

Birchfield School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC020769
Inspection date	12 March 2008
Inspector	Brian Lock
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	7 March 2005

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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

Birchfield School was founded at Tettenhall, near Wolverhampton in 1935 and moved to its present site, near the village of Albrighton in 1962. In that year the school was established as an educational trust with a board of Governors who have continued to take responsibility for the overall management of the school. The school is open to boys and girls from three to 13 years. The school is housed in an Edwardian country house and in purpose built modern buildings; and enjoys a beautiful 20 acre setting in the Shropshire Countryside. The grounds are beautifully maintained. Birchfield has excellent road, rail and airport access. It is situated only five minutes away from the M54. The school operates its own bus service to and from Wolverhampton, Telford, Bridgnorth and surrounding villages. Boarding at Birchfield School is on a weekly basis for boys only, with them going home every weekend and returning on Monday mornings. Boarding spaces are limited to 19, but at the time of the inspection there were 12 boarders. Boarding is provided in one house, on the main school site. Pastoral care and support are provided to boarders by a dedicated housemaster or mistress. The evening duties are covered by boarding tutors who are qualified teaching staff employed within the school. The Headmaster and his wife are directly responsible for pastoral care, monitoring the boarding provision and child protection. He is assisted by a deputy head, a housemaster and mistress, a bursar and boarding tutors. Boarders are provided with many activities and there are systems in place to monitor the safety of these activities. The school, through the headmaster, is a full member of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools (IAPS). It is also a member of the Boarding Schools' Association.

Summary

This two day announced key inspection covers the majority of the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools, with particular in-depth focus of all key standards. The 12 boarders are all very positive about being weekly boarders at the school. They present excellent behaviour and show an outstanding level of confidence about how they are cared for. Boarding staff demonstrate an outstanding commitment to the boarders, having an in-depth knowledge of each individual young person. Relations and contact with parents is outstanding.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school had no recommendations made at the last inspection undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in March 2005. The school has continued to develop open communications with parents and to involve young people in developing their life skills.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Arrangements for meeting the medical needs of boarders are well organised. None of the boarders are registered by the school with local GPs or dentist as they are weekly boarders parents retain total responsibility for this aspect of their sons' health. The school does employ a nurse who is available to all pupils but offers addition support to boarders and their parents. A feature of the school is the high level of contact with parents, which is excellent. The nurse(matron) is situated in the boarding house and medical records are clearly maintained in

line with policies and procedures. The matron is aware that she needs to review medical consents to bring them up to date with current practice. An on-call doctor is available in an emergency but is rarely called upon. When boarders are ill they return to the boarder house but parents are contacted at the earliest opportunity and parents collect their child as a matter of course. In the absence of the matron, the house mother tends to boarders' health needs. Communication between the matron, houseparents, school staff and kitchen staff is outstanding. The matron offers advice and support to both parents and pupils. She is involved with various sessions in the school on promoting good health and healthy eating. Catering is managed to a very high standard. The feedback from pupils, staff and parents is that the food is extremely good. Parents are invited into the school to join pupils for meals on a regular basis. Discussion takes place between the house staff, matron and head of catering about specific dietary needs and promoting healthy eating. The choice at meal times is very good with a relaxed atmosphere particularly at breakfast and supper. Although there is no food committee the head of catering consults with boarders on a weekly basis about the forthcoming menus. The School's own quality questionnaires to parents and boarders conducted in January 2008 rated the provision and catering as extremely good with no suggestion for improvement.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Young people spoken with on this inspection say they feel safe and secure, with clear security measures, protection from stranger danger and confidence in the anti-bullying strategies. All staff received child protection training earlier this year. The head and the child protection co-ordinator demonstrate an outstanding insight into child protection issues and have clear concise recording, developed from first-hand experience. Good links exist with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. A clear policy exists for complaints and how these should be dealt with. Parents are clear that if they have an issue relating to a boarding issue they would take the matter up with one of the house parents but in the unlikely event the house parents could not resolve it they would go straight to the headmaster. Boarders are equally clear that if they had a concern about anything they would speak to one of the house parents who would resolve the matter to their satisfaction. Staff are clear about the recruitment process and the need for all checks to be in place prior to staff taking up post. In a situation where all checks are not received the bursar and the head clearly discuss the issue and have a clear understanding and rationale for any decision to ensure it does not compromise the safety of children. Staff files scrutinised demonstrate a good robust recruitment system which protects children. Parents accompanying young people on trips are checked via the Criminal Records Bureau. Young people share dormitory space which has some degree of privacy screening. Boarders have a say in which dormitory they sleep and are comfortable with the level of privacy they are afforded. There is a clear understanding of the rewards and sanction systems by staff and boarders. Behaviour management is by setting clear boundaries and outstanding relationships between staff and boarders. Various risk assessments are in place to protect young people, including fire risk assessments. Following the inspection of the Independent Schools Inspectorate in October 2007 high risk activities formats are in the process of being redrafted. Information on fire evacuation and plans to update the fire detection systems in line with recommendations from Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is available.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders say that they get on with staff really well and can talk to them about anything. The School has a 'Listener' and although the boarders are aware of his existence they do not feel the need to use his service. Staffing levels are excellent, with generally at least two staff on duty with the 12 boarders. The same staff work set evenings so both staff and boarders have a clear understanding and expectation of each other. The school have clear policies in respect of equal opportunities and this is demonstrated by the pupils interacting with each other in a multicultural mix. Staff are clear about promoting anti-oppressive practice both within the staff team and with pupils. Boarders have a wide range of activities available to them but Wednesday's is most popular as it is not only a sporting day but a full activities evening including visits to external venues. The space is limited in the boarding house but balanced by open access to a range of other rooms and activities across the school site.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Relationships between boarders and boarding staff is excellent. Although the School tends not to have committees for boarders all boarders say they feel included. Given the number and age of boarders the current systems in the school work exceptionally well. Staff offer understandable reasons for decisions and involve the boarders in these decisions, such as dormitory changes, and explain decisions can be reviewed and changed if appropriate. Parents say boarders are consulted as are they. Daily discussions take place with the boarders and boarding staff throughout the day and boarders have regular opportunities to seek out boarding staff to raise any issues. Boarders' birthdays are celebrated, as are individual and group successes.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarding accommodation is within the main house and development is limited. The accommodation meets the National Minimum Standards in all respects. The positive aspect about the boarding house is the ownership by the young people despite only being resident four nights a week during school terms. In the lounge area photographs of all boarders, in group and individual poses, are plentiful. The boys personalise their dormitory areas with posters, with beds being chosen for the biggest poster areas. Boys relax totally in the boarding accommodation whilst still responding to set boundaries.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The organisation of the boarding house is designed to support the boarders which it does to excellent effect. The whole school presents as warm, open and welcoming. Boarders parents say the School is like a second home for their sons and nothing is too much trouble for boarding staff. Some degree of envy is expressed by parents on the attention to detail on issues such as laundry and medical issues. Support is available from all staff to boarders and parents, a culture nourished and promoted by the senior management team. The School offers a range of information to parents in the form of the School Prospectus, the Birchfield Journal, end of term reports, open access to sporting events, free boarding trials, meal taster sessions, staff and parents events (such as social evenings) and parent involvement in school trips. Since the Independent Schools Inspection the School is in the process of writing an in-depth development plan. The School has invested a lot of effort in appointing the right staff for the job. Communication throughout the school and with parents is outstanding. Staff across the whole

site have an excellent understanding of the boarding provision and good systems are in place to protect young people. The current arrangements for the 12 boarders meets their needs in an exceptional way.

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):

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.