

Thomas Adams School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Carole Moore
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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

Adams House is a co-educational boarding house for students between the ages of 11 - 19. There is the capacity for 65 boarders. A pupil living at Adams House is treated as a member of the family. The school regard this as an essential part of their approach and know it is a successful one. Pupils from all over the world have lived at Adams House and have been happy, safe, secure and very successful.

Adams House is not an ordinary boarding house - it is an educational establishment in its own right. It aims to provide complete education with Thomas Adams School and College. This means that students are provided with professional and caring help outside school hours from the tutors who come to Adams House during the week. These are in addition to the house staff. The tutors, who are all teachers at Thomas Adams School, assist boarders with their studies and provide any additional help they may need.

Summary

This was an announced full inspection to assess Adams House against the key national minimum standards for boarding schools. The school meets all and exceeds a number of the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

The overall outcome judgement is good with some outstanding features in individual outcome areas. The outcome areas for enjoying and achieving and making a positive contribution are judged as outstanding. The outcome areas for being healthy, staying safe and organisation are judged as good. The outcome area for economic wellbeing is judged as satisfactory. Three recommendations have been set.

The school values boarding and invests in the development of a unique approach which puts the young person's experience both now and for their future life, at its heart. Leadership and management of the school are strong, imaginative and effective. Boarders benefit from good communication between boarding and educational staff and there are effective links between the school and home over matters such as welfare, health and educational issues. This high quality pastoral care supports the individual needs of young people.

Adams House continues to develop boarding practice and to maintain its facilities to ensure the needs of all boarders are met and their welfare is promoted at all times.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were six recommendations made following the last inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The school has responded positively to these. Those relating to privacy, child protection training, recruitment, fire drills and medication have all been met.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Personal, social and health education is delivered formally through the school curriculum and throughout the boarding experience. Pupils are educated about personal hygiene, physical activity and healthy eating. The health and emotional well-being of boarders are managed well by boarding staff and teaching staff, supported by sound policies and procedures.

The Head of Care and boarding staff provide good quality medical treatment and first aid ensuring minor ailments of young people are treated sensitively. Adams House has well established links with the local medical practice ensuring that any serious concerns can be addressed quickly and effectively. Information regarding health needs and medical histories for each boarder is obtained as a component of the admission process and updated through ongoing liaison with parents. Staff are well aware of young peoples' health needs and how these may affect their ability and learning. Welfare plans are put in place to address any additional needs. The school's medical consent forms include information required for emergency first aid treatment both in the school and during school trips.

Effective policies and procedures are in place for the secure storage and controlled administration of all medication. All boarding staff have been trained in the safe administration of medication. Boarders becoming ill can be cared for in school and receive day and night time supervision from boarding staff. Boarders express a high degree of satisfaction with the emotional support and health care they receive at school from all members of the team.

Catering staff who are responsible for the preparation and provision of the school meals have a good understanding of young peoples' dietary needs. They provide balanced nutritious meals and they have all received the appropriate food hygiene training. School mealtimes confirm that the young people have a healthy appetite and general appreciation of their meals. The catering team try to provide a varied and nutritious menu and culturally different foods are sometimes on the menu. Boarders report that there is plenty of choice but it still remains a big talking point and boarders and their parents have more suggestions on how they feel it could be further improved. There is a range of options from hot meals to a salad bar to jacket potatoes. Fruit is available after school and snacks are enjoyed. There are opportunities for boarders to contribute suggestions of their own through the food book that is kept in the dining room, as well as putting views forward to the food committee.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Procedures to guard against bullying are effective and clear guidelines are given to staff and boarders. The guide to the boarding house places the emphasis on treating others as you would wish to be treated and to respect the rights and property of others. Boarders report that they do not feel bullying is an issue and on the occasion when there is an incident, it is dealt with appropriately by staff. A boarder reported: 'House parents look out for you'.

Staff have a good awareness of safeguarding issues and this has been supported by training delivered to all staff including domestic and catering staff. The school has a recently updated policy on child protection and clear procedures for staff to follow if they should have concerns. The policy is available on the school website for parents to view. The designated child protection officers attend external training to maintain their knowledge of national and local safeguarding procedures and ensure that the school's safeguarding policy reflects local practice. Prefects also receive safeguarding awareness training. Appropriate procedures are in place should young

people go missing from the school. Boarders confirm that they feel staff give a high priority to keeping them safe.

Policies relating to the school's expectations for good conduct and the management of everyday behaviour are made explicit to all boarders and their parents prior to and on enrolment at the school. These behavioural expectations are extremely effective and boarders report that they consider them to be fair. The majority of boarders impose high standards of conduct upon themselves which in turn reflects positively on their school house. This confirms the success of the overall school ethos in maintaining good traditional values. The standard of young people's behaviour is very high, negating the need for the use of all but minor sanctions and absence of the need for any physical restraint.

The handbook for boarders and their parents provides details of the complaints procedure. Boarders are encouraged to talk to any member of staff with any concern or complaint they may have. They have ample opportunity to discuss any areas of unhappiness with the boarding staff and there are suggestion boxes held in Adams House as another way to address a concern. Good relationships amongst parents, boarders and the school assist with issues being resolved at an informal stage. Boarders now have access to an independent listener and have access to telephones where helpline numbers are displayed. However the complaints procedures and helpline numbers do not identify Ofsted as another avenue of complaint. House tutors are proactive in keeping boarders safe, happy and occupied while always addressing any concerns young people may share with them.

Health and safety matters are given high regard across the school. Staff and boarders are aware of the fire safety procedures and have experienced evacuating from the boarding areas. Equipment is regularly checked, a fire risk assessment is in place and all boilers and systems are checked appropriately. The school site is well maintained with mostly prompt responses to reports of any maintenance issues. Risk assessments for activities, the school environment and off site trips are in place. However, there is no clear evidence that risk assessments have been regularly reviewed and some do not consider all the risks involved. Boarders are advised of safety issues such as areas out of bounds, the fire procedures, security of the buildings and testing of their own electrical equipment. Boarders have commented: 'I feel very safe here.'

Boarders confirm that the staff looking after them respect their needs for privacy while being responsible and attentive to their supervision, welfare and safety. The boarding accommodation provides a family type atmosphere where boarders are provided with some individual space, that is their own and respected by peers. Boarders say that they do not feel intruded upon by staff. They identify that the school has areas within the house and school grounds where they can have quiet time, although for the majority of the time they enjoy being kept occupied and active.

The school has taken extra measures to ensure that boarders' accommodation is kept secure, reserved for their own use and is unable to be accessed by strangers or uninvited visitors to the school site. Extra security measures at the end of the school day further ensure the integrity of the building and the safety of boarders. Boarders confirm that they feel safe at night because of the measures being taken and coupled with the reassuring care provided by the boarding house staff.

The school carries out comprehensive recruitment of staff with robust vetting procedures to ensure staff are suitable to work with boarders. All staff have clearance through the criminal records bureau and references are received and verified before employment commences. There are effective systems to safely manage the presence of visitors to the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

All boarders are encouraged to develop interests in a wide range of sports, activities and interests. With staff support and guidance boarders are encouraged to achieve educationally, recreationally and socially.

At Adams House there is wide range of activities to occupy boarders' free time while on site, such as using the gym, practising with their musical instruments or chilling out with friends. Weekend recreational visits are regularly organised, risk assessed and always popular. Boarders confirm the commitment shown to them by all of their house staff and their Head of Care.

The pastoral care given to boarders is a strong feature of the school. Staff and young people describe 'a family environment' and this is created through the pastoral structure. The house parents provide consistent care to boarders, supported this term by two overseas gap students with added support from the teaching staff. This is all overseen by the school house liaison tutor, who bridges the gap between teaching and boarding. Many parents support this statement with comments such as, 'the pastoral care is excellent', 'second to none', 'a very happy place to be'.

The good behaviour of boarders and low level of incidents are indicative of happy boarders who feel secure in their surroundings. Teaching staff build up positive relationships with the boarders and the headteacher is visible around the school. Boarders are very clear there are a range of staff they go to for personal support and freely initiate interaction. There is also an independent listener, whose contact details are published throughout the boarding houses.

Adams House has an approach that values the diverse needs of its boarders. Boarders are considerate of others and develop an understanding and sympathetic appreciation of those of different backgrounds and cultures. This approach is reflected in the school's behaviour and equal opportunities policies. Boarders are helped to widen their international horizons and understand different cultures. Boarders can receive support with their learning where required, particularly when English is not their first language and the school ensures that all young people have the chance to develop their individual strengths and abilities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarder's contribution to the running of the school and boarding houses is outstanding. There is an excellent range of channels through which boarders can express their views and feelings. These include the school council, college council, 6th form academic forum chaired by a year 13 boarder, food committee, prefects meetings, boarding committee and suggestion boxes. Boarders understand the purpose of these meetings and value initiatives introduced as a result of them.

The school has a creative approach to canvassing the views and opinions of parents, boarders and staff. Questionnaires have recently been introduced to enable the school to obtain feedback from both boarders and parents.

Boarders effectively use their team of house staff, who oversee and coordinate their care and education, in loco parentis. The house parent and their spouse play a key role, guiding the spiritual and moral development of each boarder, whilst promoting strength, confidence and respect for others.

A key strength is the introduction and induction of new boarders to Adams House. They are introduced to boarding life sensitively by being well supported by staff and their peers. They have assigned buddies to help them settle in to school and boarding routines through the first half term. The Head of Care and boarding tutors are sensitive to the likelihood of home sickness during this period and have developed supportive strategies to support young people and parents. Boarders new to the school confirm how easy it was for them to integrate into the school because of the welcoming and nurturing role of boarding house staff and their classmates.

Extensive links with boarder's parents and families are an intrinsic part of the support and development of boarders. From the initial contact with Adams House, parents remain very well informed and the school works in partnership to achieve the best outcomes for their child. Adams House values and includes boarder's families and promotes parental contact by phone calls and emails. Boarders are encouraged to take an interest in the outside world and have daily access to newspapers, telephones and the internet. In addition boarders are encouraged to participate in the local community and fund raising for charities. The boarding house has appropriate wireless facilities, with stringent procedures in place to ensure safe internet use.

Another outstanding feature for boarders is their relationship with staff and peers. All relationships are based on mutual respect and considerate, thoughtful behaviour towards others. Boarders enjoy their boarding experience stating 'boarding is fun, 'I have lots of friends', 'the staff are great and really care'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The school's overall standard of accommodation for its boarders is satisfactory. There are four houses, two for girls and two for boys. The accommodation is overall comfortable, heated and lit appropriately and boarders can decorate their rooms to reflect their own interests and tastes.

The boy's accommodation is split in two parts and the nature and age of the building mean creating a homely atmosphere is more of a challenge. However, the progress made so far has been valued by most of the boys who feel relaxed, comfortable and at home. Sleeping accommodation varies in size from large rooms to very small rooms particularly in the boy's houses. Whilst the accommodation is unique and some boarders like this, there are definite challenges for the school in ensuring some boy's sleeping accommodation ensures they have adequate head room and sufficient space around them.

The furnishing and décor in the girl's houses create a child friendly family atmosphere easier to achieve in the larger house. The school has a development plan to ensure all boarding houses continue to be improved to a reasonable standard, in particular the boys' bedrooms. This work

demonstrates the commitment by the school to raising standards and promoting boarding. All accommodation is maintained to a reasonable standard by a team of support staff. These are employed by the school and are very loyal and knowledgeable in any situation.

There are a range of facilities on the school site to which the boarders have access in the evenings and weekends; these include a sport gymnasium, musical facilities and an information communication technology centre, study and library. The grounds that surround the school are well-maintained and provide a safe environment for boarders.

There are appropriate arrangements in place for boarders to keep their personal possessions safe and their money and valuables are looked after by the Adams House secretary who keeps clear written records of their accounts.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The management and organisation of the schools' welfare and boarding provision are good. The values and ethos of the school are clearly set out for parents and boarders in the boarding guide. This is underpinned by clear staff policies and procedures that enhance professional staff practice. Additional information is available on the school website.

The school has a sustained track record with delivering good outcomes for boarders and this is evidenced in discussions with parents. The collective leadership of Adams House is highly accomplished. The headteacher and the Head of Care have a sharp focus to the welfare of boarders which is always high on the agenda. Boarding is successfully integrated with the whole school life.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Boarders with differing needs are supported with their learning, medical, physical and social needs. They are helped and supported to be able to feel safe, well, belong, enjoy, contribute and achieve in boarding life. Awareness of the wider world is promoted as there is a diverse group of boarders who have a wealth of knowledge and information to share. Boarders have access to staff of both genders.

The dedicated boarding staff are accessible, committed, trained and very enthusiastic about their work. Boarders benefit because it produces an open and trusting ethos. Boarders say they feel able to approach any member of staff and are confident in the knowledge that they are treated and respected as an individual.

The school has in place a training programme with regular refresher training for mandatory courses and also additional boarding training to build upon staff portfolio expertise. There is a well-established programme of appraisal which is linked to staff development training and performance.

The senior management team provides effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as the complaints, child protection and discipline logs. Consultation and regular communication with staff and parents ensure proper scrutiny and advancement of all aspects of the boarders' care. Any shortfalls in these areas are identified and addressed very quickly. This quality monitoring and other similar initiatives contribute to reports to the governing body and the school's overall strategic plan and implementation.

All boarding staff are provided with up-to-date written guidance on the school's boarding policies and practice, which includes the staff code of conduct.

Boarders respond well to the structure and enjoy their boarding experience at Thomas Adams School. There are good levels of supervision, staffing is sufficient in number for the boarders' needs and boarders know where to locate an adult during the night if required.

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 boarders and their parents are informed by the school of how they can contact Ofsted regarding any complaint concerning their welfare (National Minimum Standard 5.4)
- ensure the school has an effective system of risk assessment, specifically reviewing and updating risk assessments and considering all aspects of risks (National Minimum Standards 47.9)
- ensure beds have adequate space around them for boarders to change comfortably and sufficient head room above them. (National Minimum Standards 42.6)