

# Duke Of York's Royal Military School

DYRMS - An Academy With Military Traditions

Duke of York's Royal Military School, Guston, Dover, Kent CT15 5EQ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this boarding school

The Duke of York's Royal Military School is a state boarding school with capacity for 636 pupils, aged 11 to 18. It is located near the port of Dover in south-east England. The school converted to academy status in 2010. All students board, and there were 519 students boarding at the time of inspection. They are accommodated across 12 boarding houses.

This inspection related to the social care provision and did not inspect the education provision at the school.

### Inspection dates: 14 to 16 June 2022

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected      requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers      good

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

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Date of last inspection:** 24 April 2018

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

Leaders at the school describe the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on consistency and stability for children. However, COVID-19 arrangements were managed expertly to try to provide continuity wherever possible. Staff feel that they have returned to some sense of normalcy now and are seeing progress across the school, both in children's engagement and enjoyment of the school experience.

Children talk excitedly and passionately about their school lives. Children speak of having access to experiences that they would never have had anywhere else. The co-curricular programme is at the heart of the offer for children. Boarders can engage in a wide range of continual learning opportunities, including both fun and competitive sports. The school also ensures that those children who may not be confident at sport, or struggle socially, also get access to opportunities to build their confidence and self-esteem. For example, a group of students were recently supported by staff to start a dungeon and dragons society, which has proved popular.

Boarding staff demonstrate a reflective insight into the aims and achievements of children. Regular inter-departmental meetings give education and well-being staff the chance to identify students who need additional support. A newly structured well-being service is helping to provide effective interventions that promote well-being and improve outcomes for children. Staff record and review any information that causes concern for children. They then develop clear strategies that are well communicated and shared with the team around the child.

Staff demonstrate effective use of external health and well-being agencies to ensure that children get access to any specialist support they require.

Staff are proud of the outcomes and impact that the school has on children's lives. Staff ensure that children, who come from a variety of different backgrounds, benefit from equal opportunities and have access to all areas of the school experience. Children and staff speak of an inclusive and accepting community.

Students make significant educational progress from their starting points, including those students who experience emotional or behavioural challenges. Even students who join the student body as late as year 12 make good progress, both educationally and in terms of their engagement in all areas of school life. Staff gave examples of children who have had their school funding interrupted being supported financially by the alumni association to ensure their studies are not interrupted.

The school has a long and proud military tradition. Students talk about this element of the school with passion and enthusiasm. Students work tirelessly to improve their skills in military drill and take part in hotly contested competitions. It was clear that much of this is student led, and students will use their own time willingly to continue to develop these skills.

## **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

Since the last inspection, there have been a small number of incidents of concern involving peer-on-peer abuse, some happening in this inspection year. Staff recognise and accept the seriousness of these events. They have set in place a range of strategies to address peer-on-peer abuse and bullying, but these are still embedding. As a result, it was not yet possible to fully assess the impact of these strategies. The combination of the number and recency of the incidents to this inspection activity indicate that there may have been some failings in safeguarding practice at the school.

While those children affected, and their parents, spoke of the school's prompt actions to address concerns, this does not reduce the severity of incidents and the impact on those vulnerable children affected. Leaders outlined a comprehensive strategy to deal with peer-on-peer abuse, some core aspects of this, such as increasing levels of staff supervision in boarding houses, are due to commence in September 2022. Inspectors highlighted the need to accelerate some elements of the school's response.

Staff are trained to understand and identify risks. Students benefit from careful risk assessment and management when concerns are identified. Staff also demonstrate the ability to manage behaviour. Students in the main are well behaved, but recent incidents have highlighted a small core of students that are not reacting or responding to the cultural changes that the school is implementing.

Incidents at the school have highlighted that some students did not feel confident in raising concerns or anxieties, particularly in relation to bullying. After one recent serious incident of assault, several students came forward to say that they had also experienced bullying, but only after the perpetrator had been excluded from the school. Leaders have some ambitious plans to improve the ability of students to raise concerns, some of which are already implemented. However, recent events have highlighted some disconnect between the staff's aspirations around the student voice and the reality for children. It is noted that many students spoke of an improving picture and clearer reporting structures, and said that they were confident to approach staff with any concerns they may have.

A new designated safeguarding lead person demonstrates passion and drive for improvement. They have made many positive changes and have the confidence of the staff, parents and student body. The coordinated approach of the new well-being service is working well. In particular, responses to students who self-harm are very good. Students get access to rapid support, both internal and external to the school. This has meant that children have been kept safe.

Many students spoke about the accessibility of highly supportive staff. They say this is what makes them feel safe, cared for and listened to.

## **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good**

Leaders demonstrate a very real drive for continual improvement. Members of the senior leadership team are ambitious and have the skill set and vision required to make the changes necessary at the school.

Parents, students and staff praise the headteacher and his team and, on the whole, have confidence in their leadership. Many staff speak about their pride in what the school has achieved since the last inspection. Staff feel valued and very much a part of the process of change at the school. Staff say they feel well supported. They feel they have a voice, and that there are clear lines of communication with senior leaders if they want to share suggestions or concerns. Staff also benefit from effective training and a good-quality induction.

Leaders have put in place a range of opportunities for students to share their voice and views about developments at the school. Many aspects of the school are child focused and student led. Representatives from the school council, equality and diversity council, and food council were keen to talk about the role they play in improving the student experience.

Leaders have rightly placed a strong emphasis on their review of peer-on-peer abuse and associated strategy. There are many more well-being developments in their plans for the next academic year, and leaders are determined to keep improving this aspect of the student experience.

Leaders have clear systems in place to identify the school's impact on children's lives and progress. They ensure that students' achievements are celebrated.

Leaders have a well-developed understanding of both the strengths and weaknesses of the school. This is highlighted in a detailed improvement plan that is a focus point for all staff.

The safeguarding trustee and head of trustees are both very clear about their roles as part of the board. They demonstrate a good knowledge of students. They are aware of the current focus on peer-on-peer abuse and knowledgeable about the school's improvement plan. There is good trustee oversight and presence within the school, with regular visits to the school and good levels of formal meetings to support this oversight. Trustees have a clear sense of their role as critical friend and take this seriously in their quest to improve the school. The chair works strategically with the headteacher on the school improvement plan and ensures this is consistently reviewed.

Leaders demonstrate effective use of external agencies and support. There are some excellent examples of good inter-agency working, for example a range of external agencies have contributed to conversations with students around the personal, social and health education curriculum.

Links between the boarding staff and teaching staff are very strong, with lots of staff working across school and boarding providing valuable links and continuity of care for students.

## **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:

- 12.1 The school has and consistently implements a written policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils. This policy includes: measures to combat bullying, including cyberbullying, and to promote positive behaviour; school rules; disciplinary sanctions; when restraint, including reasonable force, is to be used and how this will be recorded and managed; and arrangements for searching pupils and their possessions.

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### **Recommendation**

- Complete a full review of the school's anti-bullying policy to capture recent developments in practice.

### **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:** SC023666

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Alex Foreman

**Type of school:** Boarding school

**Telephone number:** 01304 245025

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## **Inspectors**

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