

Swanbourne House School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Robert Smith
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Date of last inspection	1 October 2004

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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

Swanbourne House is a day and boarding preparatory school for boys and girls situated in the village of Swanbourne in Buckinghamshire, close to the towns of Milton Keynes and Aylesbury. The school is run by joint head teachers. The school provides a flexible range of boarding options for both boys and girls, including termly, weekly and more casual overnight boarding for pupils who might usually attend on a day basis. Boarding accommodation is located on the first and second floors of the main school building. Day to day supervision and management of boarding arrangements are primarily undertaken by the boarding houseparents who are a married couple who live in accommodation that is adjacent to boarding areas. The school is located in a quiet rural setting with large grounds and playing fields surrounding it. The school has a pre-prep department on the same site, as well as recently developed pre-school provision.

Summary

This was an announced inspection carried out over a period of three days with verbal feedback offered to the school on the fourth day. The inspection was conducted by one Ofsted inspector and one Boarding School Additional Inspector (BSAI). The inspection was conducted at the same time as an Independent School's Inspectorate (ISI) inspection of the school's education provision. The school provides a consistently high standard of welfare provision and support for boarding pupils that identifies and meets their needs very well. Boarders confirm they feel safe and are well looked after by a very hardworking and dedicated team of staff both in boarding and in other key areas across the school. Not least boarders thoroughly enjoy their boarding experience and have a lot of fun, which is reflected in the popularity of boarding even though it is essentially voluntary. The outcome areas assessed in this inspection were found to be either outstanding or good with no significant areas of concern having been identified. The school has particular strengths in the quality of its health care provision, the levels of individual support offered to boarders and the variety and scope of activities. Boarding is very well organised by the boarding houseparents who successfully promote a family-like atmosphere in the boarding setting. Some shortfalls exist in aspects of recruitment documentation and information provided for boarders and their parents lacks some elements expected under the National Minimum Standards.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last welfare inspection conducted by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in 2004 a small number of recommendations were made and welfare advice offered in two areas. The school has fully addressed these matters. Contact details for the regulatory body for boarding welfare are now available to staff. Welfare plans are now put in place where warranted by the level of boarders' care needs. Appropriate locking arrangements are now in place for the main surgery door. Due attention has been paid to implementing safe ways of holding dorm doors open without compromising fire safety. A new website is now in place with improved access and ranges of information for parents and clear evidence is now held of the relevant checks undertaken upon the school's Independent Listeners.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school provides an overall excellent level of support for boarders' health care needs. Appropriate policies and guidance are in place to ensure likely health risks for pupils of this age are fully addressed. These are supplemented by appropriate levels of advice and guidance for pupils as part of the school's Personal Social and Health Education (PSHE) programme and by the more informal day to day advice offered to pupils by pastoral, boarding and nursing staff. The school provides a very good level of nursing cover throughout the school week from two fully qualified nursing staff. Comprehensive support is provided by the school's local GP surgery. The health care needs of all pupils are carefully identified upon admission to the school, and subsequently to boarding, and appropriate steps taken to ensure these needs are met consistently during periods of stay at the school. Where boarders have more complex health care support needs these are particularly well met and supported by detailed welfare and health care plans where necessary. Boarders confirm they feel very well looked after by nursing staff if they are ill or have suffered any injuries. Detailed records of health care treatments are maintained and the administration, storage and disposal of medication is carefully recorded and safely managed. The school maintains excellent communication with parents over health care matters and ensures appropriate liaison is maintained with external health services where relevant. Appropriate permissions are obtained from parents for administration of medication and emergency health care treatments. The school pro-actively supports referrals to outside health and counselling services, in liaison with parents, where pupil needs or behaviours indicate this may be appropriate. An extensive number of staff hold first aid qualifications and boarding and nursing staff ensure they undertake further specific training for areas of more complex health needs that they may have to meet. The school has good facilities for caring for pupils when they are ill and need to stay at the school, and there are appropriate contingency plans in place to cope with any major outbreaks of illness amongst boarders. The school provides a good standard of food for pupils. A suitably varied and balanced diet is offered with satisfactory levels of choice at main mealtimes. Special diets are well catered for and pupils have opportunities to contribute their ideas for menus. Boarders are provided with suitable quantities of food over the course of the day and have ready access to drinking water across the school site.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school has an effective approach to managing the likelihood of bullying occurring in the school. A clear policy is in place that is regularly reinforced to staff and pupils. Boarders do not report any significant levels of bullying within the school, and particularly not within the boarding setting. They are confident that when incidents do occur staff deal with them appropriately. The school has a very detailed and comprehensive range of policy and guidance on child protection matters in place. This helps to support staff in ensuring pupils are kept safe, although the school does not hold a copy of the full local safeguarding board policies and procedures. Two senior staff are appointed as designated child protection staff to cover both the pre-prep and prep school areas. Appropriate recent training has been undertaken by these staff for this role. Staff spoken with are very clear about where and how to report any concerns of a child protection nature. The school staff team, including all ancillary staff receives regular child protection training delivered by the school's designated staff. The school maintains good records relating to situations where there may be welfare concerns about pupils, both within

and outside of the school setting, and maintains exemplary records where these concerns are of a possible child protection nature, tracking both the nature of the concern and any action taken by the school and other agencies. The school works effectively in liaison with external welfare agencies where required. Pupils are clear about behaviour expectations and the range of sanctions that may be applied. However, standards of behaviour in the school are extremely high, with pupils being courteous and respectful towards each other, staff and visitors. As a result rarely does the school have to make use of any level of formal sanctions, particularly in boarding, where pupils confirm that the simple expression of disapproval by staff is sufficient to moderate any unacceptable behaviour. Positive behaviour is rewarded in the school by the award of points for good behaviour, attitudes and progress in work. When sanctions are applied pupils feel this is generally done fairly and consistently. More serious sanctions are occasionally issued for unacceptable behaviour in school and appropriate central records are maintained of these sanctions. Where the behaviours of pupils may need particularly sensitive handling the school ensures this is identified in welfare plans and that all staff are made aware, so that a consistent approach can be sustained. The school has a generally appropriate complaints process in place for parents, which is provided in writing for new parents and is also available on the school website. Boarders are given information on who to contact if they have any personal concerns but this information does not make clear what to do if the issue at stake is more a complaint than a personal concern. Neither the information for parents or boarders makes clear how they might contact Ofsted as the external regulatory body. Records are maintained of formal complaints and action taken in response. These records indicate the school addresses any concerns raised promptly and fairly. No complaints have been received by the school since the last inspection relating to boarding welfare and none have been received by Ofsted. Appropriate attention is paid by the school to ensuring the privacy of boarders. With some very minor exceptions toilet and bathroom areas offer good levels of privacy and care is taken by boarding staff to supervise evening and morning routines without unnecessary intrusion. Boarders can have access to a telephone in a private booth to make telephone calls or use their own mobiles at certain times of the day. Information on pupils and their welfare needs is kept confidential and locked away when not in direct use by staff. Staff recruitment procedures are generally sound with all key checks and vetting in place for staff wherever possible. A detailed recruitment policy is in place outlining the expectations around safe recruitment and a central register of required checks on staff is in place, backed up by the school's own checklist system. Particularly good attention is paid to confirming references direct with referees as part of the recruitment process. On some occasions staff are starting work at the school before all required checks are received. While staff in these situations are subject to supervision by established staff, the school is not currently completing the detailed risk assessments that are expected so as to manage these situations as safely as possible. The school is diligent in ensuring other adults with potential contact with pupils have received Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks. This includes, for example, parents assisting with classes, taxi drivers used by the school and governors. Any major works requiring contractor access to boarding areas are scheduled for holiday periods to minimise risks to boarders. There are clear systems in place to manage the entry and identification of official visitors to the school, and both staff and pupils are clear of actions to take if they come across unauthorised adults on the school site. Boarders' accommodation is kept separate and secure from casual intrusion and there are clear locking up procedures in place for duty staff to follow each night. The school has a separate security committee to maintain good oversight of the effectiveness of the school's security measures. The school has an exemplary approach to the management of health and safety matters. This area of practice is overseen by a senior staff member with extensive background experience of

health and safety practice and legislation. Detailed and comprehensive assessments of likely areas of risk are maintained and regularly reviewed. Good procedures are in place to promptly identify any urgent repairs and these are quickly addressed by the school's own maintenance and grounds staff team. The safety of high risk areas such as the swimming pool is well managed and electrical equipment is regularly tested. No obvious areas of risk that the school was unaware of were noted during this inspection. The school has a clear policy on 'out of bounds' areas that is regularly updated and reinforced to pupils, and boarders spoken with were clear on what these were. The school's Health and Safety Committee meets regularly and maintains good oversight of this area of practice.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school offers an excellent level of individual support to boarders. This is provided by the overall pastoral structures operating within the school day and additionally by the direct advice, support and care given by the boarding and nursing staff. Boarders consistently report how well they feel they are looked after and confirm there are ample numbers of people within the school they feel they could go to if they had any worries or concerns. There are good systems in place for staff to share information about any boarders around whom there may be welfare concerns raised. The school has appointed two independent listeners who have been appropriately checked and vetted and boarders are made aware of how they can contact them directly although this information is not currently included in the 'frequently asked questions' guide to boarding. The school has a clearly stated approach to challenging discriminatory practice or attitudes and emphasises to staff and pupils the need to value and respect difference and diversity. Boarders live happily with each other and do not exhibit any inappropriate attitudes to children from different ethnic or cultural backgrounds. An atmosphere of tolerance and inclusion is promoted in the school both generally and within the boarding setting. This is reflected in the positive and supportive attitudes shown by boarders to those pupils whose behaviours or care needs may be out of the ordinary. The school provides good support for pupils with additional learning and language support needs including pupils who are seen as particularly gifted and talented. The school provides an excellent and stimulating range of activities for boarders during week times, and at weekends for termly boarders. Boarders report always having something to do and never being bored, although they have good levels of free time to relax in as well. Activities include a wide range of on-site sporting opportunities, school clubs and societies, simple games and 'camps' in the school's extensive grounds, indoor games and occasional television and DVD watching. Occasional weekend trips out are arranged for termly boarders. There are suitable facilities for study for boarders in the evening and at weekends if needed, and there is no evidence of any inappropriately onerous demands being made outside of school time that might compromise their welfare. The school ensures all play and recreational areas are kept safe and secure. They are subject to regular checking and risk assessment and areas of high risk are suitably supervised by staff. Pupils are fully aware of 'out of bounds' areas and are also expected to display suitable levels of competence before being allowed, for example, to build camps or play on the golf course.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school works hard to ensure the views of boarders are listened to. At a formal level the school has a school council to which issues affecting boarding can be brought by pupils. Boarders'

feedback indicates that they rarely feel the need to use this route as they can raise matters directly with the boarding house staff and get a quick resolution. The boarding environment is relaxed and friendly, and one in which pupils clearly feel they are appropriately listened to. At a day to day level pupils can exercise choices at mealtimes and with regard to activities and, as already noted, boarders are confident they can approach a range of people in the school if they feel any concerns need sorting out. The school also carries out regular surveys of pupils views over a range of key issues, which offers a further opportunity for them to express their views on boarding life. Boarders' contact with home and family is well supported by the school. While this is obviously less of an issue for weekly and casual boarders, all boarding pupils have ready access to a telephone booth that they can use in private. Weekly and termly boarders can also use their own mobile phones at certain times in the evenings, as well as either writing letters or emailing home during the school day. Parents and family are free to phone or visit at all reasonable times. Boarders report they are well supported in their introduction to boarding. They find staff helpful and supportive in the more difficult early stages of boarding and also confirm they get a lot of help from older boarders to get over initial homesickness. A 'frequently asked questions' sheet is being developed by boarding houseparents to inform parents and boarders about boarding expectations and routines, although this does not cover all areas of information that might be of use to new boarders and is currently not in a child-friendly format. The school promotes an excellent quality of relationships between staff and boarders. The atmosphere in boarding is relaxed and boarders clearly feel at ease in their relationships with the staff who care for them. The extended family approach promoted in boarding by the houseparents is much appreciated by boarders and clearly successful in creating a nurturing and caring environment.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school provides boarders with a good standard of accommodation. Boarders' dorm areas are well decorated, suitably heated and ventilated and provide scope for boarders to personalise the areas around their bed spaces. There is adequate provision for storage of clothes and personal possessions. There is adequate space in dorms to accommodate termly, weekly and casual boarders without undue disruption to those who stay longest. Boarding accommodation is suitably separated by age and gender with boys and girls accommodation on separate floors. There is a good standard of toilet and bathroom provision and these areas have been fully refurbished since the last boarding welfare inspection.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has appropriate and up to date documentation and information in place, either in writing or on the school website, covering the ethos and operation of boarding provision. This provides a comprehensive and accurate picture of the way in which boarding is provided and boarders' welfare is promoted. The day to day operation of boarding is very successfully and efficiently managed by the boarding houseparents who receive good support from the head teachers and governing body. The potentially complex mix of termly, weekly and casual boarding is well-organised to ensure that, in particular, the welfare needs of longer-term boarders are not compromised by the comings and goings of less regular boarders. The school is fully aware of the expectations of the National Minimum Standards and works hard to ensure outcomes for boarders are fully in line with the aspirations of the Every Child Matters governmental

framework for services for children. The school has very good systems of monitoring and oversight of all key areas of practice and safety relating to boarders' welfare, either by the head teachers or by identified senior staff members. Appropriate action is taken in relation to any concerns arising from the monitoring undertaken. The school has a well developed structure of responses to foreseeable crises that might impact on boarders' welfare including, for example, a well thought out contingency plan relating to avian flu. The school ensures good levels of staff are on duty to support boarders during evening and weekend periods and to be available overnight. Staff on duty have ready access to additional support from the resident houseparents, and from other staff living on the school site. Boarders feel there are ample staff available to them at all times and are confident of where to find staff during night-time periods. Recent changes in staff responsibilities have led to an increase of demands upon the resident houseparents to fully meet the needs of boarders, however the school has plans in hand to address this issue in the immediate future. Careful attention is paid to ensuring activities and events, both on and off the school site, are satisfactorily supervised by staff. More lengthy trips away from school, or abroad, are subject to a rigorous process of risk assessment. Staff working in boarding are provided with a good induction covering relevant key areas of practice and are well supported by more senior and experienced staff in the ongoing exercise of their duties. Staff have relevant and up to date job descriptions and have a clear understanding of areas of responsibility and decision-making in relation to boarding arrangements. The school provides very good access to key areas of training for staff to enable them to keep boarders safe and to promote their welfare. The school also maintains a detailed and up to date framework of policy and procedure for staff to refer to.

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 that all situations where staff commence work at the school prior to receipt of all required checks are subject to formal recorded risk assessment. (NMS 38)
- make clear in information provided to boarders and their parents how they can contact Ofsted in its role as external regulator of boarding welfare. (NMS 5)
- develop a more child-oriented guide to boarding that covers all key areas of information for new boarders. (NMS 21)

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.