

The Elms

Inspection report for boarding school

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| Inspector | Dawn Taylor |
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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

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| 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 Elms School provides education to day and boarding pupils aged between eight years and thirteen-years-old (not including the Pre-prep classes). The Elms School states, in its prospectus, that their aim is to achieve 'academically outstanding results, though the main emphasis is one of a happy balanced family, based on Christian values within a safe and secure structure. The Elms aims to foster an enthusiasm for life, to develop self-confidence and good manners, to enhance the talents of the individual and generate appreciation of others and our environment'.

Summary

This was an announced inspection undertaken by one Ofsted inspector and a boarding school additional inspector over three days. The inspection looked at the key Boarding School National Minimum Standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups. Outcomes for boarders at The Elms are good. Boarders and staff promote established values and an ethos that promotes a school with a strong sense of community and a holistic child-centred approach. These strengths are not currently reflected in the school's written guidance to staff or in policies and procedures.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Overall the school has made good progress since the last inspection and strengths identified in the last report have been maintained. The school were asked to ensure all key staff maintain their first aid qualification. All relevant staff have now updated their training. The school were also asked to undertake some refurbishment work in line with the school's development plan. The girl's boarding house has now been completed with the appropriate number of toilet and bathroom facilities for the girls accommodated. The boys dormitory areas and the toilet designated to the sick bay have been decorated and hoods have been fitted over the telephones in the boys area to promote privacy.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarder's health and wellbeing is being effectively promoted by staff who work in partnership with parents and medical professionals to identify and meet individual's needs. Good links between educational and boarding staff ensure boarders are provided with appropriate support with sensitive issues. Boarders have access to medical treatment and first aid. A team of matrons are available in the school's sanatorium at all times for the treatment of minor and contagious illnesses. A doctor's surgery is held every week in the sanatorium and there is an established professional link with the local surgery. The school operates a medication policy, developed with the involvement of the school doctor, that specifically addresses the use of non-prescribed medication and boarders self-medicating. Policies and procedures are in place for the safe storage and administration of medication and all medication is stored securely. Consent for medication and first aid is sought from parents and guardians. Boarder's continuing health is promoted because a record is kept of the outcomes of all medical appointments to ensure any ongoing concerns are addressed. Information regarding the health and medical histories of each boarder is gained as part of the school's admission process through proactive contact with families. This ensures individual's needs are identified and receive immediate and appropriate

response when they are taken ill. The separate accommodation for sick pupils is of a good standard and comfortable. Boarders told inspectors 'it is really good here because the matrons look after you really well. There is a sick bay - it is really nice and private. There is a girls room and a boys room. The matrons really help you when you are ill- give you the right medication and let people come in and see you'. Boarders health is further promoted by the school's welfare committee, made up of three school governors, who recently undertook a quality audit of the medical provision and the matrons responsibilities. Their findings and recommendations were fed back to the Headmaster and board of governors. Boarders are receiving good support in relation to health and personal problems and are able to confidently identify staff who they can go to for help and advice. Boarders have access to information and guidance with regard to health and social issues in age-appropriate formats and as part of a leavers programme. Boarders are relaxed and well informed when discussing personal, health and social matters. The school does not operate a personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, however, key aspects of PSHE is addressed as part of the science and religious education curriculum's. It was not possible to establish the content of the subjects covered and, therefore, difficult to assess the consistency and quality of information shared with boarders.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarder's safety is promoted because staff listen and take appropriate actions to ensure their welfare. Policies and procedures are satisfactory and do not reflect the good practice described by staff and boarders to safeguard children. This has been recognised by the school and an external consultant has been employed to review and develop all the school's policies and procedures. Boarders are cared for in a warm and friendly atmosphere. Staff and boarders know that bullying is not tolerated and that staff act on any information that bullying might be taking place. Boarders said 'when you have got something like you are sad, all your friends and teachers help you. When you are upset, there are loads of people to stick up for you. If you can't find your friends you can talk to teachers, prefects or older leavers because they are all really nice to you'. Boarder's welfare is safeguarded because staff receive in-house training in child protection presented by the designated child protection officer. The designated child protection officer attends regular external training to maintain her knowledge of national and local child protection procedures. Boarders confirm that they feel staff give a high priority to keeping them safe. The chair of the board of governors has not undertaken relevant child protection training to update his knowledge and ensure he is able to monitor that the school is taking appropriate action to safeguard children. Boarder's privacy and confidentiality is respected because their concerns are listened to. The girls are pleased with their new boarding house, which has created an environment that avoids unnecessary intrusion on their privacy. The boys described work that had been undertaken to fit hoods over the telephones and a change in the colour of the shower curtains that promotes more privacy. The boys felt that work still needed to be undertaken to further promote privacy when they are using the phone and in the shower area. Boarders are encouraged to develop appropriate behaviour and respect for others through the minimal use of punishments and an ethos, which celebrates achievement and community support. Positive behaviour is actively rewarded and inappropriate behaviour is addressed in a very fair and measured way. Boarders consider the school is good at caring, encouraging and communicating. An established behaviour management structure and opportunities for the boarders to be guided to learn good social skills are having the positive effect of creating a harmonious environment in the school. Staff are focused on recognising and rewarding good work, and prizes are given to boarders who have displayed exceptional effort or outstanding

achievement. Boarders said 'it is nice to get silver and gold cards they help you get more points for your house. They give you gold cards in a really nice way. They give you them in assembly and they make you walk up to get them'. Parents' and boarders' complaints and concerns are proactively addressed by staff and the Headmaster. Boarders state that the school responds quickly to any concerns raised by them and that they are proactively supported to raise any concerns or issue that they have. Boarders are able to access a range of information about external people and agencies with whom they are able to discuss concerns because the school is proactive in distributing this information. Boarder's welfare is further promoted through established prefect systems with clear guidance and regular oversight from boarding staff and the Headmaster. Prefects are provided with an induction, which includes appropriate training in relation to child protection and welfare matters. Younger boarders are very confident about the prefects in the school and boarding houses and readily named them as someone they would go to if they had a worry or concern. Boarders expressed confidence in the safety and security of the school. Boarders learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they regularly practise the emergency escape drill. Safe procedures are in place to protect boarders through tests on fire systems and other electrical equipment at appropriate intervals. Environmental risk assessments are in place to ensure the school is fully informed about potential hazards to reduce risks. An external company has undertaken a whole school fire risk assessment and the school is currently working to complete the resulting action plan by September 2008. Staff recruitment files contain evidence of recruitment checks that have taken place prior to staff being employed. This includes an appropriate enhanced criminal record bureau check. Where 'gap' students had been recruited not every element of the recruitment checking system had been undertaken. There were no interview notes on file or 'certificates of good conduct' (or equivalent from relevant authorities of the student's home country where such facilities are available). The school has risk assessments for all aspects of the premises, grounds, boarder's behaviour and activities, both on and off site. Particular efforts are taken to ensure that all areas used by the boarders are free from avoidable safety hazards.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Individual support to boarders is given priority by The Elms School and staff are focused on boarder's success, needs and achievements. Boarders are extremely secure and quietly confident members of the school community. Staff work in a very encouraging and supportive manner through formal structures such as tutor systems and informal routes such as chats over hot drinks in the boarding houses. Boarders speak warmly of the care and guidance they receive, and refer to an environment of mutual trust, respect and friendship - 'if someone has a problem we don't laugh at them we just help them'. They express confidence that any problems or issues, which might arise would be dealt with sensitively and constructively. In addition, boarders have ready access to people, including the school's chaplain and doctor, who are not boarding or teaching staff. The Elms School's ethos is based on Christian values, and Chapel retains its place at the heart of school life. The school provides an environment where the value of quality and diversity is understood and promoted. The environment represents the individual and diverse identities of boarders and this uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and understanding.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are encouraged to contribute to the running of the school because their views and opinions are valued, which results in social cohesion and strong school identity. The school's systems gain boarders' views about matters affecting their daily lives and the general running of the school. The Headmaster has weekly meetings with prefects and the Housemistress has regular suppers with the dorm prefects. Boarders stated 'we can talk about matters in form meetings and matrons will often ask our opinions'. This helps boarders to feel ownership of the setting and to be part of school community life. Boarders have a team of house staff and a personal tutor who oversee and co-ordinate their care and education. All staff actively address any difficulties that boarders may have. Systems of listening to and obtaining the views of boarders are fully integrated into the running of the school and involve boarders in any developments or changes to school or boarding life. Examples of where boarders' views influence significant developments include the introduction of cooled drinking water fountains around the school site and the refurbishment of the boarding houses. Boarders benefit from the opportunity to maintain regular private contact with their parents, families and friends. The staff demonstrates a positive attitude to working in partnership with families and promoting parental contact. Boarders are supported to have appropriate private contact with friends and family and to write home every week.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Boarding at The Elms School is promoted and developed by a dedicated management and staff team. Policies, procedures and staff guidance are satisfactory and do not reflect the good practice described by staff and boarders. This has been recognised by the school and an external consultant has been employed to review and develop all the school's policies and procedures by September 2008. The Elms School has a Statement of Boarding Practice and Principles, which is clear and concise. Boarders' care and educational experience is underpinned by the school's coherent philosophy and values. There is a newly established governors monitoring and reporting structure in place that ensures the senior management team and school governors are informed of standards in the boarding houses. The monitoring and reporting of health and safety within the school is not capturing all key issues such as the whole school fire risk assessment, to ensure that boarders are cared for in a consistent and safe manner. The Elms School has substantial strengths and a sustained record of delivering good performance and managing improvement. Staff and boarders at all levels are given opportunities in forums such as meetings to help with the school's organisation and development. The senior management team provide effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as the complaints, child protection and discipline logs. Managers meet regularly to monitor the school's functioning and they maintain an overview of all risk assessments, incidents, complaints and records of sanctions and discipline. Members of the senior management team and the Headmaster visit boarding houses in the evenings on a regular basis to monitor practice and talk to boarders. Boarders are kept safe and provided with good care as they have sufficient numbers of staff to look after them. Boarders are making good progress because staffing in the school is well organised and very effectively managed. Systems are in place for the regular review of staff performance and resulting internal and external staff training, however, these do not capture all staff with boarding duties.

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 personal, social and health education is planned, monitored and evaluated and provides age appropriate information to all boarders NMS 6.2
- ensure the chair of governors undertakes relevant child protection training NMS 3.3
- ensure work continues to promote and develop personal privacy for boys using the telephones in the boarding house and in the boys shower area NMS 37.1
- ensure the appointment of 'gap' student staff includes every element of the recruitment checking system that is possible (even if the student concerned is already known to the school or to a trusted school abroad or is recruited through an agency) NMS 38.4 and NMS 38.5
- ensure work is undertaken in line with the whole school fire risk assessment action plan NMS 26.1
- ensure there is an appropriate process for the regular review of the performance of each member of staff with boarding duties by a more senior or experienced member of staff NMS 34.5
- ensures opportunities are provided for training and up dating in boarding practice for all staff, including new and experienced staff, commensurate with the roles, experience and rate of turnover of staff, and any changes or planned changes or developments in boarding at the school NMS 34.7
- ensure the school's governing body has a system to monitor health and safety and welfare provision NMS 8.2.

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.