidence develops and the

community benefits from and values the diversity and cultural experiences boarders bring.

Recruitment and leaders' oversight of host families does not fully consider the relevant national minimum standards. For example, not all hosts complete the required training. There have been changes in the leadership of boarding since the last inspection which may have contributed to these shortfalls. During the inspection, leaders were open about areas they had not fully understood and began to address these shortfalls. It is reassuring that leaders act swiftly when necessary. Children who come from overseas to visit the school for extended periods are subject to private fostering arrangements. The school notifies the local authority about these arrangements and the local authority considers the school a proactive partner.

School records are not always well completed. In addition, leaders are not always able to share details about the small number of children who have boarded in a clear way. Host families keep boarding diaries and have many photos of the children's experiences while boarding. This means that children have a reminder of their time in England to take away with them, and host families also have photos to keep as memories. However, this is not an agreed system, so may be inconsistent, but where this does happen it is a wonderful record for children to have.

Leaders are strongly committed to the school and its underpinning approach. However, some of the weaknesses identified during this inspection were not known to leaders. Oversight from governors lacks rigor, so leaders are not held to account for the quality of boarding. The chair knew oversight was not sufficient and is recruiting new trustees with relevant experience to strengthen the board. This does not appear to have negatively impacted on the experiences children have when visiting the school.

Despite the weaknesses in oversight, staff and hosts work together to provide visiting children with an excellent experience. Host families often offer boarding places for overseas children several times because of the value they place on the experience. Host families take great pride in the children who visit and how they develop during their time at the school. These factors help children to build lifelong happy memories of their time at this 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's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and takes appropriate action where necessary. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 2.1)
- 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. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 2.3)
- The school's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 2.4)
- Any lodgings arranged by the school to accommodate pupils provide good-quality accommodation and supervision, are checked before use and are monitored by the school during use, including checks at least termly. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 23.2)
- The school visits all potential lodgings it may arrange and interviews any adult who will be responsible for the accommodation of the pupils in each lodging, takes up references, and has recorded a satisfactory assessment, before any boarder is placed there. Unless the host family are in a family relationship with the boarder, the school can demonstrate that all members of the host family aged 16 and over, who will be living at the lodgings whilst the boarder is staying, obtain an Enhanced DBS check, with check of the Children's Barred List, with satisfactory outcomes known, before any boarder is placed. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 23.4)
- The school ensures that all adults providing lodgings for boarders on its behalf have undergone suitable safeguarding training at least every three years, and that they understand the school's policy in relation to boarders going missing and their role in implementing that policy. (Boarding schools: national minimum standards 23.5)

Point for improvement

- School leaders should ensure all host families are provided with first-aid training.

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: SC025000

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Paul Merrell

Type of school: Boarding school

Telephone number: 01384 394633

Email address: info@elmfield.com

Inspectors

Karol Keenan, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Jodie Lewis, Social Care Inspector

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Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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