

St Michael's School

The Society of St Pius X

St. Michael's School, Harts Lane, Burghclere, Newbury, Berkshire RG20 9JW

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

This non-affiliated independent boarding school is registered for pupils aged from 4 to 18. It opened in 1991 to meet the needs and beliefs of the followers of the Society of St Pius X. The school is a registered charitable trust and its goals reflect those of the Catholic society to which it belongs. There are currently 17 boarders.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 12 and 13 May 2026

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Date of last inspection: 26 September 2023

Summary of findings

Boarders enjoy staying at the school and make good progress while they are there. They enjoy a wide variety of activities, many of which take place in the extensive school grounds. They have access to the on-site church to practise their faith. Safeguarding practice within the school is sound and all staff understand their roles in keeping children safe. Leaders and managers provide a supportive environment in which children can learn and develop. Boarders benefit from quick responses to issues that arise in friendship groups.

Some maintenance is required across the school and boarding areas. Leaders and managers are aware of the issues that require attention.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Boarders say they enjoy staying at school. They have built good relationships with the other boys, alongside making progress academically and personally. Parents also comment positively about how their children have developed and grown since boarding at the school.

Boarders' views and ideas are actively encouraged by staff. The school council and informal discussions have led to various changes, including the purchase of equipment and new activities being added to the programme. Meeting minutes evidence that staff listen to boarders and act on requests, explaining the reasons if something cannot be achieved. Additionally, boarders have regular meetings with key staff to set their own targets, both academically and socially.

Boarders enjoy a wide range of activities, including various sports, army cadets (which included a recent weekend camping trip), cookery and choir. The former chapel has been separated into a study space, which is used daily, a large common room with a pool table, and a small, quiet, social area with chess and other board games.

Boarders do not have access to mobile phones or the internet, other than for schoolwork. They say that they are happy with this, as it encourages them to be active and helps them to interact with their peers, leading to stronger bonds with each other as a result.

The school recognises the need for boarders to be ready for the outside world when they leave. The school uses the personal, social, health and economic curriculum to support children in their knowledge, including understanding other cultures and faiths, developing relationships with others, and recognising the risks posed in their local communities.

Boarders and pupils across the school are creative in raising funds for new equipment for the school, but also for a local hospice and education for children in deprived areas overseas. Boarders spoke enthusiastically about the upcoming jog-a-thon to raise money for the local children's hospice.

Children's health needs are well understood and, when possible, children self-administer their medication. While this is agreed with parents, there is nothing in writing that shows the children feel able to manage their own medication.

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

Boarders say they feel happy and safe in the school. They feel able to approach the boarding staff with any concerns or worries that they may have. They know who the independent listener is and how to contact them. Boarders say they have access to phones that they can use in private, should they wish to seek external advice or support.

The behaviour management approach is clear, and flexible enough to take into consideration the current circumstances and challenges for each child. Boarders understand the expectations and are often able to manage minor issues among themselves.

Boarders recognise that there are inevitable frustrations with their peers at times. However, they are clear that if an issue grows, the staff will always sort this out for them. During the evening before the inspection, there had been a discussion with staff regarding name-calling and hurtful comments. Boarders said that this had helped and spoke about what they had learned.

Responses to safeguarding concerns are swift. The designated safeguarding lead is clear on their responsibilities and is confident in liaising with external safeguarding agencies as required. The boarding staff all understand the approach to reporting safeguarding and child protection concerns, and their role in keeping children safe.

Close liaison with families means that boarding staff have a sound understanding of children's circumstances, risks or vulnerabilities, enabling them to support children effectively when they are upset or worried.

Safer recruitment practice and site safety arrangements are in place, helping to ensure that children do not come into contact with unsuitable people in the school. This includes careful planning, such as the installation of new fencing when the new church was built on site, as the building is open to the wider community.

The school and boarding environment looks tired and worn in places, with funds being diverted into major building works that have been required. The sleeping areas require some maintenance, such as repairs to the ceiling from a previous water leak, and soft furnishings, such as curtain dividers, would benefit from being updated.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders in the school, together with the whole staff team, have high expectations for the boarders to be well-rounded people. They have high aspirations for each child to succeed to the best of their abilities, while remaining in keeping with the school's faith.

The school has particularly strong links with children's families, understanding the unique circumstances for each boarder. Therefore, children's individual needs are taken into consideration across the school's departments.

Weekly boarding meetings allow staff to monitor boarders' progress and their interactions with others, as well as to consider any additional help or support they may need. Comprehensive meeting minutes identify who is taking the lead responsibility for supporting individual boarders who may need extra help at that time.

Leaders in the school recognise the strengths and weaknesses in the boarding provision, acknowledging that the head of boarding is still relatively new in post and learning the role. Several changes have been made by the incoming head of boarding, which have strengthened the monitoring of boarding quality.

Governance of the school is effective, and there is suitable cover for the safeguarding lead role while the recently appointed safeguarding trustee is completing all relevant training.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Leaders should consider improving the appearance of the boarding areas, ensuring that they are well maintained and decorated to a suitable standard, and consult with boarders regarding the soft furnishings.
- Leaders should implement a formal agreement between staff, parents and boarders to ensure that boarders who administer their own medication are supported to do so safely.

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: SC012016

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Fr. John Brucciani

Type of school: Boarding School

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Inspectors

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