

The Downs, Malvern College Prep

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

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 Downs, Malvern College Preparatory School opened on 1st September 2008 as a result of a planned merger between two well respected boarding schools. The new school is an independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged from two and a half to thirteen years. Situated in extensive grounds in the Malvern Hills, The Downs, Malvern College Prep continues to value its surroundings along with traditions inherited from both schools, but has also taken the opportunity to move with the times, striving to exceed the confines of the national curriculum in academic, as well as in cultural, sporting and social accomplishments.

Boarding is flexible with the option for a one night experience, weekly or full-time care. Boarders are in the care of resident house parents and a team of highly qualified matrons in a newly refurbished boarding house.

Summary

This was an announced joint inspection with the Independent Schools Inspectorate. It was undertaken by one Ofsted inspector over three days. The inspection looked at the key Boarding School National Minimum Standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall outcome judgement for The Downs, Malvern College Prep School is good. The outcome judgements in being healthy, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution and economic wellbeing are outstanding and the outcome judgements in staying safe and organisation are good.

Boarders' health and pastoral care is being well promoted by a dedicated team of professional staff who are continually striving to develop the boarding experience.

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 no recommendations made in the last report.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health and wellbeing needs are being proactively and effectively promoted through professional and comprehensive services.

Boarders' have access to high quality medical treatment and first aid. Medical care is provided 24 hours a day by a team of matrons, supported regularly by the school doctor and his local practice. Matrons are an integral part of the boarding staff team. They are resident in the boarding house and available to boarders and staff at all times.

The school operates a highly developed medication policy, procedure and practice guidance that specifically addresses the use of non-prescribed medication and the safe storage and administration of medication. These policies and procedures are regularly reviewed by the school's doctor who stated 'apart from seeing to the medical problems of the boarders and

performing medicals, I have also overseen matron's record keeping, day book, storage and dispensing of drugs and individual pupils medications. I am very satisfied with all the administrative issues and protocols that she has written and consider The Downs, Malvern College Prep to be very well run with this respect'. The quality assurance of professionals' external to the school is seen as vital and invaluable by the matrons' and Headmaster and demonstrates the school's commitment to raising standards.

Boarders' health and welfare is further promoted by detailed records 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. There are effective systems for communicating appropriate information to other staff across school, including catering staff. Boarders' with specific health care needs have clear care plans, agreed with parents and the child's doctor.

The medical centre has been recently refurbished to a very high standard. It is situated in the heart of the boarding house and provides young children with a comfortable, welcoming space to chat with matrons about any matters. One boarder stated 'I can speak to matrons at any time of day or night. We can phone matrons on the boarding house phone. There is a sick wing for boys and one for girls and we can see the doctor who comes into school'.

Boarders' have access to information and guidance with regard to health and social issues in age appropriate formats. These areas are addressed comprehensively through the school's curriculum, assemblies and the 'year 8 leavers' experience'. Matrons' are involved in running school sessions that promote healthy life styles. The timing and content of these sessions are fed back to the team of boarding staff so discussions and exploration can continue in the boarding house. Boarders' are relaxed and well informed when discussing personal, health and social matters. Chat times are viewed as very positive by the boarders' and are creatively used to raise health matters in the boarding house.

Boarders' religious and health related dietary needs are met by a team of catering staff responsible for the provision and preparation of meals. These staff have a comprehensive understanding of what makes up a good balanced diet and have comprehensive on going training about nutrition to enable them put this into effective practice. Environmental Health visited the school on 28th January 2009 and the school was upgraded from a 4 star to a 5 star award. Menu planning is adventurous, integrates culturally appropriate food and encourages boarders' to try new dishes. Boarders' and staff talk enthusiastically about themed food days including Russian and Chinese Days when the kitchen staff dressed according to the theme to serve children a range of foods from each country.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders' welfare is promoted because the school provides a safe environment in which boarders' can flourish, and staff promote an ethos that encourages and supports an atmosphere of mutual respect and understanding.

Child protection procedures, anti bullying protocols and complaint procedures are known to staff, parents and children and are up-dated and revisited regularly. Bullying is taken seriously

by the school and all reported incidents are recorded and appropriate action taken. Parents are encouraged to support the work of the school and boarders are regularly reminded of their responsibilities for the happiness of those around them. Staff receive regular formal and informal training and proactively look for and address worries about children in their care.

Boarders' welfare is safeguarded because staff receive regular in-house training in child protection and demonstrate excellent knowledge of policies and procedures. The designated safeguarding officer and key staff attend external training to maintain their knowledge of national and local child protection procedures and ensure that the school's child protection policy reflects local practice. Staff have responded in a very professional and knowledgeable way to any concerns about a boarder's safety. Boarders confirm that they feel staff give a high priority to keeping them safe. Regular reporting of each child's progress is made between school, boarding house and home, and any matters of concern are raised at the earliest opportunity. There is a governor who takes a lead on safeguarding.

Boarders state that they are listened to and supported to behave well. 'Golds and reds' in the boarding house are designed to complement the day school system of 'stars and stripes' and rewards the good behaviour of boarders whilst maintaining discipline. The boarding house 'golds' scheme enables the children to physically see what they are aiming for with a chart that is displayed in the games room.

The health and safety of boarders within the school and when off campus is taken seriously. The Headmaster ensures that this aspect of care is coordinated across the school site giving support to those with delegated responsibility for specific health and safety tasks. A range of relevant documents, including the accident log, reveal that there is proper assessment of potential risks to boarders within the school. All potential hazards are given due consideration and where necessary measures are in place to reduce them. Significant developments have included changes to the road layout that runs through the school and intruder alarms being installed in the boarding house. This demonstrates the school's commitment to safeguarding boarders.

Boarders expressed confidence in the safety and security of the school. Boarders learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they regularly practice the emergency escape drill and staff receive fire training. 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.

The school has thorough risk assessments for all aspects of the premises, grounds, boarders 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.

The school has a clear staff recruitment procedure for the vetting of all staff and volunteers. Staff recruitment files contain evidence that recruitment checks have taken place prior to staff being employed in line with the school's policy and all checks with the criminal records bureau are carried out. However, the recruitment checks of GAP staff are not sufficiently rigorous. The Headmaster recognised the difficulties very quickly and put in place measures to protect the children. This shortfall potentially failed to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Individual support to boarders' is given high priority by the school. The boarding staff team work in a very encouraging and supportive manner, and consequently the care, social opportunities and activities are outstanding. Boarders' know that they can talk to a variety of staff across site as well as individuals' external to the school. They are confident that the team of boarding staff would help them resolve any problems. Staff promote the availability of people to listen to through discussions, chat times, posters and written guides for boarders.

Boarders' are able to develop interests in a wide range of group and individual sports and activities with nurturing staff guidance. The well-established programme of hobbies, evening and weekend social events provides boarders' with opportunities that encourages them to achieve educationally and socially to their fullest potential. The school's narrow gauge steam railway continues to be one of the many popular wide ranging hobbies that run for all children on a Saturday morning. Other options include craft, knitting, weaving, rambling, film, judo, natural world and fencing. The boarding house runs regular weekend trips, which have included grass boarding, ice skating and theme parks. Across the school site there is a wide range of outstanding indoor and outdoor recreation facilities for the use of boarders' including a new sports centre. The staff promote a good balance of organised and free time that takes into account tiredness and energy levels of boarders.

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. Boarders understand moral issues which are explored in student council, PSHE and chat times.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' are actively encouraged to contribute to the running of the school because their views and opinions are valued, which results in social cohesion and strong school and house identity. The school's systems gain boarders' views about matters affecting their daily lives and the general running of the school and boarding house. This helps boarders' to feel ownership of the setting and to be part of school community life.

Boarders' have a team of boarding house staff and a form tutor who oversee and coordinate their care and education. The house parents, house tutor deputy, house assistants and matrons' all play key roles, guiding the spiritual and moral development of each boarder whilst promoting confidence and respect for others. All staff actively address any difficulties that boarders' may have. Systems of listening to and obtaining the views of boarders' are fully integrated into school life and issues arising in 'chat time' discussions and school council are considered seriously and, where appropriate acted upon. Examples of where boarders' views influence significant developments include the food, year 8 privileges and mobile phones.

The school demonstrates a very positive attitude to children's families and parental contact. Boarders' are supported to have appropriate private contact with friends and family. The school understands the value and importance of communication and contact with parents and have used parent meetings and parent questionnaires to gather views and influence practice.

Boarders' are supported to take an interest in the outside world and have daily access to newspapers, telephones and the internet. In addition boarders' are involved with community based activities such as brownies, guides, a local cricket club and fund raising.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The school has a very high standard of accommodation for its boarders'. The boarding house and medical centre have been significantly developed and refurbished. House parents accommodation has been refurbished to enable the close supervision of all boarding activities. In addition to the boarding house the early years department, academic quad, sports hall and pre prep classes are all new purpose built additions to the school. In the school grounds the astro pitch has been resurfaced, additional car parks and three new netball/tennis courts have been built. All of this work has been completed to an outstanding standard. The school works to a development plan that continues to identify areas of development with timescales for completion. Work still to be completed includes the development of a new laundry room, which will ensure the high standard historically set will continue with larger numbers of boarders'. This work demonstrates the commitment by The Downs, Malvern College Prep School to promoting the welfare of boarders and staff living on site.

The accommodation provided for boarders' is very comfortable, well heated and lit. Boarders' can choose to decorate their bedrooms and many are personalised, which helps boarders' take pride in their surroundings as well as helping them to develop ownership of the environment. All boarders' are proud of their houses.

All accommodation is maintained to an excellent standard by a team of support staff. These are employed by the school and external contractors, both are very loyal to the school and knowledgeable in an emergency. The support staff are integral to the school's success and are involved at more than one level with the boarders, with some involved in trips and activities.

The school provides each boarder with a lockable secure place where they can keep their possessions. There are very effective systems for recording pocket money held on behalf of boarders.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

In September 2008 The Downs School merged with Malvern College Prep School. The Downs, Malvern College Preparatory is now an independently registered school with significant links with Malvern College. The school pays for specific services from Malvern College, such as human resources, but remains an independently registered setting.

The Downs, Malvern College Prep has a Statement of Boarding Practice and Principles, which is clear and concise. Written documentation for boarders' gives all required information to children and their families on the services available. This includes the philosophy of care and the expectations of the school.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Children are valued as individual, and their strengths and weaknesses are considered, understood and appreciated. Boarders' care is underpinned by the school's clear values and ethos. Boarding is supported by a strong

management team who demonstrate a commitment to raising standards. Staff attend regular external and internal training and named governors take on a quality assurance role.

The Downs, Malvern Prep School has substantial strengths and is developing a service that delivers good performance. Where areas for improvement emerge the school recognises and manages them well. The senior boarding management team provide effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as the complaints, child protection and discipline logs.

Staff, parents and boarders' are given numerous opportunities in forums such as meetings, e-mails and questionnaires, to help with the school's organisation and development of boarding. The depth and detail of consulting and planning is demonstrated in the work currently being undertaken by the school to manage the merge. This quality monitoring and other similar initiatives contribute to reports to the governing body and the school's overall strategic plan and implementation.

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 the appointment of 'gap' student staff includes every element of the recruitment checking system listed under standard 38.2 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) standard 38.4.