

Birchfield School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC020769
Inspection date	29 June 2010
Inspector	Martha Nethaway
Type of Inspection	Key

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Nominated person	Richard Peter Merriman
Date of last inspection	12 March 2008

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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

Birchfield School was founded at Tettenhall, near Wolverhampton in 1935 and moved to its present site, near the village of Albrighton in 1962. In that year the school was established as an educational trust with a board of governors who have continued to take responsibility for the overall management of the school.

The school is open to boys and girls from 3 to 13 years. The school is housed in an Edwardian country house and in purpose built modern buildings and enjoys a beautiful 20 acre setting in the Shropshire Countryside. The grounds are beautifully maintained.

Birchfield has excellent road, rail and airport access. It is situated only five minutes away from the M54. The school operates its own bus service to and from Wolverhampton, Telford, Bridgnorth and surrounding villages. Boarding at Birchfield School is on a weekly basis for boys only, with them going home every weekend and returning on Monday mornings. Boarding spaces are limited to 19, but at the time of the inspection there were 9 boarders. Boarding is provided in one house, on the main school site.

Pastoral care and support are provided to boarders by a dedicated housemaster or mistress. The evening duties are covered by boarding tutors who are qualified teaching staff employed within the school. The headmaster and his wife are directly responsible for pastoral care, monitoring the boarding provision and child protection. He is assisted by a deputy head, a housemaster and mistress, a bursar and boarding tutors.

The school, through the headmaster, is a full member of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools. It is also a member of the Boarding Schools' Association.

Summary

This was an announced inspection undertaken by one Ofsted inspector over two days. The inspection looked at the key boarding school national minimum standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall outcome judgement continues to be outstanding in the majority of the outcome areas. Boarders have a good circle of peers with which to share their hobbies and interests and to share playtime and have fun. The school takes pride in having happy boarders. Boarders benefit from their boarding experience because it helps to develop personal and social maturity from experiencing an appropriate level of responsibility leading to greater self-confidence and independence. This helps to develop all round maturity.

As a result of this visit there are no recommendations made.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations were made at the last inspection visit.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health continues to be outstandingly promoted. There are comprehensive and wide-ranging policies in place which are effectively implemented in practice. Staff are well informed about health needs and this is because the school nurse is dynamic and communicates clearly with staff about all matters relating to health promotion.

Boarders are provided with an inspiring pastoral system. Boarders clearly develop self-confidence and self-esteem because they are provided with many opportunities to develop informed opinions and attitudes about a range of personal, social and moral issues. Boarders are helped to learn about the facts relating to health issues which are elementary to their growth and development. Boarders are enabled to acquire those skills such as those relating to personal safety and about good decision making which are vital to their well-being and their interaction with other members of the school and the wider community.

Boarders' medicines are successfully managed by the school nurse. The medical care of boarders during the early morning and late evening is managed by the boarding staff under the supervision of the school nurse. Boarders are protected because the correct medical consent forms are completed and regularly reviewed. Boarders receive excellent first aid and prompt health care as necessary. This is because the nurse attends sports fixtures and maintains excellent communication with the opposing school. Boarders are further protected because the nurse has innovative links with the local authority school nurses that promote best practice in school settings. The nurse attends regular training events that promote continuous professional development.

Boarders receive high quality and excellent choice in catering provision. Boarders expressed high praise with the food provided, which is outstanding. The choice, quality and quantities reach a high standard. The catering team successfully meet the dietary needs of all boarders. This is because staff liaise very effectively with the child, parents and boarding staff to ensure that all needs are properly addressed. For example, each week the menus are planned ahead with boarders and boarding staff input. The catering team are highly effective because they manage the kitchen and catering to a high standard. Their dedication and commitment is praised by boarders, parents and all staff.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The welfare of boarders continues to be outstandingly promoted. This is because the school succeeds with the effective implementation of policies and practice that fully addresses: complaints; countering bullying; child protection and safeguarding; behaviour management; health and safety and staff selection and recruitment. The senior management team regularly monitor, review and update policies and this permits the school to run smoothly for the benefit of boarders.

Boarders are protected from abuse. Boarders' protection is promoted through the school's policy and procedures which informs staff on what actions to take regarding concerns about harm or abuse. Policies are updated to reflect wider guidance regarding safeguarding measures. The school shows a high commitment to child protection and the safeguarding agenda. This is because all staff have a regular programme of training. The designated person's child protection

training is up to date. Staff know and understand their role and level of responsibility. They know the correct steps to take when they have a concern about the welfare of a child. As a result, boarders are living in a safe and secure environment and safe working practices are transparent in the boarding community.

The school has in place an effective complaints policy. Complaints and concerns are resolved quickly and informally. Boarders and parents are well informed about how they can make a complaint, however minor.

Boarders' behaviour is exemplary and this is because the school prides itself on high standards of behaviour and principles. Staff succeed in creating an environment that has a strong code of conduct and boarders understand it. This is achieved through creating a spirit of trust and cooperation. The school believes that rewards, positive reinforcement and encouragement are crucial to encouraging excellent standards of behaviour. The school has a comprehensive behaviour management and discipline programme. This includes a wide range of rewards, stars, house points, merits and good conduct rewards. The school occasionally uses sanctions and this is to encourage boarders to develop self-discipline through development and improvement.

Boarders are provided with a happy and secure learning environment where bullying does not take place. Boarders are clearly taught about how to discern what is bullying and what is, 'children being children'. Staff are highly accomplished at giving considerable guidance with understanding this complex distinction. Boarders do not identify bullying as a problem at the school. One boarder commented, 'The school has in place a simple three step approach to prevent bullying, ask them to stop, tell them to stop and then tell an adult.' The management team are highly advanced at monitoring all behavioural incidents and this includes any bullying events. This means that the school is proactive in addressing any trends and patterns.

The school is excellent at providing a safe, healthy and secure boarding environment. The whole school approach to all matters related to health and safety is outstanding. The school and staff take all reasonable steps to fulfil their obligations under health and safety legislation. This is because policies are clearly defined and risk assessments and management are highly effective in practice. In addition, boarders are protected from the risk of fire. Boarders learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they have regular opportunities to practice the evacuation of the building.

There is a good selection and vetting procedure for staff working with boarders. This is well supported by an excellent standard of records that clearly demonstrate that all the necessary pre-employment checks are completed. This ensures that all staff are deemed to be suitable to work with children. Finally, key management staff have attended external training for safe recruitment. This helps to further strengthen the school's recruitment processes and procedures.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The helping of boarders to achieve well and enjoy what they do continues to be outstanding. The school provides a holistic approach to boarding and education. Boarders enjoy a safe, comfortable and homely environment. Boarders receive excellent personal support. A very experienced, capable and professional body of staff are available to all boarders for any personal guidance or personal problem. This includes both male and females. Boarders' ability to respond positively to responsibility is one of the key aims of the boarding experience. They achieve this

because they have opportunities to share responsibility for simple straightforward day-to-day tasks.

The school offers equal opportunities to all pupils and their parents. The school treats everyone fairly and equally. Staff help promote boarders' understanding of social issues. Boarders participate in a range of innovative fundraising events which contribute to local and national charities. One staff member commented, 'This helps broaden boarders' horizons.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are well supported and actively encouraged to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school. This is achieved through a number of initiatives. Boarders can formally express their views and opinions during the daily house meetings in the morning and evening. Open discussion about venues for outings and activities takes place during the boarding day. In addition, there are formal mechanisms to canvass views and feedback through annual boarding questionnaires. Boarders are consulted half-termly regarding their dormitories and who they would like to share with. Boarders have daily access to the outside world through the nightly watching of the six o'clock news, a daily national newspaper and a daily local paper. One boarder commented, 'This means that I know what is going on in the world around me too.'

Boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families. This is because they have access to convenient and private telephones.

The school has a clear admission policy for boarders. The boarding places are generally taken up by older pupils. For one week prospective boarders can join the boarding community so that they can experience the boarding structures and routines first hand.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders' possessions and money are protected which is excellent. The boarding staff provides excellent, secure protection for all boarders' personal possessions and for any boarders' money or valuables looked after by the school. Few personal possessions are brought in by the weekly boarders. A full written record is kept.

Boarders are provided with good accommodation. Good standards are provided in all areas of the boarding house, ensuring all areas are appropriately lit, heated and ventilated, suitably furnished and accessible to all. The school employs dedicated cleaning, maintenance and grounds teams and they are very loyal to the school and maintain the environment to a high standard.

Boarders have good sleeping accommodation. The west wing of the main original school building is occupied by boarders. There are three dormitory areas ranging from three, four or five beds respectively. Boarders are provided with good space where they can personalise their areas with appropriate personal photographs, pictures and posters.

Boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities and these are maintained to a good standard.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The leadership and management of the school continues to be highly successful and engenders a very positive focus on high quality boarding. As a result, boarders clearly benefit from their boarding experiences.

The school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare and is outstanding. Boarding is popular with children and parents because it is weekday boarding. One staff member commented, 'Boarders can make significant strides in terms of their personal organisation and social skills while retaining a significant amount of dedicated family time at the weekends.'

The school has a suitable statement of the school's boarding principles and practice which is available to parents, boarders and staff. The school's policies are clearly explained. These documents are also available on the school's website and staff understand the importance of explaining the information booklet so that children and parents are well informed about what the school can offer in terms of the positive benefits of the boarding experience.

Boarding is managed and supervised by committed, experienced and qualified boarding staff. They are assisted by teaching staff each evening on a rota basis. There are clear procedures in place for the management and supervision of the boarding house. One staff member commented, 'Communication between the boarding staff and myself is exceptionally good.' Boarding staff work highly effectively and provide support, encouragement and care for all boarders in their charge. Boarders know where staff are because there is a duty staff room on the dormitory and someone is on duty in the house at all times when boarders are in residence.

Risk assessment and school record keeping contribute to boarders' welfare and is outstanding. This is because the school has a thorough grasp of the importance of monitoring risk management, health and safety and policies and procedures. The management team has an accurate overview of how effective the quality of the boarding provision is performing. The strategic management of the school and governing body represent sustained commitment in achieving effectiveness and efficiency.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school provides an environment which nurtures each child to reach their full potential. All are treated as unique individuals. Boarders experience achievement and success at appropriate levels, regardless of their abilities. One of the core values of the school is to provide a management structure which permits staff ease of access, open communication and regular involvement in decision making.

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

There are no recommendations.