

Marlborough House School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Liz Daniels / Lindy Latreille
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Date of last inspection	1 March 2005

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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

Marlborough House School was founded in 1874 and moved to its present site on the outskirts of the village of Hawkhurst, in 1930. It is set within 34 acres of the Kentish Weald and provides good resources and facilities for the pupils. The school became a Charitable Trust in 1957 and now has over 300 boys and girls aged between three and 13 years, on the school roll. The school enjoys and achieves academic success, with a high proportion of pupils gaining places at prestigious state and independent schools. In addition, the pupils are encouraged to pursue extra-curricular activities, including the Arts and Drama. The pupils are also encouraged to represent their school in sporting activities and competitions at all levels and, as a result, the annual sporting events calendar continues to be very busy. Marlborough House offers a nursery provision as well as pre-preparatory and preparatory schools. In accordance with parents' wishes the boarding provision is now entirely 'flexi-boarding' with approximately 80 pupils staying one or two nights per week. A wide range of clubs and activities are available after study time, for all pupils, whether boarding or not. In general, the boarding night then starts once activities have finished and the day pupils go home mid evening. The boarders are cared for by a house master, two matrons, an assistant matron and two 'gap' students who also support the teaching staff during the day.

Summary

This full welfare inspection was undertaken to fulfil the three year inspection requirement for boarding schools. All of the standards considered by Ofsted to be key standards, were inspected. The visit provided the opportunity to meet with the Headmaster, housemaster responsible for the boarding provision and other key staff who have a role in boarding. The inspectors joined the boarders for some of the evening and for breakfast, providing an opportunity to hear their views; the children speak enthusiastically about boarding and see it as an enjoyable and positive experience. In addition, 22 young people's surveys were completed and seven surveys returned from parents. In general the feedback praises the school for its boarding provision. The school provides homely, comfortable boarding accommodation and a small team of staff ensure the children's good health is promoted and that they are kept safe whilst they stay. Very good practices are in place to ensure the young people are able to voice any concerns and the staff support them whereby they can develop as individuals. There are some shortfalls in the boarding toilet and wash facilities; however, the children only stay one or two nights and, when staying, the staff ensure the facilities are used in small groups, whereby the shortage has a minimal impact. Where areas for improvement are identified, the senior management team are responsive and demonstrate a willingness to explore changes which will improve the provision.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last full welfare inspection for Marlborough House School was undertaken in March 2005 and the shortfalls identified then were reviewed during a monitoring visit in 2006. There is no record available to confirm whether any recommendations were found to remain outstanding at that visit.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Excellent resources, processes and support are in place to ensure the children's health is promoted when they board at Marlborough House. Any guidance given is directly linked to the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme undertaken within the school. Comprehensive health forms are completed when the children join the pre-preparation (pre-prep) school, with the aim that they are updated as they move into the preparatory (prep) school. All forms are appropriately stored in matron's office. However, those children who board do not always have an up to date health form that provides current consent for medications or that reflects their evening and night-time needs. Effective arrangements are in place to ensure that first aid is provided and minor illnesses are treated by a team of competent and designated staff who are all trained in first aid. As all the boarders are local children, they remain registered with their own General Practitioner (GP), opticians and dentist. Prescription and non-prescription 'household' medications are administered by one of the three matrons. Most are stored in a locked cupboard although some are not in their original packaging identifying the name and dose of the medication. In addition, some that may be needed in an emergency are not currently being stored safely, although an alarmed cabinet is on order to be installed imminently. The children do not all have Medication Administration Records (MAR charts) but the correct details of all medication administered is recorded in the medical room daily log, whereby the frequency of administration of particular medications can be tracked. There is excellent catering provision at Marlborough House School. A varied nutritional menu with plenty of choice is developed each week and the food is locally sourced wherever possible. Many special dietary needs are accommodated and the school is imaginative in the way it explores multi-cultural foods. All the meals are served in the school's spacious dining room and the catering staff are all trained in food hygiene. Any boarders who are unwell are accommodated separately in a sick room, situated within the boarding accommodation. There is an informal arrangement that the toilet and washbasin facility situated nearby is not used by the boarders when the sick room is in use. Any child who is unwell goes home as soon as is possible but whilst at school are cared for by one of the matrons; a call button within the room sounds in the evening matron's accommodation. However, there are no clear policies in place to minimise the risk of infection spreading from the sick room.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The policies and procedures in place at Marlborough House School protect the children from bullying. The staff are vigilant and, by recognising those who have the potential to bully as well as those who are vulnerable, they provide appropriate guidance and support. The incidence is low and good communication throughout the school staff ensures behaviour is managed fairly and consistently. Similarly there are policies and procedures to protect the children from abuse. Staff are trained in Child Protection and the 'Local Authority Designated Officer' (LADO) is booked to provide an update for all staff during the next 'In Service Training' (INSET) week in January 2009. A senior staff member is designated to take responsibility for safeguarding; he and the head of boarding have undertaken additional training. Good measures are in place to monitor internet use and prevent access to inappropriate sites. Behaviour is well managed at the school; considerable emphasis is placed on rewarding good behaviour but any punishments for poor behaviour are consistent and not excessive. The children earn good and bad marks which result in rewards or sanctions; in general the children view good marks as a positive

incentive. There has been no incident which has necessitated the use of major punishment or physical intervention. The school responds positively to any queries or concerns raised by parents and boarders. Regular coffee mornings provide a good opportunity for parents to meet the Headmaster informally to raise any queries they may have and to discuss where they feel improvements can be made. The boarding handbooks for both parents and pupils guide the reader as to how else they may raise concerns within the school; there are various avenues available for them and all concerns are followed up or investigated as necessary. The details are recorded and the complainant informed of the outcome. The Head is made aware of all serious complaints and co-ordinates their investigation whereby he can monitor any trends and frequencies. Details of external organisations such as 'Child Line' and the number of the Independent Listener are publicised; however, the contact number for Ofsted is not currently readily available. Good processes are in place to ensure the children are protected from the risk of fire. Weekly fire alarm tests are well managed and fire drills are carried out during 'boarding hours' each term. Appropriate checks and servicing of emergency lighting, fire fighting equipment and fire alarms are in place and the fire risk assessment is agreed by the local fire authority. However, a fire exit door leading to an outside fire escape is not alarmed whereby it can be accessed without staff supervision or their being aware it is open. In addition, a fire escape ladder accessed through a dormitory window poses a risk that the children may use it inappropriately and fall. The school is currently seeking advice through an independent fire company to clarify the need for the ladder and the most appropriate way to manage the risk. The personal privacy of the children is respected. Staff are readily available to monitor and care for the boarders but they are not intrusive. However, there are communal showers for the boys which currently have no separation and a small unscreened bath also in the same room; plans are in place to screen the showers and the bath is used with discretion, only when the showers are not in use. Therefore, in general and as a result of careful management, the children's privacy is maintained. Formal processes are in place for the selection and vetting of all staff who care for the boarders. Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures are sought and references are required prior to employment. However, not all the information required under National Minimum Standard (NMS) 38.2 is held on file for every member of staff. No member of staff works unsupervised with the boarders unless they have been satisfactorily checked with the CRB. The boarding accommodation is situated on the first floor in the main building of the school and parents collect and 'drop off' their children's possessions during the day, for the nights they board. However, the uniform shop is accessed by walking through the boarding accommodation; the school requires that any deliveries for the shop are left in the main entrance of the school, although there are no formal systems in place to monitor those adults who may access the accommodation when visiting the uniform shop. Once boarding starts, the children are well supervised and the main entrances into the school buildings are locked whereby the boarding accommodation is secure. The health and safety of the children is high on the school agenda. Appropriate maintenance contracts and safety checks are in place and the school is responsive in rectifying identified hazards. Risk assessments, undertaken by the staff are monitored and co-ordinated by the bursar who is the designated person with responsibility for health and safety. However, one dormitory window is not restricted as it provides access to the external fire escape ladder (as stated earlier in this report), although the ladder is not part of the school's fire plan for escape. There is currently no risk assessment in place for the window which allows access into the dormitory or out onto the roof.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school encourage the children to share any anxieties or concerns with staff; although there is a school tutor system the ethos is to enable them to speak with whoever they feel most comfortable with. An 'independent listener' is also available; his number is publicised by the telephone or a child can contact in confidence, by putting their name in the 'prayer box' near the school entrance. In addition, a 'worry box' in the boarding accommodation has just been introduced to allow boarders to share their concerns with the house master or matron. The weekly staff meeting provides a good opportunity for any welfare concerns to be shared and discussed enabling a cohesive plan of support and care to be introduced. The school promotes its policy of 'equal opportunities' and ensures that there is a theme of respect amongst the children and the staff. All the children live locally and 'English' is their first language; although the school is historically Christian and that ethos is clearly publicised, pupils from differing ethnic backgrounds and religious faiths are welcomed. Many of the children require special diets although not usually for cultural or religious reasons; their needs are well met within the excellent catering provided. The staff are alert to those children who struggle to integrate and ensure support is in place to prevent their being isolated.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders are encouraged to express their views about the boarding through formal opportunities such as the pupils' forum, as well as the informal new 'worry box' in the boarding area. The school promotes the importance of hearing the children's views and takes them into account when developing boarding practice. As the school now offers only flexi-boarding the children live at home and stay overnight for one or two nights per week. Whilst at school a telephone is available for them to contact their parents and although staff are usually aware they are making calls, they are able to speak privately. The numbers of help lines and outside contact numbers that they may call if they have problems or are distressed are well publicised, although the list has not been updated to include Ofsted. The 'Boarding Handbooks' provide comprehensive information for a child who wishes to board at the school, as well as for their parents. By trialling one night for two weeks the child, parents and staff can ensure it is a positive experience, before arranging for the child to become a regular boarder. The boarding is arranged to enable the children to board on the same nights as their peers and good communication amongst the staff ensures any child who is initially anxious about being away from home, is very well supported.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Within the context of flexi-boarding the school believes the children do not need large amounts of money or valuable personal items and they are therefore discouraged from bringing them in. However, the staff provide safe-keeping for any extraordinary situation. The boarding dormitories have been thoughtfully and creatively refurbished to enable them to be welcoming, homely and comfortable, despite being occupied by different groups of boarders each night. The rooms are clean, well-maintained and an appropriate size for the numbers of children accommodated. Separate dormitories for boys and girls are situated at either end of the boarding area, each with a mixture of single and bunk beds and the staff have their own sleeping accommodation. There are insufficient toilets and washbasins for the girls' boarding accommodation to meet the National Minimum Standards. There are also insufficient cubicle toilets, as well as communal showers which cannot be separated, in the boys' accommodation;

these facilities therefore also do not meet the National Minimum Standards. Similarly the toilet near the sick room is also used by the boarders. However, plans are underway to rectify the shortfalls by the end of October 2008 and the boarding groups are organised whereby the shortfall in facilities does not impact negatively on the children.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has comprehensive up to date information available that outlines the boarding principles for parents, boarders and staff. As boarding is managed by a small team of staff, good communication ensures that the head of boarding is aware of any incidents that occur during boarding, including those which result in the management of behaviour. Similarly any complaints made are also discussed with him. The weekly boarding meetings which he has with the Headmaster then provide a forum for these to be explored, although this is not always recorded. There is no formal process in place to monitor incidents, behaviour management and complaints at least twice a term, whereby it is unclear whether concentrations or trends are identified. Details of any accidents are forwarded to the school bursar who monitors for any trends and takes any necessary action. Similarly he ensures that the risk assessments of premises and activities remain relevant and updated. Flexi-boarding is arranged from Monday through to Thursday with very occasional boarding on a Friday to fit around a special event. A rota ensures that there is always a mix of male and female staff on duty and there are good levels of supervision during boarding; each child knows who is responsible for them during any activities they may undertake and how they can contact staff. All staff with boarding responsibilities have job descriptions identifying their role and who they are responsible to. There is an induction policy and when staff initially become involved with boarding, they undertake an informal induction which is not always recorded. Staff are in general well trained in the aspects of boarding that are particularly relevant for their role and all staff have basic training in child protection. Some staff have supervision and are appraised but there is no formal process in place to ensure this is undertaken with all boarding staff. A comprehensive staff manual and Boarding Policy ensure all the staff who have a role within boarding have a wealth of information to guide them in the school's approach to boarding, as well as how to safeguard the children and promote their welfare.

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 each boarder has an up to date health form that provides current consent for medications as well as reflecting their evening and night-time needs (NMS 7)

- ensure all medications are stored safely and are in their packaging, detailing the name of the medication and the dose (NMS 15)
- introduce a policy for the use of the sick room, aimed at preventing the risk of the spread of infection by detailing the dedicated use of the toilet facilities when the room is occupied, the cleaning of the room and the management of soiled linen (NMS 48)
- ensure that boarders and their parents are informed of how they can contact Ofsted regarding any complaint concerning their welfare or to discuss any problems with the boarding provision (NMS 5 & 19)
- undertake a risk assessment for the non restricted window access in 'Daisy' dormitory and in conjunction with the local fire authority, review the need for the evacuation exit point. In addition, ensure staff know when children are accessing external fire escapes (NMS 47)
- ensure records are maintained to reflect a robust recruitment procedure and to reflect the induction, supervision and appraisal of staff (NMS 38 & 34)
- ensure the toilet and washing facilities used by the boarders are upgraded to provide the appropriate number of toilets with washbasins, as well as showers that can be separated (NMS 44)
- ensure incidents, behaviour management, complaints, accidents and risk assessments for boarding are monitored at least twice a term, whereby concentrations or trends are noted and action taken (NMS 23).