

The Bolitho School Foundation Company Ltd

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Chris Passmore
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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The Bolitho School is an independent day and boarding school. It has a Christian foundation with a Church of England Chaplain, and is affiliated to, though independent of, The Woodard Corporation, the largest group of Church of England Schools in the UK. The school is co-educational and takes pupils aged from four to 18. Boarding arrangements vary between full-term boarding, weekly boarding and flexi-boarding. There are six boarding houses four of which are off site and accommodate senior school pupils. Boarding staff are made up of both teaching and non-teaching staff with appropriate gender balances. The school offers a bi-lingual section of the curriculum, in English and French, as an option for pupils from Year 4 and operates the International Baccalaureate in the sixth form. The school has grown in number over past years and attracts students from several European countries and the Far East. The Bolitho School is set in a residential area of Penzance with views out to sea and the surrounding coastline. It is within walking distance of the main town facilities as well as more local small shops such as newsagents. The school has a fleet of mini-buses that are used on a daily basis to bring day pupils to and from the school as well as to convey weekly boarders. The school makes use of its location, local heritage and proximity to the coast by arranging outings with educational and leisure foci for boarders at weekends and half term holidays.

Summary

This was a planned inspection of The Bolitho School against Key National Minimum Standards. The last Boarding Welfare inspection of the school took place in November 2004. Since then there have been changes within the senior boarding staff, house staff and premises used for boarding. There have been specific interim visits to the school to meet the new Head of Boarding and to investigate a concern over sanctions imposed following an incident involving boarders. The school dealt with the latter issue in a satisfactory manner. There was a satisfactory inspection of the school, including its boarding arrangements, carried out by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in 2006. The present inspection was carried out by two inspectors over three days during which there were discussions with key staff, pupil groups, GAP students and inspection visits to all the boarding premises. Significantly the school no longer uses lodgings to accommodate boarders but has acquired and brought into use new properties adjacent to an existing sixth form boarding house. Additionally there is a new sixth form centre established, separate from the main school site, which has released space within the main school building. Improvements to boarding accommodation have been made within the main school building, The Cottage and the new sixth form boarding houses. Material standards within the range of boarding accommodation varies but is at least satisfactory with some accommodation being outstanding in quality. Organisation and leadership of boarding has improved with planned developments still being implemented. Pupil's behaviour throughout the inspection experience was good and they demonstrated positive levels of consideration for each other and their respective cultural and language differences. The school has a significant international student population and inclusion was evident across the nationalities throughout the school. There are still difficulties being experienced regarding the provision of food that will satisfy all cultural preferences but the school is taking these issues seriously and trying to meet these needs or educate students in healthy eating options. There are practice issues that can be improved to the benefit of pupils and boarding staff but in the main the schools self-assessment demonstrated an awareness of these areas and planned to address them. Of particular note was the improvements in pupils' attitudes to boarding and the school's provisions for their

welfare. There was a more relaxed atmosphere about the school and in the boarding houses. Boarders were more balanced in their comments regarding their boarding experiences, with some making very complimentary statements. Whilst there are areas of recommendation made, overall there have been significant improvements made since the last inspection and the school's direction of travel is a positive and progressive one.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Several requirements and recommendations were made at the last inspection. Most have been addressed completely or in part. The décor of the dining room is improved. New seating has been provided. The menu is displayed in the hallway. The boarding provision has been increased by the acquisition of new boarding houses adjacent to those already in existence and the cessation of use in lodgings. These new properties have been opened-up to provide one large sixth form boarding house. The premises can be separated and secured for accommodation of sixth form boarders of each sex at night time. There have been improvements made to the boarding accommodation in the main school and at The Cottage. These include décor, furnishings, a new conservatory and a new fire alarm system throughout. There has been an increase in boarding staff and a new working rota introduced. Boarding staff said they much preferred the new working rota. Around the school there are displays, artwork and photographs of students on activities and enjoying the diversity of school life offered at Bolitho. There has been significant investment in IT throughout the school and boarders have use of these facilities during the evenings and at weekends. New changing facilities have been provided for both sexes and a new toilet block for males created on the main school site.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Arrangements for health care are well managed and provided for. Students have a range of health professionals from whom they can seek advice or council. In-school healthcare provision is good with rooms available for both male and female students who become ill or need health care supervision during the day. General health care and well being is taught through the school's Personal, Social, Health Education (PSHE) programme. Boarding staff are given first aid training and have a medical handbook available as source of advice and guidance. Boarding staff also state they would call the nurse in any instance of doubt even though she may be off-site. There are guidelines prepared for the use of special recovery medication where students are known to have allergies or suffer from chronic conditions. Catering is all in-house. Catering staff are trained, menus varied and cyclic. Local produce is used and home prepared. Percentage results based on questionnaires place satisfaction with food in the mid-band but inspectors' experience and inspection of the catering operation showed the food to be good. Students report fluctuations in quality and sometimes certain dishes are not sufficient in quantity to go round. Questionnaire surveys have been initiated and will be collated by the school in order to inform their five year development plan. These include a section on school catering. A food committee is also planned with input from students. Sixth form students have their own lunch time catering from the sixth form centre kitchen. This facility is a popular one and meals well liked. The main school dining room is a busy area during meal times, especially at lunch times. The school day has been rearranged to accommodate three sittings for lunch but the basic dining and kitchen area is in need of review.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school has good arrangements in place to keep boarders and students safe whilst they are living at the school. Boarders' questionnaire replies showed that the school's approach to anti-bullying works well with the majority saying they were never bullied. It was stated that where bullying does occur it is not serious in nature and the school deals with it. Boarders are protected from abuse through staff training in child protection. The school nurse is the nominated school's liaison person for child protection. She has a background in this area and regularly updates her understanding of child protection issues. Boarding staff are given induction and update training on child protection. The behaviour of boarders and pupils around the school and in the boarding houses is good. Boarders have time to relax as well as study. Discipline is stated to be fair. Boarding staff have clear, updated guidelines on permitted levels of discipline as well as what is inappropriate sanctioning. The school has appointed a private Fire safety consultant to advise on matters of fire safety and fire prevention. These arrangements appear to work well in enabling the school to maintain its Fire Risk Assessment and updating its structural fire safety. There is evidence of regular fire drills involving boarders in each of the boarding houses, fire detection and fire fighting equipment is maintained by professional contractors as well as being tested on a regular basis. Boarders stated that staff respect their personal privacy and generally felt that personal information was handled sensitively. Staff demonstrated an awareness of the individual boarders strengths and needs and treated them in an age appropriate way. Staff recruitment was generally well managed though files were a little less well ordered. Not all new post holders have been subject to new Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) enquiries originating from the school but have been appointed using disclosures from their previous employer. Disclosures are issued for the purposes of staff vetting and as proof for inspection purposes. Recording disclosure numbers and dates on a spreadsheet after the originals have been inspected is acceptable practice. Personnel checks for the school guardians scheme were in place and there was evidence of GAP Students being suitably vetted by the police or civil authorities in their home country before placement at the school. Supervision of visitors and contractors is well managed. Visitors report to reception where they sign-in and are either given a visitors badge or escorted around the school. Contractors report to the head of maintenance and are supervised whilst on site. Boarding Houses are out of bounds to boarders through the school day. All boarding houses are secured by key-pad locks on their main doors and boarders feel safe and secure whilst in their houses. One boarder commented on this aspect of security by stating, "We have a big housemaster and two strong Gappies to protect us". The school has a main Health and Safety Committee that meets regularly through the year and in addition there are other slots for health and safety on the Governors' Meetings and school section meetings. Policy and procedures are in place and there is a system of risk assessment appropriate to the nature of the activity or situation. These are completed by various personnel through the school but generally collated through the bursar's office. There are checks in place to maintain the safety of mains services and equipment by regular testing and certification by professional contractors. Portable Appliance Testing (PAT) is carried out by a contracted electrician throughout the year. Many of the boarders have their own electrical equipment and this is included in the PAT schedules. There a few rooms using novelty strand lights (fairy lights) for decorative purposes but there appears to be no clear policy around their use.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders' questionnaire responses indicate there are adults in the school they can take problems to or seek personal guidance from. These persons varied between individual boarders and not all those named were boarding staff. This may reflect the fact that there has recently been significant moves in the staffing of boarding houses and relationships were still being formed. Other established staff and independent individuals were named within the list of boarders' confidants. There was no evidence of any discrimination between boarders of different nationalities or cultures. Boarders said they enjoyed meeting and forming friendships with boarders from other nationalities. The school celebrates calendar dates from other cultures, such as Chinese New Year and has a Chinese speaking teacher in the sixth form who also acts as interpreter in more sensitive pupil issues.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders' opinions on the opportunities to have their say about boarding were split. The overall majority answered they 'Usually' could have their say whilst the remainder answered 'Always' or 'Sometimes', with a narrow majority voting for 'Always'. Boarders knew of the various means by which their views could be represented, boarder committee and school council, but their responses suggested they were not confident those views were being truly expressed. There were also claims that house meetings were ineffective because staff 'did not listen' or listened but did not follow-through with action. This may mean boarders did not get the response they wanted or that explanations were not given or not clear in responses from staff. There are examples of how the school has responded to boarders' views but there was not a dynamic response to this area of questioning. Boarders are able to maintain contact with family and friends through a variety of means but most choose email or mobile phone communication. There are land-line phones available to boarders in their boarding houses. These offer variable degrees of privacy but where a boarder needs any more privacy they are able to use the office phones in the boarding house. This was evidenced during the inspection as well as the frequency with which calls come into the office from family and friends of boarders. Boarders are given email accounts by the school and can use these for family contacts but there have to be constraints placed on the times during which personal emails can be sent and received. For overall security purposes personal laptops have to be scrutinised to ensure compliance with school standards. Post is received at the school and distributed to boarders in their houses.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Within an overall judgement of 'Good' there are elements of boarding accommodation that are outstanding and some that are satisfactory. Accommodation for sixth form boarders is good or outstanding. The most recently acquired houses have been refurbished to a high standard with new heating and wiring as well as furniture and fittings. Bathing and toilet facilities in these properties exceed the NMS significantly. Study provision in sixth form houses are good and there is a programme of replacing storage cubes with flexible wall shelving. Standards in St Clare, the main school accommodation, have improved but there is more to be done. Planned improvements are to be undertaken when roof repairs are completed. Bathing and toilet provision exceed the NMS. Accommodated numbers in the Cottage need to be monitored. The

accommodated numbers and need for appropriate storage makes space a premium in many of The Cottage bedrooms. This boarding facility has areas that are good but some rooms less so.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has good organisation and management structures in place. There are clear lines of leadership in boarding practice and policy. The Head of Boarding works closely with the Head and Deputy Head as part of the school's Senior Management Team and has improved many areas of operation since his appointment. There is a commitment to improvements within the physical provision for boarding as well as in areas such as activities for the non-sporting or musically inclined boarders. Performance management and professional supervision in boarding practice is informal and not always recorded. Boarding staff were clear in their conversations that they could seek advice from the Head of Boarding and that he regularly discussed boarding issues with them. Boarding staff work co-operatively with each other to provide mutual support in the boarding houses but lack formalised training opportunities. The school has now renewed its membership with the Boarding Schools Association and can access information, advice and training material. Information for boarders was evident on notice boards in the boarding houses, around the school and in the student diaries. The school's contact with parents was varied but included evidence of written, electronic and telephone communications. End of term reports do not yet contain any summary of boarders' social progress or experiences whilst in boarding arrangements.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure all new staff positions are subject to a new CRB Disclosure check (NMS 39.1 & 3.)
- make a policy decision on the use of decorative or novelty lighting strands in bedrooms and dorms (NMS 47.2)
- ensure that all outcomes from boarders' committee or house meetings are clearly explained (NMS 12.)
- plan appropriate training opportunities in boarding practice for boarding staff (NMS 34.1 & 7.)
- provide structures for formal supervision and appraisal sessions of boarding staff (NMS 34.5.)

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for boarding school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' health is promoted (NMS 6)
- safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and welfare are supported by appropriate records (NMS 7)
- boarders' receive first aid and health care as necessary (NMS 15)
- boarders are adequately supervised and looked after when ill (NMS 16)
- boarders are supported in relation to any health or personal problems (NMS 17)
- boarders receive good quality catering provision (NMS 24)
- boarders have access to food and drinking water in addition to main meals (NMS 25)
- boarders are suitably accommodated when ill (NMS 48)
- boarders' clothing and bedding are adequately laundered (NMS 49).

Ofsted considers 6 and 15 the key standards to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are protected from bullying (NMS 2)
- boarders are protected from abuse (NMS 3)
- use of discipline with boarders is fair and appropriate (NMS 4)
- boarders' complaints are responded to appropriately (NMS 5)
- the operation of any prefect system safeguards and promotes boarders' welfare (NMS 13)
- boarders' welfare is protected in any appointment of educational guardians by the school (NMS 22)
- boarders are protected from the risk of fire (NMS 26)
- the welfare of any children other than the school's pupils is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated by the school (NMS 28)
- boarders' safety and welfare are protected during high risk activities (NMS 29)
- boarders' personal privacy is respected (NMS 37)
- there is vigorous selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with boarders (NMS 38)
- boarders are protected from unsupervised contact at school with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures; all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises are supervised (NMS 39)
- boarders have their own accommodation, which is secure from public intrusion (NMS 41)
- boarders are protected from safety hazards (NMS 47)

Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5, 26, 37, 38, 39, 41 and 47 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders have access to a range and choice of activities (NMS 11)
- boarders do not experience inappropriate discrimination (NMS 18)
- boarders' welfare is not compromised by unusual or onerous demands (NMS 27)
- boarders have satisfactory provision to study (NMS 43)
- boarders have access to a range of safe recreational areas (NMS 46)

Ofsted considers 14 and 18 the key standards to be inspected.

Annex A

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school (NMS 12)
- boarders receive personal support from staff (NMS 14)
- boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families (NMS 19)
- new boarders are introduced to the school's procedures and operation, and are enabled to settle in (NMS 21)
- boarders have appropriate access to information and facilities outside the school (NMS 30)
- there are sound relationships between staff and boarders (NMS 36)

Ofsted considers 12 and 19 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' possessions and money are protected (NMS 20)
- boarders are provided with satisfactory accommodation (NMS 40)
- boarders have satisfactory sleeping accommodation (NMS 42)
- boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities (NMS 44)
- boarders have satisfactory provision for changing by day (NMS 45)
- boarders can obtain personal requisites while accommodated at school (NMS 50)

Ofsted considers 51 the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- a suitable statement of the school's principles and practice should be available to parents, boarders and staff (NMS 1)
- there is clear leadership of boarding in the school (NMS 8)
- crises affecting boarders' welfare are managed effectively (NMS 9)
- the school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare (NMS 10)
- risk assessment and school record-keeping contribute to boarders' welfare (NMS 23)
- boarders are supervised adequately by staff (NMS 31)
- staff exercise appropriate supervision of boarders leaving the school site (NMS 32)
- boarders are adequately supervised at night (NMS 33)
- boarders are looked after by staff which have specific boarding duties, and have received adequate induction and continued training (NMS 34)
- boarders are looked after by staff which follow clear boarding policies and practice (NMS 35)
- the welfare of boarders placed in lodgings is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 51)
- the welfare of boarders is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated away from the school site on short-term visits (NMS 52)

Ofsted considers 1, 23, 31 and 34 the key standards to be inspected.