

Culford School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Dorrit Andrews
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Date of last inspection	16 January 2007

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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

Culford School traces its origins back to 1881 and has occupied its present site in the 480 acres of Culford Park since 1935, becoming co-educational in 1972. The school is one of a group of independent schools established by the Methodist Church and is overseen by the Methodist Board of Management who is represented on the school's governing body.

The school welcomes pupils of all faiths and denominations into its 'Christian family community'. Boarding pupils currently range from seven to 17 years of age, 115 of whom are boys and 82 are girls. Boarding accommodation is provided in one co-educational junior House and three senior Houses – two for boys and one for girls.

A substantial programme of refurbishment of the boarding accommodation is underway together with the near completion of an indoor tennis centre and new music school.

Summary

This was an announced parallel key inspection with the Independent Schools Inspectorate and all key standards were inspected. The school meets all key National Minimum Standards and exceeds a number of them. Outcome areas for Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution and Organisation are all judged as outstanding. The remaining outcome area, Economic Wellbeing, is judged as good.

Boarders are provided with a high level of care and outstanding pastoral support from a range of initiatives. Their views are actively sought through a wide range of forums and their ideas and suggestions contribute to decision making within the school community. The health needs of boarders are responded to well by qualified health staff based at the school's 24 hour medical centre. Positive behaviour is promoted as is contribution to the wider community and support for one another.

Safety and security matters are taken seriously by the school and robust procedures are in place for the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils, staff and visitors. Boarding accommodation is being upgraded through a substantial refurbishment programme and in consultation with boarders.

The leadership and management of boarding is very strong and contributes highly to the overall outcomes for pupils. Staff have access to good systems of support, guidance and training opportunities to assist them in safeguarding the welfare of boarders.

All recommendations from the previous report have been addressed.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last inspection asked the school to clarify the provision of fresh fruit and drinking water in the boarding houses and to utilise its Food Committee to review menus. A daily supply of fresh fruit is available together with ready access to drinking water and snack making facilities.

The profile of the Food Committee has strengthened and pupils have an active voice in contributing to menus.

The school was also asked to fit keypad locks to boarding house entrances and to review the recruitment processes for peripatetic staff. These matters have been attended to. The action taken in response to these recommendations support the safeguarding of pupils' welfare.

The establishment of regular house meetings and the development of a training programme for matrons were also recommended. These matters have also been addressed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The health care of boarders is positively promoted and they receive health care as necessary. The school's medical centre provides 24 hour cover and support from well-qualified staff. Regular visits are made by the school's medical officer who liaises with other health professionals when required. The school holds a medical history of each pupil and obtains parental consent to medical treatment and first aid at the point of admission. Access to optical and dental services is also arranged as required and pupils have access to both male and female doctors.

Medical centre staff participate in regular training and study days to update their knowledge and to support their role. They also monitor the administration of medication within boarding houses, support the enrichment programme for sixth formers and provide first aid training for the school's Cub Scout section. Health care plans for the management of specific medical needs are compiled with pupils and are regularly reviewed. Effective systems are in place for the safe storage and administering of medication, including those held by boarders. Records are maintained of accidents, treatments and significant illnesses and medical centre staff are fully conversant with handling confidential information. Additional qualified first aid staff are always available on duty and house staff receive medication and first aid training.

Personal, social and health education primarily takes place within the teaching environment of the school. Additional support and advice is available from visiting speakers, the school's doctor, house staff and medical centre staff who also maintain a comprehensive range of literature suitable for young people.

Boarders are provided with a balanced, healthy diet, and good opportunities for exercise and relaxation. Special diets and a range of cultural backgrounds are catered for. Boarders also have access to fresh fruit, drinking water and snacks in their boarding houses and may also bring in their own provisions.

Meal times are well organised, social events and sufficient time is allowed for boarders to finish their meals properly. The school's food committee has a high profile across the school and is actively involved in tasting new dishes and contributing to menus. All pupils are able to communicate suggestions through school and house meetings as well as direct to the food committee.

There are no outstanding recommendations from the environmental health service and all catering staff receive appropriate training for their role.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Clearly written policies and procedures are in place to promote and safeguard the welfare of boarders and staff are very aware of their responsibilities towards the children in their care. Pupils have a clear understanding of what they should do if someone is making them unhappy. Bullying is not tolerated and is not identified as a problem at the school. Pupils holding positions of responsibility receive guidance on how to refer matters to staff in the event of any concerns coming to their attention. All staff receive child protection training and regular updates and there is a good working partnership with the local safeguarding children's board. Positive behaviour is promoted and standards of behaviour are high. Many pupils remarked on the giving of warnings and staff discussing issues with them initially. A system of rewards is in place and many pupils consider discipline to be fair. The limited role of prefects is clear and many boarders view prefects as being supportive. The school's complaint procedure is made available to parents and pupils. The raising of concerns is encouraged at an early stage. No parent or boarder has contacted Ofsted regarding any concerns.

Regular fire drills take place at different times and boarders are familiar with fire evacuation procedures. A fire risk assessment is in place and is regularly reviewed in response to the ongoing refurbishment programme. Fire fighting equipment is regularly serviced and tested together with emergency lighting and fire alarm systems. Fire safety training is provided for staff and professional advice is sought regarding health and safety issues. Clear expectations are placed on pupils to sign in and out of boarding accommodation.

House staff and matrons are clear on the privacy needs of boarders and, for example, knock on doors and wait for a reply before entering. Supervision of boarders during rising and bedtime routines is conducted sensitively.

Robust procedures are in place for the recruitment and checking of all staff. In addition, a number of senior staff have completed safer recruitment training.

Significant emphasis is placed on security matters. A record is maintained of visitors to the school and proof of identification is requested where appropriate. Wherever possible, maintenance staff carry out work in the boarding houses during school hours or when boarders are not present. The public use of the school's sports hall does not establish substantial unsupervised access to pupils. Usage by local schools and members of the public is formally managed and monitored by the manager and staff of the sports hall. All staff are aware of what to do should they encounter a stranger on site and regular reminders are given to pupils. Each of these measures contribute to the safety of pupils.

Boarders' sleeping areas are for their exclusive use. The communal areas of the boarding houses are for boarders and other pupils designated to share these facilities. Discussions with boarders evidenced that they feel safe in their boarding houses.

Health and safety matters are taken seriously by the school and robust procedures are in place for the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils, staff and visitors. Safety glass has been fitted and window restrictors installed where a significant risk has been identified. Risk assessments are in place for the premises, grounds and activities both on and off site. Boarders

confirm that they are aware of health and safety matters affecting them, such as out of bounds areas.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are provided with an outstanding level of pastoral care across the school community and identify a wide range of staff to whom they feel they can go with any worries or concerns. The list includes the Head of both the Senior and Prep schools, house staff, tutors, medical centre staff and the school's Chaplain. External counselling support is also available. In addition, a range of peer support systems, monitored by staff, is in place including mentors, buddies, prefects and sixth formers which all contribute to supporting, guiding and 'looking out for' others. A good representation of ages, gender and pupils from different cultural backgrounds are appointed to these positions and fellow pupils report that these individuals are accessible and approachable.

Significant changes in boarders' personal circumstances such as family illness and bereavement are dealt with sensitively. Formal tutorial sessions take place regularly and play a key role in monitoring individual progress. However, pupils are also encouraged to take any worries or problems to a member of staff of their choosing. Opportunities are also provided by house staff, the school Chaplain and Headmasters to meet informally with small groups of pupils often over a meal or hot chocolate. House staff also provide 'circle time' if there is an issue of conflict to be resolved and younger boarders are able to 'post' concerns anonymously into a message box for house staff to deal with.

There are sound relationships between staff and boarders and interactions between staff and boarders were seen to be genuinely warm and supportive. The boarding houses have a family atmosphere which is maintained by dedicated staff.

The school positively promotes the integration of all pupils and acknowledges their individuality. Systems are in place to support and assist children who have specific cultural needs. The school has a sustained track record of high performance in enabling pupils to develop personally and socially. Comments received by parents also support this.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils are actively encouraged and supported to express their views and be involved in decision making. An extensive range of formal and informal opportunities are available. These include house councils, school council, food committee, house meetings and various other school committees. Changes made as result of listening to pupils include menus, the choice of activities and trips, school uniform and sports kit. Consultation has, and continues to take place, in relation to the refurbishment of boarding accommodation. Pupils report that council and committee meetings work in practice and that feedback is received regarding suggestions and ideas put forward. Individuals also feel comfortable in proposing ideas direct to members of the senior management team.

Boarders are able to maintain private contact with their families and friends. Payphones are available for pupils' use although the majority have their own mobile phone. Office telephones are also made available when necessary, particularly for pupils from overseas and when parents

are working abroad. Appropriate helpline and outside contact telephone numbers are displayed on notice boards and in written information provided to pupils. Many pupils use email as a means of maintaining contact with family and friends. Appropriate safeguards are in place to protect pupils when they are using the internet and these have been shared with parents and pupils. Parents are welcome to visit their child at school and are encouraged to attend sports matches, school concerts and other events. Staff contact parents about their child's progress and any concerns. In turn, parents are also encouraged to contact the school.

New boarders are introduced to the school's procedures and operation, and are enabled to settle in. Written information is provided to new boarders and their parents; pupils also engage in a programme of induction supported by a mentor or buddy. The length of induction varies for some pupil groups, particularly in relation to pupils from overseas and for sixth formers. The process of induction is regularly reviewed to assess what works well. Boarders are positive in their comments about their experience of induction.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Secure, lockable storage is provided for boarders' personal possessions and valuables. Younger boarders may also hand valuable items and pocket money to staff for safe-keeping. There is a very low level report of items going missing.

There is a substantial rolling programme of refurbishment and upgrading underway. Residents of refurbished houses are very proud and pleased with the finished results. Boarders are involved in discussions about décor and how to spend allocated house budgets to the benefit of everyone.

Accommodation is clean, appropriately lit, ventilated and heated. Personalisation of bedrooms and dormitories is encouraged by house staff. The compilation of boarders sharing rooms is regularly discussed and boarders are given opportunities to indicate whom they would like to share with. Younger pupils in particular enjoy sleeping in their dormitories and refer to their experiences as being 'one big sleepover'. A high number of boarders choose to board as they find it an enjoyable, fun and caring experience.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The leadership and management of boarding is very strong and contributes highly to the overall outcomes for pupils. There is a clear vision of the purpose and benefits of boarding and a strong commitment to continuing to improve the boarding provision.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school positively promotes the integration of all pupils and acknowledges their individuality. Systems are in place through a range of regular senior and pastoral meetings, monitoring programmes and pupil led committees to raise and discuss day to day matters affecting pupils. The school's senior management team identify areas for development, are reflective in their practice and are open to new ideas.

Comprehensive documentation regarding the school's boarding principles and practice and relevant policies are made available to appropriate parties. Detailed House Handbooks are also provided and are regularly updated.

Boarders are appropriately separated by age and gender with no major discrepancies being reported in the quality of boarding practices for boys and girls. A small number of boarders highlight some differences in physical provision between Houses but also acknowledge the work completed already and the work currently underway to improve facilities.

Systems are in place for the effective monitoring of records by the Headmaster, designated members of the senior management team and medical centre staff.

Boarders are adequately supervised by staff and are aware of who is on duty and who is responsible for them at specific times. Boarders also have knowledge of where staff sleep at night and they feel able to call upon staff if necessary. A house duty rota is followed in practice and suitable arrangements are in place for covering duties at times of staff sickness and absence. There is a high number of resident staff who can be called upon for support by duty staff.

House staff are experienced and clear in their role and have access to good systems of support, guidance and training opportunities to assist them in safeguarding the welfare of boarders. Regular meetings take place involving House staff and Matrons to discuss the pastoral care of pupils and boarding practice. Systems are in operation for the annual appraisal of staff. Job descriptions are in place and staff are know who they are accountable 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):