

# St. Mary's Music School

## School Care Accommodation Service

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Edinburgh  
EH12 5EL

Telephone: 01315 387 766

**Type of inspection:**  
Announced

**Completed on:**  
31 October 2024

**Service provided by:**  
St. Mary's Music School Trust Limited

**Service provider number:**  
SP2005007894

**Service no:**  
CS2005110876

## About the service

St Mary's Music school is registered to provide a school care accommodation service to a maximum of 38 pupils at any one time.

The school is Scotland's specialist music school and the Choir School of St Mary's Cathedral. It is one of the UK's leading specialist music schools. The school provides a unique education for children and pupils with a special talent in music. It is coeducational, non-denominational, day and boarding, and caters for boys and girls aged nine - 19. It draws pupils from many different backgrounds and from all parts of Scotland as well as elsewhere in the UK and abroad. Entry to the school is by audition and assessment, based on musical ability and potential, regardless of personal circumstances. Government funding, up to 100%, is available through the Aided Places scheme to assist with the cost of tuition and boarding fees.

The school is located in the North West district of Edinburgh. There is excellent access to amenities and public transport links.

## About the inspection

This was a shared inspection with Education Scotland which took place on 28 October 2024 between 12:00 and 19:30, 29 October between 09:00 and 19:30, 30 October 2024 between 09:00 and 19:00 and 31 October between 09:00 and 16:00. Education Scotland carried out an inspection of the school, onsite, between 28 October 2024 and 31 October 2024.

The inspection was carried out by two inspectors from the Care Inspectorate. To prepare for the inspection, we reviewed information about this service. This included previous inspection findings, registration information, information submitted by the service and intelligence gathered since the last inspection.

In making our evaluations of the service, we:

- spoke with 14 young people;
- spoke with 9 members of staff and managers;
- spoke with a board member;
- observed practice, the environment and daily life; and
- reviewed documents.

A joint letter of the inspection findings of the Care Inspectorate and Education Scotland can be accessed on the Education Scotland website.

## Key messages

- Children and young people were cared for by staff who knew them well and understood their needs
- Children and young people had formed close relationships within the inclusive boarding community
- Improvements were needed to protection documentation to provide clarity about decision making processes
- The school had made improvements to the environment which was more comfortable and attractive
- Support plans (known as Passport for Care) should be developed for all children and young people who require them.

## From this inspection we evaluated this service as:

In evaluating quality, we use a six point scale where 1 is unsatisfactory and 6 is excellent

How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing?	4 - Good
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Further details on the particular areas inspected are provided at the end of this report.

## How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing?

4 - Good

We found a number of important strengths in aspects of the care provided supporting positive outcomes for children, therefore we evaluated key question 7 as good.

Children and young people were kept physically and emotionally safe in the boarding house. They enjoyed warm and trusting relationships with staff who were kind and caring and attuned to their needs. The inclusive boarding community also helped young people to form close relationships with each other.

Flexibility in the school's approach to boarding was beneficial and the varying arrangements helpfully supported young people and their families.

Most staff were confident about their roles and responsibilities for keeping children safe and we were satisfied with the school's collaborative approach to child protection. However, improvements to documentation were needed in order to accurately reflect a clear audit trail of concerns to their conclusion. **See area for improvement 1.** The school were supportive of the suggestion of visits from board members to the boarding house which would raise the profile of the board for young people and enhance safeguarding.

The staff strongly advocated for all the young people in their care and endeavoured to ensure they experienced warmth, compassion and got the most out of life.

Improvements to the environment within the boarding house provided a pleasant place for young people to live. The staff were aware of areas which could be further enhanced and were looking to progress this. Many young people told us that Wi-Fi was an area which could be improved. It is a general expectation that young people have reasonable access to Wi-Fi living away from home and we urged the school to give this serious consideration.

Young people experienced many opportunities for fun activities both within the boarding house and in the wider community. Young people were very well supported with their music and staff were also ambitious for them to develop other talents such as art and sport. The speciality of the school meant that young people were strongly devoted to their music and practice, however there was also a strong emphasis in boarding to support young people to take time for themselves and promote their wellbeing.

Young people had a variety of opportunities to participate and express their views. Within the boarding house they had completed house self-evaluations and this would be strengthened by plans in place to conduct individual interviews with young people.

There were many supportive actions and creative strategies helping young people to make progress, however this could be better evidenced through care planning. The incremental approach to planning led to increased levels of support for those young people who needed it. The introduction of a 'passport for care' was in the early stages, and was, at the time of inspection limited to a small number of young people. It was clear that a number of other young people would benefit from that level of support and the school needed to progress this. Some of the young people also had a 'passport for learning', and a more collaborative approach would be helpful, as the strategies identified could be transferrable between care and education. **See area for improvement 2**

We found medication was managed appropriately and we provided some minor feedback on how this could be improved.

Most of the young people ate well and enjoyed the food in the refectory, however they spoke about the limitation of the availability of snacks in boarding and we asked that discussions take place with young people to resolve this.

Leaders in the boarding house led by example and had established a very positive culture. The inclusion of key boarding staff in welfare meetings brought knowledge and understanding of the needs of the young people and their families, as well as strategies used to support young people within boarding. It was pleasing to hear the vision for the boarding house, though this could be strengthened further by including this in wider improvement planning and quality assurance.

We understand that there have been changes to the board and the Care Inspectorate needs to be notified of these changes in order to carry out the necessary checks. Due to these changes, there has been a lack of visibility of the board within the boarding house. Nonetheless, it was pleasing to hear that there are plans in place to recruit new board members with safeguarding expertise. We would encourage more contact between the board and boarding house staff and young people.

There were enough staff available to meet the needs of the young people and keep them safe. However, we understand that there were changes about to happen which would present challenges. Whilst there was a succession plan in place, we would encourage the service to consider the sustainability of this plan.

Safe recruitment was well managed and well organised. Staff were equipped to support the needs of the young people, through training, such as child protection, trauma, and mental health first aid. Plans were in place to source funding for future training to further enhance staff skills and knowledge, equipping them to care for the diverse group of young people.

## Areas for improvement

1. In order to evidence that young people are fully protected the service should make improvements to documentation to accurately reflect a clear audit trail of concerns to their conclusion.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with the Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS)3.20 which state that "I am protected from harm, neglect, abuse, bullying and exploitation by people who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities".

2. In order to ensure of the needs of all young people are clear the service should continue to develop Passports for Care for all young people who need enhanced support.

This is to ensure that care and support is consistent with Health and Social Care Standards (HSCS) which states that "My personal plan (sometimes referred to as a care plan) is right for me because it sets out how my needs will be met, as well as my wishes and choices". (HSCS 1.15)

## What the service has done to meet any requirements we made at or since the last inspection

### Requirements

#### Requirement 1

By 9 February 2024 the provider must ensure that young people experience high quality support and protection through effective protection practices. In order to do this they must, at a minimum;

- Review the child protection policy and procedure and ensure that roles, expectations and timescales are clearly identified and understood by all staff
- Ensure that the language used in the policy is conducive to nurturing care
- Develop an effective adult protection policy
- Schedule adult protection training for staff and ensure that staff are clear about the circumstances in which an adult protection concern should be raised and their role and responsibilities.

This requirement was made on 3 October 2023.

#### Action taken on previous requirement

We assessed that the service had met this requirement. However we have made an area for improvement in relation to documentation used to record concerns and their outcomes See area for improvement 1.

**Met - within timescales**

#### Requirement 2

By 9 February 2024 the provider must provide an environment that is suitable and pleasant for young people to live in. In order to do this they must, at a minimum, ensure that communal areas are clean, odour free and decorated and furnished to an acceptable standard.

This requirement was made on 3 October 2023.

#### Action taken on previous requirement

The service had made improvements to the environment making it a pleasant place for young people to live.

**Met - within timescales**

## What the service has done to meet any areas for improvement we made at or since the last inspection

### Areas for improvement

#### Previous area for improvement 1

In order to ensure that the service can consistently achieve positive outcomes for young people the provider should ensure that care plans and risk assessments are updated regularly and reflect current information and staff practice.

**This area for improvement was made on 3 October 2023.**

#### Action taken since then

The service had changed the way they produce care plans. The new system was in the early stages of development. We have made another area for improvement in relation to support planning. See area for improvement 2.

#### Previous area for improvement 2

To ensure that staff have up to date and relevant guidance, the provider should review and update policies and procedures on a regular basis and ensure that staff have understanding of how they use policies and procedures in practice.

**This area for improvement was made on 3 October 2023.**

#### Action taken since then

All policies and procedures were up to date.

## Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at [www.careinspectorate.com](http://www.careinspectorate.com).

## Detailed evaluations

How well do we support children and young people's rights and wellbeing?	4 - Good
7.1 Children and young people are safe, feel loved and get the most out of life	4 - Good

7.2 Leaders and staff have the capacity and resources to meet and champion children and young people's needs and rights	4 - Good
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