

Padworth College

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Merryl Wahogo
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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

Padworth College is set in an 18th century listed building, in its own extensive grounds, in Berkshire. Public transport is not readily accessible but students are taken in Padworth's own vehicles to the nearest stations when they want to travel. Reading is the nearest town, and it is only 45 minutes by road from Heathrow and by rail from London.

There is no uniform, all members of the school community are known by their first names, and rules are kept to the necessary minimum for a residential community.

The school accommodates approximately 80 boys and girls aged 14 to 23 years. There are three accommodation wings. One is in the main house and two have been built more recently. Accommodation is mainly in single rooms with some boys sharing in the main house.

Summary

This was the three yearly announced key inspection. A great deal of the provision is good and many students obviously enjoy their time at Padworth. There are some significant difficulties in relation to maintenance arising from the fact that this is a listed building, and management do their best in the circumstances. Although outcomes for students are generally good, the satisfactory ratings arise out of a number of risks created by the failure to meet all key standards.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The only outstanding recommendation from the last report is that management are still not keeping records of interview notes taken during the recruitment process. Staff have addressed all other recommendations, although they have not been able to eradicate all maintenance problems.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The school nurse and biology teachers pass on information promoting various aspects of health. School rules are clear about not smoking or using drugs and staff actively discourage pupils from developing any sexual relationships.

The school nurse has been in post many years and has developed good relationships with college staff as well as the local GP. The latter reports that she gives an excellent standard of care to the students, who can ask her to book appointments at the surgery. Remarkably few students have health problems, however, health plans, for those that do, contain all the necessary information. The nurse keeps up her training and registration through her contacts with other school nurses. She attends weekly pastoral meetings, ensuring good communication with boarding staff.

The nurse keeps all medication and medical records secure in her office. She also keeps an accurate record of the administration of all prescribed medication and homely remedies. The college makes proper provision for the possibility of any health epidemics.

Staff mostly require students who wake up with minor illnesses, to wash, dress and attend registration before returning to their beds or to sick bay, if necessary. Some students dislike this, saying that they know when they are so ill they should stay in bed. Additionally, some staff are more likely than others to allow students to remain in bed. This poses the risk that young people may feel coerced into going into lessons when in fact they need to recover in bed.

Menus are very varied and reflect the international nature of the school. Additionally, there is an international evening once a year, when those students who wish to do so, cook traditional foods and other students can sample these. There are hot and cold alternatives at every meal, as well as at least one vegetarian option. Students generally think the standard and amount of food is high, though a common complaint is that there is too much fat or oil. Student representatives convey the views of their peers to the catering staff, at food committee meetings. Students generally report that staff are responsive to those views. Additionally, any allergies or other dietary needs are well catered for. When students have seen a menu and do not like anything on it, they can cook for themselves if they wish, in the student kitchen.

The dining area is spacious and kept meticulously clean and there is a water cooler, as well as juice, available. Catering staff are appropriately trained and qualified and follow good food hygiene procedures. Whilst catering staff are now completing the bronze Healthy School Award, and have a three star hygiene certificate, the college has not acted on all the requirements from the last Environmental Health inspection. This poses the risk that standards or safety cannot be maintained.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Students report virtually no bullying at Padworth and there are robust policies and procedures in place to deal with it, should it occur.

There is a designated member of staff for child protection, who is clearly known to have this responsibility by students and staff alike. She provides training to other staff, both individually and in groups, and has responsibility for updating the child protection policy. Some guidance is not explicitly stated, which poses the risk that staff can make mistakes. Ancillary staff are not fully trained in child protection, which creates the risk that they may not know how to deal with a disclosure properly. Nevertheless, ancillary staff are aware of who the designated person is for child protection. Pastoral staff demonstrate genuine concern for the wellbeing of the young people and are mostly well aware of policies and procedures.

Ancillary staff are clear about ensuring that anyone on site, whom they do not recognise, is directed to either a particular member of staff or the college office. Maintenance staff also understand the need to maximise use of lesson times for any maintenance that is required in bedrooms.

Essentially, behaviour at Padworth is of a high standard. Following increasing discipline problems last year, however, new rules have been introduced this academic year. Not all students were clear about these new rules. Teaching staff can give detentions, but these may then have to be supervised by boarding staff because of part time working amongst teachers. This contributes to extremely long working hours for boarding staff.

The complaints policy and procedures are thorough and staff follow them well. There has only been one complaint this year and it is being properly addressed by the college.

Padworth has a student leader system, rather like a prefect system. Staff have written a clearly set out and entirely appropriate document, outlining the roles and responsibilities of student leaders, which is appreciated by the relevant students. There is an induction into this role, held at the beginning of the academic year.

The head of boarding keeps a log of all fire drills and other fire equipment testing. Staff conduct regular fire drills, at different times of day and night and so boarders are well aware of evacuation procedures. Some boys reported others locking them into their rooms just before a fire drill, and as a result these locks have been removed.

The college runs residential schools at Easter and during the summer. These schools make use of many of the same staff and all the facilities, but the staff to student ratio is much higher because they cater for much younger students. They follow the same recruitment procedures, and as one particular master has been in charge of the scheme for many years, it operates smoothly, ensuring the safety of participating students.

There is some discussion as to whether staff always wait to enter bedrooms, after they have knocked. Whilst some students complain that this doesn't always happen, staff claim that when students are playing loud music they do not always hear the knock. Certainly, written guidance advises staff to 'Wait a few seconds for a response, before entering'. Students all report complete privacy in relation to bathing areas.

Staff are good at protecting students' personal privacy. All staff understand the need to ensure that anyone on the premises whom they do not recognise, should be assisted to the office, or to find a particular member of staff. Recruitment procedures ensure that no staff begin work without CRB checks and most other checks are pursued properly. However, the recruitment team do not always record explanations of gaps in CVs and do not keep a record of staff interviews.

The buildings are generally free from safety hazards, although there is a hole under the floor covering in the laundry room. This presents a risk of someone injuring themselves.

Staff are also good at maximising the chances that boarders are kept safe within their accommodation. Students confirm that staff are constantly reminding them to keep the external doors, which are on a keypad system, locked. Staff express some concern that there is a footpath around the grounds, giving public right of way. Staff patrol this area at night and do not report any incidents of intrusion, but some feel that the situation puts them under undue stress.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The lack of sufficient activities, particularly at the weekends in the winter, is a major bone of contention with students and their parents. Staff are well aware of the problem and are making real efforts to address it. They, and the students, are somewhat mystified by students' failure to sign up for new activities provided by staff. Students have now suggested improved locations for notices offering such activities. Sports activities are particularly limited, although, during the week, staff have made football, basketball and swimming available.

Students report very good personal support from both boarding and teaching staff. Almost all students say they can talk to a member of staff if they have a problem. Padworth has appointed someone to be an independent 'listener' and she goes to significant lengths to make herself known to students. Before arriving at Padworth, students fill in a form identifying how their religious and cultural needs should be met and the vast majority of students report that Padworth supports them accordingly. Given the complexity of the process, as students come from every continent and a vast number of countries, Padworth does very well. Students really value the opportunity to learn from people from other nations and cultures.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Padworth does well in relation to consulting students. Staff consult boarders in a variety of ways. There are weekly boarders' meetings, led by the head of boarding, as well as a school council and a food committee, on which boarders are represented.

Staff are introducing Skype in the house office to allow students to make private calls home, since the landlines provide only one private booth, in the main house. There have been problems with the wireless internet connections, which have bothered the students greatly, but when this is working students can email on their laptops. The senior management team have made real efforts to get the connection problems sorted out.

Staff report using a 'buddy system' to help newcomers settle in. It was not entirely workable this academic year because of the proportion of new students to old, but those who did have a buddy said it was very useful. Students value the 'welcome supper' when they first arrive, which gives them a special way to begin to get to know each other.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Staff do all they can to protect students' property. All students are normally able to lock their bedroom doors when they leave the room. Additionally, they are able to obtain small safes in which to keep valuables and staff encourage them to hand in any large amounts of money for safe keeping. There is a member of staff who helps pupils manage their bank accounts.

Since Padworth is a listed building there are serious constraints on the management's ability to respond when complaints are made about rooms being too cold. Nevertheless, the relevant member of staff informs the man responsible for maintenance, and he does his best.

Unfortunately, certain bedrooms and living areas still tend to be rather cold, but staff do monitor this. Equally, when students on some floors have long showers or all take their showers over a short period, others tend to find that there is not enough hot water for them.

Boarding staff manage the accommodation well. Boys and girls do not sleep in the same units and are not allowed to visit either. Most bedrooms contain a work desk, as well as other necessary furniture. Whilst students launder their clothes, staff launder bedding on a weekly basis. Those students who do share bedrooms, can choose to move should they not get on with the other young person in their room.

Other than the problem of insufficient hot water, students report no problems in relation to washing and toilet facilities. Certainly, there is adequate provision in all the units.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff create formal, as well as informal, opportunities for young people to learn about each other's cultures, and celebrate their own. There is a certain limit to how much attention can be paid to this process, inherent in the fact that most parents wish their children to be better acquainted with English culture as well as the English language. The small group of boarding staff also come from a variety of different countries. There are no students with significant impairments and so this aspect is impossible to judge.

Parents and students can learn about the principles and practice of boarding from the relevant handbooks, which are very detailed.

There are no significant discrepancies between the boys' and girls' boarding areas as Padworth has invested in refurbishment of the boys' areas. Both boys' and girls' boarding areas are subdivided into junior and senior sections.

Students do not normally engage in high risk activities. The Bursar is responsible for general risk assessments, but has not ensured these are regularly reviewed. There is also no risk assessment for the premises as a whole, as opposed to for the buildings. These factors pose a risk that dangers may be overlooked and students or staff come to harm as a result. This has not happened as yet.

Students confirm that they are always supervised, if they are under 16, when they are off the school site. When they have a trip to Reading town centre, for example, they must remain in groups of three and meet up with the member of staff at regular intervals. They are also able to contact the staff member on mobile phones.

Whilst Padworth does give fairly thorough job descriptions to boarding staff, not every area covered by the standards is included. There are also contentious issues about the demands made on boarding staff, who do not have teaching responsibilities, to cover school based activities. This creates the risk that staff may be resentful and overworked and might leave sooner than would have otherwise been the case. Equally, opportunities for experienced staff to update their boarding practice through training, other than in relation to child protection, are limited.

The head of boarding conducts regular assessments of the performance of boarding staff. All staff describe being spoken to about child protection as part of their induction. They also report receiving copies of the school's child protection policy and procedures and information about boarding school minimum standards. Staff are also very positive about the level of informal supervision available to them and the help they receive from the Head of Boarding.

Padworth has created almost all the policies recommended in the standards.

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 the Bursar prioritises carrying out the requirements made in the last Environmental Health report (NMS 24)
- ensure staff practice is consistent for calling the nurse when a student wakes up feeling ill (NMS 15)
- keep copies of interview notes and gaps in CVs, when recruiting new staff (NMS 38)
- ensure that all guidance, relating to child protection, is written into policies and procedures (NMS 3)
- ensure that all ancillary staff receive child protection training (NMS 3)
- ensure that all necessary risk assessments in-school situations are carried out and reviewed annually (NMS 29)
- improve communication with students about access to locally available activities and consider increasing spending on on-site leisure activities (NMS 11)
- consider whether a system can be created to ensure that all young people can get a hot shower (NMS 44)
- consider creating regular meetings between the Principal, the Head of Boarding and the Bursar (NMS 8)
- ensure that job descriptions contain all necessary information (NMS 34)
- devise a means of ensuring that boarding staff are not overworked (NMS 34)