

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 723 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 482 students boarding at the time of inspection. They are accommodated in 12 boarding houses.

The school has long links with the military going back 200 years, and has well-established traditions in military music and military ceremonial activities. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds, and a higher than average proportion of pupils are in receipt of the service premium. The traditions of the armed forces shape the faith-based activities, and worship is influenced by a Christian ethos that embraces and involves all faiths.

There was a social care monitoring inspection in January 2017. An aligned education inspection was conducted alongside this social care inspection and the school was judged as good. A separate report is available for this.

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 April 2018

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 **outstanding**

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

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Date of last inspection: 29 April 2014

Key findings from this inspection

This boarding school is good because:

- An experienced, confident and competent senior management team leads the provision, putting the needs of students first.
- Students' health needs are met by the well-equipped medical centre on the school site.
- Students are safe and secure. The designated safeguarding lead takes swift and decisive action in the event of any concern. He utilises the comprehensive monitoring systems to ensure each student's ongoing welfare.
- Students' behaviour is exemplary. Staff use positive rewards to encourage good conduct and appropriate sanctions to discourage poor behaviour.

The boarding school's areas for development:

- Some students say that staff do not always listen to or respond to their concerns or informal complaints.
- Staff have not carried out a trial fire evacuation recently in boarding time.
- Some students say that the portion size is too small at meal-times, and that staff do not provide a suitable quantity and variety of snacks across all boarding houses.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Review the effectiveness of the systems in place to hear the voice of the student, and consider what further avenues are needed and how feedback is given to a student about their concerns or requests.
- Carry out a trial fire evacuation in boarding time.
- Consider portion size at mealtimes for the differing needs of students and the provision of a suitable quantity and variety of snacks across all boarding houses.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Students make good progress in their academic and social skills, while staff give the students' emotional well-being equal priority. A parent said, 'My son has progressed beyond recognition and I am pleased with all aspects of his comprehensive school life.' Another parent said, 'My daughter has developed and matured in a thriving and committed environment. This school is exceptional at delivering a balance of strong education, independent life experience, good morals, discipline, self-belief and respect.'

Students enjoy constructive and positive relationships with the staff around them. They reported how they had developed trust with house parents and felt that they could talk to them about anything. A student said, 'The new housemaster is so awesome. He really listens to us.' Other students said, 'Being "Dukies" is like being in a big family that always looks after you.' Parents say that there is much better communication between school and home since the new headteacher has been in post.

Although staff have a variety of systems in place to hear each individual student's voice, some students told inspectors that they had raised issues yet nothing had happened as a result. Examples included name calling and inconsistencies when staff apply sanctions. Students had not raised these as formal complaints. Upon hearing the issues, senior staff took immediate action during the inspection.

Catering staff have made significant progress in the provision of meals. Students contribute to the choice of menu and enjoy a wide choice of healthy food. Some students and parents commented negatively on portion size. Students gave a mixed view about the provision of snacks and food in boarding, with some saying that there is not enough food or choice in some areas. Students and staff said that kitchens should be equipped with cookers and ovens to support independence skills.

Students' health needs are met in full. Qualified nurses on site are able to give guidance about important health needs, such as vaccinations. There is a sick bay where students can rest if feeling unwell. Staff work effectively with health professionals to ensure the ongoing health of students. This includes utilising other agencies, such as child, adolescent and mental health services, when necessary. There are succinct and up-to-date written plans to promote students' health.

Contact with parents and others is a strength. Students make full use of digital technology, such as video conferencing, to speak to their parents and family. Staff consider carefully how to facilitate this, for example to accommodate time differences in other countries.

Equality and diversity are a real strength. There is no economic divide or hierarchy.

Students enjoy each other's company in a calm, loving and accepting environment.

Staff prepare students well for the future. Students develop their confidence, for example by travelling independently to the local town. Staff ensure that they have the necessary contact numbers in the event of an emergency.

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

Staff are extremely vigilant in safeguarding students. They act on any concerns, working with safeguarding professionals within the school to address the issues. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) consults the necessary people, such as the designated officer for safeguarding in the local authority or the local Prevent officer.

Staff protect students from harm such as bullying, racism, homophobia and the risk of radicalisation. Staff are alert to any emerging concerns about a student's well-being. Staff use 'smart' safeguarding reporting systems that ensure that there is a swift and efficient response to concerns. A parent said, 'From the matron to the head, all are responsible for my child's safety and well-being. My experience of this has been positive.'

Staff pay careful attention to students' emotional and psychological well-being. Students can go to a well-being room in their boarding area, the health ambassadors by the coffee shop or the school counsellors. Students identify many adults around them whom they can talk to. Staff take action to ensure students' ongoing welfare. They target intervention as outlined in the pastoral operation plans.

Students have a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They use an online system, 'Confide', to report anything that concerns them. The DSL monitors this carefully to ensure a prompt response. Of particular note is the approach to e-safety. The DSL has established systems to monitor and respond to any concerns, such as the language or intent expressed in social media. He takes immediate action to fully safeguard students. Students trust staff, for example telling staff when a fake profile has been set up with their name and image. Students are confident that staff will approach the software providers to remove such profiles.

Students are generally well behaved. They do not go missing or need any form of physical intervention to manage behaviour. The senior management team has developed an inclusion centre. This provides support for students are struggling, including those who may be at risk of exclusion. The facility is well equipped and staffed with various professionals. Staff have adopted a solutions-focused approach so that students continue their education while reflecting on and modifying their behaviour.

Students live in a safe environment with all necessary health and safety certification in place. They practise evacuating the building or having a 'lockdown' in an emergency. However, students have not recently practised a fire drill in boarding

time.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Senior leaders manage and monitor the school effectively to an excellent standard. They are determined that students have the best possible care and support to fulfil their potential. The senior leaders channel their enthusiasm and energy through the entire staff team. When senior staff identify that care is not up to their exacting standards, they provide additional support to staff, such as training and mentoring. This leads to the eradication of issues that students have raised historically.

The headteacher demonstrates exceptional leadership. He has worked with the senior managers to build a strong, decisive and reflective team. They are ambitious to provide the best possible support and opportunities for students. They have recognised the strengths and weaknesses of the school and developed an operating model to plan improvements for the future. A parent said, 'The head has made incredible progress in turning the school around. His continued stance is that the school is all about the students in every aspect of their life there.'

Senior leaders have established an inclusive culture. Care, kindness and acceptance are at the heart of the principles of the school. Students of many cultures and abilities say that they feel a part of the school community and that there is no discrimination. Students demonstrate a caring attitude for the wider community, such as by raising funds for charity. Staff are part of a wider community group to reduce crime in the area and to share intelligence.

There is excellent communication with parents on a regular basis. A complaints system is in place for parents or students, should there be a need to raise a concern. The number of complaints is small. No students have made a formal complaint since the last inspection. Senior staff are aware of the need to promote further the complaints system.

Care and education staff work exceptionally well together. There is cohesive working in a supportive and open culture. Students are emotionally in the best place to achieve academically.

Accommodation is generally of a high standard. Considerable investment has been made in some areas, with clear plans to improve the boarding areas that are considered not to be up to standard. Continual improvement is the underlying ethos. The senior management team has a thorough self-evaluation, school improvement plan and a future operating model in place.

A strong board of governors acts as a critical friend, providing scrutiny and challenge to the senior leadership team. It includes a governor responsible for safeguarding.

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 difference 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: SC023666

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Alex Foreman

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspectors:

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