

Wymondham College

Inspection report for boarding school

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| Unique reference number | SC055089 |
| Inspection date | 9 November 2009 |
| Inspector | Trevor Hall |
| Type of Inspection | Key |

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| Date of last inspection | 6 November 2006 |

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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

Wymondham College is a co-educational, state-maintained boarding college, admitting pupils aged 11 to 18 years. There are currently 1,217 students, of which 659 are boarders. The college is located between the market towns of Wymondham and Attleborough, with the city of Norwich 10 miles away to the north east. The college has good road links to London and the Midlands and there is a local rail service.

Boarding is organised into six houses; Peel Hall is used as a Year 7 induction house and only accommodates young people of this age. Lincoln Hall and Ralphs Hall provide accommodation for the college's sixth form students, while all of the other houses take a range of pupils aged between 12-16 years. All day pupils of the college are allocated to one of the houses, who provide facilities for these students during the college day.

The college is located in a rural setting, with all aspects of the college being accommodated within the main college campus. The college has an excellent range of student facilities and extensive sports facilities, including games pitches, a sports hall and a heated indoor swimming pool. The college has improved boarding provision considerably since it was last inspected, with the new sixth form accommodation block offering outstanding study and living facilities.

Summary

This was an announced inspection undertaken by three Ofsted inspectors, conducted over three and a half days. The inspection looked at the boarding schools national minimum standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups. The inspection was informed by the college producing a detailed and comprehensive pre-inspection self-assessment, an extensive questionnaire completed by some of the college's boarding students and by completed questionnaires from interested parents. This inspection revealed a college that is operating to a very high standard; the college was judged to be good in one of the Every Child Matters outcome groups and outstanding in all of the other five outcome groups, achieving an overall rating of outstanding.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the college was last inspected, improvements have been made in the way the college formulates welfare plans for young people and in the way medication is administered in the medical centre. Several policies in respect of students self-administering homely remedies and requesting to see the college's doctor without staff being present have been introduced in line with previously made recommendations.

The recording of complaints within each boarding house has improved, with each house now having their own complaints log. New whistle-blowing policies are now in place to support staff and to formalise how staff can safely bring any concerns to the attention of senior managers, or to external regulators.

Training has been provided for house staff on basic distraction and physical intervention strategies, to enable them to intercede safely and with confidence when required to do so.

Young people's rights to appropriate privacy have been further acknowledged and strengthened by the provision of further training and guidance to all boarding house staff.

Safe employment practice has improved and now meets the required standard; there was no evidence of any staff being employed by the college without all appropriate pre-employment checks having been completed.

The college has made several improvements to the safety of the campus; it has improved lighting, particularly around the medical centre, and it has also fenced in the pond.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Students' health and well-being needs are being effectively promoted through professional and comprehensive services.

Students have access to high quality medical treatment and first aid. A team of registered nurses is available in the college's health centre at all times for the treatment of minor illnesses, and a doctor's surgery is held two times a week in the health centre; gender appropriate doctors are available if students request it. The college operates a highly developed medication policy, procedure and practice guidance that specifically addresses the use of non-prescribed medication and students self-medicating. Effective policies and procedures are in place for the safe storage and administration of medication. Staff are trained in the administration of medication and actively put into effect the college's health education policies and integrate these into their daily contact with students. Consent for medication and first aid is sought from parents and carers on an appropriately detailed consent form.

Students' welfare 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 history of each student is gained as part of the college's admission process through proactive contact with families. This ensures individual needs are identified and that each student receives an immediate and appropriate response when they are ill. The separate accommodation for sick students is comfortable and of a very high standard.

Student confidentiality is not always protected, as in some boarding houses, details of allergies have been displayed openly on notice boards, enabling this information to be viewed inappropriately by other young people. While acknowledging that this been done in an attempt to safeguard the young people with allergies, this practice was not universal throughout the college and does not meet national minimum standard 7.5.

Students have access to information and guidance with regard to health and social issues in age-appropriate formats. These areas are also addressed formally through the college's curriculum. Boarders are relaxed and well informed when discussing personal, health and social matters.

Students' 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 had training about nutrition to enable them to put this into effective practice. All students take their main meals in the college's central refectory, with the exception of the sixth form who take their main meals in

the sixth form centre. Students have a choice of two hot meals and a vegetarian option, and a salad bar is always available at each main meal. Menu planning is adventurous, integrates culturally appropriate food and encourages students to try new dishes. Flexible arrangements are made to take account of students' choice, and students' responses to both formal questionnaires and informal discussion confirmed that they feel the food at the college to be of good quality, varied and nutritious. While all main meals are taken in the refectory, students can also buy food from the tuck shop and make snacks in the boarding houses.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Students' safety is promoted because staff are aware of the college's policies and procedures; they listen to the concerns of their students and take appropriate actions to ensure their welfare.

Students are cared for in a warm and friendly atmosphere. Staff and students know that bullying is not tolerated and that staff will act quickly on any information that bullying might be taking place. Students living at, or attending Wymondham College as day students, are particularly well protected in relation to child protection concerns. The college's designated child protection staff have attended appropriate external training courses and all boarding staff receive regular in-house training and demonstrate excellent knowledge of policies and procedures. This high level of training ensures that the relevant staff maintain up-to-date knowledge of national and local safeguarding procedures and ensure that the college's safeguarding policy reflects the best local practice. Boarders confirm that they feel staff give a high priority to keeping them safe and are knowledgeable about who they could talk to if they had any concerns.

Students state that the college respects their privacy and confidentiality, that their concerns are listened to and they are supported to behave well. Positive behaviour is actively rewarded and inappropriate behaviour is addressed in a very fair and measured way. The college has a strong focus on promoting effective and supportive networks, for example, younger students are very positive about the newly introduced in-college peer mentoring system. Boarders consider the college is good at caring, encouraging and communicating. A clear behaviour management policy, within the college's established structure, ensures that students have the opportunity to learn good social skills; this has the positive effect of creating a harmonious and friendly environment throughout the college.

The college has a clear complaints procedure and information about this is available to students and parents through written material. Students state that the college responds quickly to any concerns raised by them and students are proactively supported to raise any concerns or issues that they have.

Students expressed confidence in the safety and security of the college campus. Students learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they regularly practise the emergency escape drill and staff receive fire training. Safe procedures are in place to protect students through tests on fire systems and other electrical equipment at appropriate intervals. Environmental risk assessments are in place to ensure the college is fully informed about potential hazards and to enable it to reduce such risks.

The college operates an established robust staff vetting procedure which is applied consistently and staff demonstrate an excellent awareness of the need to safeguard their students at all times. Staff recruitment files contain extensive evidence of recruitment checks that have taken

place prior to staff being employed. This includes an appropriate enhanced criminal record bureau check. All adults who visit the boarding accommodation are supervised by staff. This excellent practice ensures that young people are appropriately safeguarded.

The college 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.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Individual and group support to students is given a very high priority by the college. Students are benefiting from living in a college where staff are focusing on promoting their success, meeting their needs and celebrating their achievements.

Staff work in a very encouraging and supportive manner and consequently the care, social opportunities and activities are of a high standard. Students freely initiate interaction and seek help from various staff members on duty. The college provides an environment where the value of equality and diversity is understood, promoted and celebrated. The college community represents the individual and diverse identities of students and this uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and understanding.

Wymondham College prides itself on the quality of its pastoral care, through the medical centre, the chaplaincy, the college's counselling service, an independent listening adult and through the pastoral structure promoted by the excellent relationships witnessed between the young people and staff.

Students are encouraged to discuss all matters related to their boarding life. Staff response is positive and they take seriously the issues raised.

Students enjoy living in a college that has an effective equal opportunities policy and an ethos of inclusiveness. No student raised any issue about inappropriate discrimination either directly to the inspectors nor in student questionnaires completed prior to the inspection. Students talked enthusiastically about the college's ethos and the friendly relationships that exist between both students and the college's staff group, which they feel makes the college both effective and special.

Study provision within the college is very good, with ample space available for all boarders to work on preparatory or private study. The new sixth form boarding provision provides excellent facilities that have greatly enhanced the study and leisure amenities for these students.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Students are actively encouraged to contribute to the running of the college because their views and opinions are valued, which results in social cohesion and a strong college identity.

Students consider that they benefit from a supportive boarding experience, which is open and inclusive. The college's systems gain students' views about matters affecting their daily lives and the general running of the boarding houses. They also believe that by effectively communicating with them about matters concerning their own lives, progress and future, the

college is helping them to be responsible, independent and to develop appropriate self-confidence. Regular tutor groups, house and college council meetings enable students to raise concerns, discuss worries and express points of views.

Students each have a team of house staff who oversee and co-ordinate their care and education. The house staff play a key role, guiding the development of each student while promoting strength, confidence and respect for others. All staff actively address any difficulties that students may have. Systems of listening to and obtaining the views of students are fully integrated into the running of the college and these involve students in any developments or changes to college or boarding life. Essentially boarders believe they have a voice in the college and staff listen to them.

The staff respond to boarders in a supportive and thoughtful way and boarders are in turn positive about their relationship with the staff. This helps students to feel valued and gives them a sense of ownership of the setting and to be a real part of college life.

The college demonstrates a very positive attitude to students' families and parental contact. Students are supported to have appropriate private contact with friends and family. The college understands the value and importance of communication and contact with parents.

Students are supported to take an interest in the outside world and have daily access to newspapers, telephones and the internet. In addition students are involved with community based activities, the combined cadet force, Duke of Edinburgh awards, and fund-raising for a variety of charities.

The college also actively encourages both on and off site events that bring in other educational establishments and the local community. The college has regular sporting commitments against other colleges and colleges and the college also encourages the students to take part in appropriate social events.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The standard of accommodation throughout the college is good, with certain aspects being outstanding; all boarding accommodation is comfortable, well maintained and clean and provides a safe environment for the students.

All boarders below the sixth form live in five large boarding houses; these houses are essentially the same although some over the years have been adapted differently to accommodate different needs. All of these houses, whose original fabric dates back to the late 1950s and early 1960s, are organised in such a way as to include pupils of each of the college years from Year 8 to Year 11, with the exception of Peel Hall which only accommodates Year 7 pupils. The Year 11 students enjoy either single or twin accommodation; younger pupils are accommodated in rooms of various capacities in small dormitories for up to six younger students.

Students expressed their satisfaction with their living accommodation and were happy with the level of internal and external security within the college, stating that very little was ever lost or stolen. Pocket money is kept secure in each individual boarding house office and young people can access their money, through the house bank, at any reasonable time. Each young person is provided with a small lockable safe; however, staff have an override facility to enable

them to access these in case of concerns or in circumstances where young people are unable to gain access. The college has appropriate policies in place in respect of staff conducting room or locker searches and there was no evidence that unauthorised searches of students' bedrooms or possessions have taken place.

The new sixth form centre offers young people an outstanding level of accommodation, providing each young person with a single study bedroom with en-suite facilities. A separate dining provision is provided in the sixth form centre, which is serviced by the main kitchen.

Boarding areas of the college are clean, well decorated and well maintained, fit for purpose and are age-appropriate. The college has good maintenance provision, which is well organised and ensures that work is prioritised to primarily ensure that the health and safety of young people is appropriately maintained. No boarders at Wymondham College are placed outside the college in lodgings.

Students can choose to decorate their bedrooms or bed spaces with suitable pictures or posters, which helps to maintain a homely environment. All accommodation, surrounding buildings and the grounds are maintained to a high standard by the local authority. The college grounds are beautifully maintained and offer the students a safe environment in which to relax or pursue sporting activities.

The college is located in a rural setting in mid-Norfolk just outside the market town of Wymondham and within easy reach of Norwich. Regular weekend shopping trips are organised to enable boarders to replenish stocks of personal requisites. The college has its own transport to enable the students to access the wider community. Sixth form students who hold an appropriate driving licence may, with the college's permission, bring their own vehicles on to the campus; however, strict rules are in place which limit the carrying of other students in these vehicles.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Students' enriched care and educational experiences are underpinned by the college's coherent philosophy, values and sound leadership.

Wymondham College has a comprehensive range of documents that clearly reflect the college's commitment to boarding practices and principles. The students' and parents' handbooks give all required information to young people and their families on the services available, in a format that is easy to understand. This includes the philosophy of care and the expectations of the college.

The Principal and senior management team provide strong leadership to students and staff. They are actively involved in the day-to-day operation of the college and of the boarding houses.

The health and safety of boarders within the college and when off-campus is taken extremely seriously. The college bursar ensures that this aspect of care is co-ordinated across the college 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 students within the college. These include: risk from intruders; use of

apparatus during sports or play; outings and spread of infections, as well as other risks specific to other, more specialised off-site activities. All these potential hazards are given due consideration and where necessary, measures are in place to reduce them. The assessment of risks on trips off-site is either done by the boarding house staff or the college's trips and activities co-ordinator, whose approval is required prior to any off-site activity being undertaken. In addition the local authority require that all major high-risk activities or trips abroad meet their risk assessment criteria and that they receive their approval prior to them taking place.

Students make good progress at Wymondham College because staffing in the college is well organised and effectively managed. Young people's welfare is comprehensively monitored and regular discussions within staff meetings, coupled with effective communication systems within the college, ensure that all staff are aware of pupils with special needs, or those requiring higher levels of support or supervision.

Appropriate representatives of the senior management team effectively monitor all relevant records, such as the complaints, child protection and discipline logs. This ensures proper scrutiny of all aspects of the students' care. Any shortfalls in these areas are identified and addressed. This quality monitoring and other similar initiatives contribute to periodic reports to the governing body and the college's overall development plan.

The college has a well-established crisis management plan that anticipates a wide range of foreseeable incidents or crises. The crisis management plan names individuals undertaking specific roles and appropriately allocates responsibilities with specific timescales.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All of the college's recording systems take account of potential needs in relation to a young person's diversity such as identity, race, culture and religion. The college provides an environment where the value of equality and diversity is understood, promoted and celebrated.

Boarding houses are organised and operated extremely well; they are focused on the needs of the young people in residence and are warm, welcoming and nurturing. The current boarding arrangement contributes effectively to boarders' welfare, with all of the houses working closely together to ensure that experiences for all students are focused on their needs, abilities and capabilities. The physical condition and standard of decoration and equipment of all the boarding houses is of a high standard, and while the newly opened boarding house possibly reflects a higher standard of accommodation than in other parts of the college, this is no more than is expected in a modern purpose-built residential unit as opposed to houses that have had to adapt over many years to changing standards and expectations.

Boarding houses are appropriately staffed and young people are adequately supervised at all times. The college has effective cover arrangements for staff who report in sick. Staff are appropriately aware of the whereabouts of boarders at all times, including when they are off the college premises on trips or visits. Staff members sleep-in each night and boarders know how to contact these staff should they require assistance. Excellent registers of boarders are maintained so that staff are aware of how many young people are resident within each boarding provision at all times.

Wymondham College has substantial strengths and a sustained record of delivering outstanding performance and managing improvement. Where areas for improvement emerge, the college

recognises and manages them well. The senior management team provide effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as received complaints and any perceived child protection issues. The college has made several referrals to the local child protection safeguarding panel since it was last inspected; all of these referrals have been appropriate and the college has always co-operated fully with any external review or investigation of concern. This inspection has not revealed any issues that the college should have referred, but had failed to do so. The college willingly embraces working appropriately with outside agencies and regulators and has a good record of consulting with these agencies when it is appropriate to do so.

Staff and students at all levels are given numerous opportunities in forums such as meetings and individual assessments, to help with the college's organisation and development. This consultation and regular communication ensures proper scrutiny and advancement of all aspects of the students' 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 college's overall strategic plan and its 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 that confidentiality of personal information about boarders is protected. (NMS 7.5)