

Elmfield Rudolf Steiner School

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

Inspection dates

07/02/2017 to 09/02/2017

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good **2**

The quality of care and support

Good 2

How well children and young people are protected

Good 2

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good 2

Summary of key findings

The boarding provision is good because

- Boarders benefit from their experiences of staying with host families organised by school.
- Boarders receive good-quality support from school staff, who help to ensure that boarding arrangements meet individual needs.
- Host families provide a good standard of care for boarders. These arrangements are supervised by school staff through regular monitoring, which helps to ensure that any difficulties are quickly resolved.
- Boarders increase in self-confidence and self-esteem because of their boarding experience. They unanimously praised their host families and the support they received from school and fellow pupils.
- Families also praise the boarding arrangements at the school, and confirmed that they are kept informed about their child's progress.
- Boarders' safety is a high priority, and staff, boarders and host families are well informed about procedures to follow if they have any concerns.
- Boarders are kept safe through child protection procedures they understand clearly, and good links with external safeguarding professionals.
- The management of boarding arrangements is good. Staff work well together to ensure that boarders are well cared for. Staff are committed to maintaining high standards for boarders in their care. Communication across school is very good, and any relevant information about any boarder is passed to appropriate staff.
- One national minimum standard is not met. This relates to the boarders not having access to an independent listener. However, staff quickly responded to this shortfall and an independent listener was identified during the inspection, but the arrangement had not been fully embedded.

- Four recommendations for improvement are made. These relate to: the quality of information the school seeks from the families of boarders; ensuring that all host families are familiar with the procedure if boarders are missing from home without permission; providing training for host families in first aid and awareness of social media and IT; and giving host families guidance on what information to record about boarders.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

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

- The school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff, and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who boarders may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at school. Boarders are informed who this person is and how to contact them, and they are easily accessible. Boarders are also provided with one or more appropriate helpline(s) or outside telephone numbers, including the Office of the Children's Commissioner, to contact in case of problems or distress. During the inspection, staff identified a person willing to undertake this role, but this process was not embedded in the routine for the boarders, at the time of the inspection. (National Minimum Standard 2.3)

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- The records specified in Appendix 2 should be maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate; in particular, the school should ensure that boarders' individual records contain all key information, including medical and welfare information.
- Any staff member or volunteer employed or volunteering in a position working with boarders should have a job description reflecting their duties, receive induction training in boarding when newly appointed, and receive regular reviews of their boarding practice, with opportunities for training and continual professional development in boarding. In particular, boarding hosts should be provided with first-aid training and training in IT and social media awareness.
- Host families should know and implement the school's policy in relation to boarders going missing and their role in implementing that policy. The school should ensure that all host families are familiar with the missing from home policy and procedure.
- The school should provide satisfactory written guidance to host families accommodating pupils on behalf of the school, covering the school's policy and practice for lodging pupils. In particular, the school should offer clarity about what written records should be kept by host families.

Information about this inspection

The inspection was undertaken over three days by two inspectors and with three hours' notice. Inspection activities included visiting all host families, talking to all boarders staying with host families, contact with the local statutory safeguarding authority to gather their views, discussion with staff and scrutiny of a wide range of documentation about boarding.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------|----------------------------|
| Julia Wright | Lead social care inspector |
| Andrew Hewston | Social care inspector |

Full report

Information about this 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 274 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 termly placements, usually from Steiner schools overseas but sometimes from other Steiner schools in Britain. Accommodation for these pupils is provided in the homes of host boarding families. The majority of these host families include a member of the school's teaching staff. There were five pupils boarding at the school during this inspection. The school was last inspected in November 2012.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Good

Boarding pupils enjoy their experience of staying with host families during their time at the school. The boarders were unanimous in their praise for their host families, and the support they received from the host families, fellow pupils and school staff.

Boarders discussed the difference that boarding made to them. This included opportunities to improve their language skills, learn about a new culture, and experience different ways of living. They mentioned good relationships with their host families, enjoying activities and outings, and making new friends. Boarders' self-confidence increases and they develop resilience skills.

Boarding pupils have a thorough induction to school and boarding life. They are well informed about who they can contact if they are worried about any aspect of their stay. They retain contact with their own families, who were positive in their feedback about their child's experience of boarding. Expectations for behaviour, and potential consequences, are explained clearly to boarders as part of their induction, thus avoiding misunderstandings.

The safety of boarders is a high priority for the whole school, and for host families. Monitoring of boarding arrangements is good. Boarders receive support from members of the boarding committee, and the pastoral member sees boarders weekly to make sure they are comfortable in their placements. All school staff know which pupils are boarders. The staff report any changes or observations about boarders to the education lead or other members of staff to ensure their concerns are explored further.

Boarding staff undertake regular reviews with boarders, host families and other staff, gaining feedback from all parties about the success or areas to improve. This means that information can be used to improve areas of the service further for the benefit of future boarding students.

The quality of care and support

Good

During this inspection, five boarders were at the school, and placed with host families. Host families all have a connection with the school, either by teaching there or being a parent of a current or former pupil. Boarders attend the school for one term, or sometimes longer. Boarders currently attending the school are boarding with the aim of improving their English skills and having the opportunity to live in another country, and making the most of all the opportunities for personal development and cultural awareness associated with this.

Boarding pupils are very well cared for by their host families. One boarder said, 'I am very comfortable here and I have everything I need. It is very friendly.' Another commented, 'If I need anything, I help myself or ask. It is very relaxed and friendly.'

Boarding arrangements are overseen by the boarding committee, which includes the education lead for the school. The safety of boarders is a high priority, and the boarding committee carefully monitors arrangements, including checking the quality of boarding facilities in host family homes, and ensuring that all the pre-placement checks on host families are completed. Families are given clear guidance about the physical requirements for boarding students – including having their own room, and access to all shared areas within the home.

Boarders are treated with dignity. They are involved in the lives and routines of their host families, including leisure, sport and social activities, such as day trips to places of interest, and visits to the cinema and theatre. Boarders' individual and diverse needs are carefully considered. For example, one host family ensured that their boarder is able to attend church when she wants to, showing her where the different churches are in the local community. The boarder commented, 'I may not go every week, but I know where to go. That is helpful for me.'

Induction arrangements for new boarders are thorough. A nominated teacher within school completes the induction to school and host family with each boarder, helping them to become familiar with the school and the local community where they will be living. Boarders are given written information, including key names and telephone numbers, in case of difficulty. They are given information about important policies such as safeguarding, and behaviour expectations. This helps boarders understand the necessary boundaries in place for their protection and safety. The induction teacher also sees the boarders weekly for English as a second language lessons, and has the opportunity to talk to boarders about their experiences, identifying any difficulties or challenges they may experience and ensuring the right help is in place for them.

Arrangements for monitoring boarders' well-being in the host family placements are also good. A pastoral care teacher sees the boarders weekly, either as a group or individually, to check on their welfare. In addition, all school staff support the boarders and liaise with senior staff if they observe any changes or have concerns about boarders' behaviour. This whole-school approach to boarders' welfare supports their overall well-being. One shortfall identified during this inspection was that the school does not have an independent listener – someone outside the school who is available if boarders wish to speak to them. During the course of this inspection, staff promptly responded to this shortfall and made arrangements to appoint someone in this role, thereby promoting the welfare and safety of boarders.

Host family reviews are undertaken annually. Feedback from boarders and host families after each placement identifies areas of strength and any areas for development, helping to enhance the experiences of future boarders.

School staff obtain information from the families of prospective boarders prior to their arrival in England. Occasionally, this does not identify additional health needs that are not included in the initial information. Staff are reviewing this process to ensure that the school gains as much relevant information as possible to meet individuals' needs.

Boarders' medical needs are well catered for, and if they are unwell their host families care for them or seek medical advice as appropriate. Host family members who work at

the school have received first-aid training, but those who do not work at the school have not had this opportunity. It would benefit boarders if all host adults received first-aid training in case of accidents or emergencies. In addition, it will reinforce boarders' safety if host families receive IT and social media awareness training.

Boarders and host families maintain contact with the boarders' own families, who are updated if any issues arise. One family member commented, 'We are very happy with the boarding family. There are no problems, and if little things come up, they contact me. I know that he is very happy there.'

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Boarders feel safe and comfortable staying with their host families. One boarder said, 'I feel totally safe here, no worries. There are lots of people I can talk to in school, friends, hosts and my family.'

Host families undertake annual safeguarding training and are provided with copies of key policies and documents. Host families are knowledgeable about the process to follow if they are concerned about any aspect of their boarder's welfare. Host families are also given a copy of the school's missing or absent policy. However, not all hosts said they were familiar with the policy, although they were clear about the steps they would take to report a boarder as absent.

When necessary, staff have links with social workers relating to boarders under the age of 16 years living with host families. A social worker said, 'The staff are extremely helpful. When a child is coming to the school, they give me lots of prior notice, with full details of the child, their parents and the host family. All the necessary paperwork is seen. All of the host families have been very amenable and the children advised of my visit, and they have been seen alone; no concerns have been raised. I have a very productive working relationship with school.'

A whole-school ethos of encouraging positive behaviour is reflected in host family arrangements. Boarders display kind and considerate behaviour towards each other and adults responsible for them. When they arrive at the school, boarders are informed about basic rules applicable in school and in the host home. These include clear rules that alcohol and drugs must not be used, as well as rules on timekeeping, bedtimes and use of mobile phones. Difficulties between boarders and hosts are rare, and if they arise are quickly escalated to school staff and managed. There have been no incidents of restraint with boarding pupils.

The overall management of health and safety is good. All the host family homes are visited annually to check on health and safety arrangements and to ensure that they are suitable, with a reasonable standard of decoration. Host families all have a fire plan in place in case of emergencies, and they practise this with each new boarder they care for. Boarders' safety takes the highest priority.

All essential checks of the backgrounds of potential hosts are undertaken prior to a boarder being placed in their care. This includes checks with the disclosure and barring service, and obtaining references. A recent improvement has been the requirement that

potential hosts provide three references, rather than two, in line with school staff recruitment. All these actions reflect the school's commitment to boarder safety.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Good

An experienced and motivated team leads the school boarding arrangements. Boarding is seen as an important aspect of school life. Boarders learn from pupils, teachers and hosts and also contribute their own experiences of life, enriching the whole school experience. Good communication between managers, teaching staff, boarding staff, hosts, families and boarders means that boarders receive all the help and support they need to keep safe and to enjoy their lives at the school. Managers and staff have good systems in place to welcome boarders, recruit hosts and monitor arrangements, with boarders' safety at the forefront of the service. Clear aims and objectives of the boarding service are set out in school documentation.

Policies and procedures are all monitored and reviewed regularly, ensuring that they are clear, and support and detail procedures to follow to maintain good practice in the school. Host families are clear about their role in providing care and support to boarders, and boarders themselves feel safe and comfortable with their host families. There is good contact and communication between school staff, boarders and host families, which means that difficulties are dealt with quickly. The roles and responsibilities of each party are well defined, which reinforces a consistent service for all boarders. However, host families would benefit from further guidance on what to include in their record-keeping about boarders' welfare.

All staff and host families are knowledgeable about safeguarding practice and what to do if they have any concerns about an individual. Safeguarding training is refreshed annually. Members of the board of trustees provide external scrutiny of the boarding provision, providing additional oversight of boarders' safety.

Boarders are encouraged to contribute their views about the service in a number of ways, including formal feedback at the end of their placement and weekly discussions with the pastoral care teacher. Hosts also make helpful suggestions to improve the service for future boarders.

Host families complete an agreement with school about their responsibilities as a host family, and this clarifies roles and responsibilities, contributing towards boarders' overall safety. There have been no complaints from boarders or their parents. Parents are highly supportive of arrangements for boarders at the school, and their feedback confirms they are pleased with the care their young people receive from their host families. One parent said, 'She rings me quite regularly, and it is all positive. The hosts tell me how she is doing too, and this is very helpful.'

Managers and staff have responded well to the recommendations for improvement made at the last inspection. All parents and host families are provided with a copy of the anti-bullying policy so that they are familiar with its content. All non-teaching staff receive an annual appraisal, and school staff continue to reflect on and share the information about the relationship between academic progress and the value of the boarding experience.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

| Judgement | Description |
|----------------------|---|
| Outstanding | A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced. |
| Good | A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted. |
| Requires improvement | A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good. |
| Inadequate | A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress. |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 332/6000 |
| Social care unique reference number | SC025000 |
| DfE registration number | |

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

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| Type of school | Independent school |
| Number of boarders on roll | 5 |
| Gender of boarders | Mixed |
| Age range of boarders | 3 to 18 |
| Headteacher | Diana Ball, (Education Lead). |
| Date of previous boarding inspection | 26 November 2012 |
| Telephone number | 01384 394633 |
| Email address | info@elmfield.com |

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