

Dean Close School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Caroline Jones / Michael Williams
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Date of last inspection	19 October 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

Dean Close Senior School is a co-educational boarding school providing care and education for a total of 296 boarders (including 35 flexi boarders). It has a total of 203 day pupils. The school operates within a Christian family ethos and aims to provide a framework for pupils to learn to live as a community. Boarding accommodation is arranged across five boarding houses in separate buildings across the school site. Boarders are full boarders, although it is possible for some day pupils to board flexibly under certain circumstances. The school also takes boarders from overseas and there is a designated team of staff who support the overseas scholars. Special arrangements for assistance with language and guardians are in place. The school is situated quite close to the centre of Cheltenham in extensive private grounds. It has good access to local transport networks, leisure facilities and community amenities.

Summary

This key inspection of boarding at the school was announced so that an inspection programme could be developed and comments from boarding scholars and their families obtained. All of the key national minimum standards for boarding schools applicable to the school were inspected. The inspection team, in addition to the lead inspector, included two Ofsted inspectors and a boarding school additional inspector. The school remains satisfactory with some good outcomes for boarding scholars during a period of transition. As reported generally by boarding scholars and their parents 'the school has a strong pastoral focus' and 'offers a range of optional and organised activities and experiences'. Housemasters and mistresses are key figures in the boarding houses and are generally well liked by scholars being described as 'the best', 'cool' and 'amazing' in questionnaires. Systems of support for all scholars are a strength of the school. Most boarding scholars identified several different staff including tutors, housemasters, matrons, chaplaincy staff and the counsellor who they would go to for help. Scholars from overseas receive good support and the school is good at knowing about and meeting different cultural needs. The most significant shortcoming of the school is its failure to protect scholars when appointing new staff. In addition there remain concerns from the previous inspection about care of boarders when they are ill, supervision of matrons and physical differences between houses including all scholars having a secure place for valuables. Other recommendations from this inspection include updating the child protection procedure, making the definition of bullying clear, having sufficient staff on duty in boarding house particularly in the mornings and following through planned changes of induction and choice of tutors for new scholars in the sixth form. The school has itself identified most of these areas for attention and has actions planned to address shortcomings. The judgements in this report have been made using new bench marking guidance that Ofsted implemented on 1 April 2008. Information about this guidance can be found on the Ofsted website. The new basis for making judgments is not directly comparable with that used previously.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were 13 recommendations made at the last inspection of which eight were identified as serious welfare concerns. The school has taken action to protect boarding scholars from the risk of fire and intruders. The food provided to scholars has continued to improve. Adults living

within boarding houses who are not employed by the school have written contracts. The school complaints procedure is included in information to parents. Some actions to protect boarders who are sick and unwell have been implemented. However, there are outstanding actions in the arrangements for care of ill boarders and record keeping. Significant shortfalls were found in staff recruitment procedures. The school has continued to undertake improvements to the boarding accommodation, however, significant differences in standards between houses remain. A system for regular supervision and support for matrons is not fully developed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The school promotes the health of all its scholars through a comprehensive and age appropriate personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme which includes external speakers. This programme is supported by the medical centre which has a range of information available and can assist individuals. The school chaplaincy staff also has a role in discussion of PSHE topics with individual scholars and in groups. The school is clear in its responses to alcohol, smoking and illegal substance abuse by boarders and generally responds firmly when any instances are reported. Scholars are generally well cared for when they are unwell. The school has taken action following the last pharmacist inspection recommendations, although some parts have only been put in place recently. There are instances of very good multi agency working by the school and other agencies. Scholars who are unwell are supported to remain at, or return to school. The medical centre can be very busy and is not always able to devote time to scholars who have non-medical needs. The school recognises that there are shortcomings in existing health care arrangements and has instigated its own review. The health centre facilities are restricted. Scholars' confidentiality can be compromised when consulting with medical centre staff and, privacy is very limited when scholars need to stay in the medical centre. There are difficulties in caring for larger numbers of boarders who are unwell at the same time. The medical centre is not able to care for boarders overnight and generally scholars are not able to stay in their boarding houses during the day if they are unwell. Record keeping and communication between boarding house staff and the medical centre is variable and there are shortcomings in communication with the sports centre staff, all of which place scholars' health at risk. Scholars have access to good quality catering, providing a wide range of options and opportunity for a balanced diet. Responses from scholars, questionnaires and discussion confirm that they are generally satisfied with the school food; with noticeable improvements following a catering review which included additional money allocated for some meals. Scholars with special dietary requirements confirm that these are accommodated, including the availability of halal meats. Scholars are able to comment about the food either directly with the new catering manager or via house staff. All main meals are taken in the school dining hall which provides a pleasant and spacious environment. Boarding scholars have access to additional food in their boarding houses which are supplied three times a week with fruit, bread, 'spreads' and milk. The school has been awarded four out of five stars as a result of a recent Environmental Services inspection of the kitchens.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Scholars generally reported that there was no bullying at the school. Where any instance of bullying is reported by a scholar action is promptly taken to deal with the incident. There is written information for all scholars in handbooks. Bullying is a regular topic in personal, social

and health education lessons and staff have access to procedures on managing any reported instances of bullying. Where scholars reported any bullying it usually related to behaviour seen by others as 'banter' or 'respect', expected by scholars from others younger than them. However, some pupils are more sensitive to such behaviour and this should be recognised and acted on. Scholars are protected by the school from abuse. The schools designated Child Protection Officer is aware of events where outside agencies need to be notified or involved. The school has a child protection procedure. However, it is not sufficiently comprehensive and following external review needs to be revised and updated. Staff have received some information and training about child protection, including a reminder flyer with their pay slips. The school Child Protection Officer plans to increase the detail of training for all staff, including non-teaching staff. Scholars are generally very well behaved. They follow the school 'Code of Conduct' to behave with consideration and mutual respect towards others. Scholars are encouraged and rewarded for good behaviour as well as academic achievement. The school's behaviour expectations of scholars is clearly recorded for them, their families and staff. Disciplinary rules are consistently applied with records kept of major and minor breaches and the resulting sanction. Scholars generally report that punishments are fair and appropriate to the offence. Boarding scholars are protected from the risk of fire. Fire drills are held regularly in boarding houses, including drills at night. Fire alarms and fire safety equipment are routinely tested. A central log has been established for all fire tests to be recorded, although it is not yet a complete record. Boarders' accommodation was inspected by the Fire Service in June 2008. The advisory recommendation made following this visit resulted in action plans being drawn up and work is well under way to attend to points noted. Fire safety risk assessments have recently been reviewed for all boarding houses. Boarding scholars generally reported that their privacy is respected. Occasional instances were reported by scholars of some house staff intruding when they fail to knock on the bedroom door before entering. There are significant shortcomings in the recruitment of new staff. There are different personnel involved with the recruitment of academic and other staff, with gaps in the checks of both groups of staff. The sample of recruitment records revealed the following omissions: appointments made without references being taken up, no evidence of direct contact with referees to verify the reference, no written records of the outcome of interviews, evidence missing of relevant qualifications being checked, appointments made without previous employment history provided, recorded explanations missing for gaps in employment history, failure to check with previous employers involving work with children. The school has failed to follow the Department for Children, Schools and Families 'Safer Recruiting in Schools' guidance; in some cases with Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks submitted after employment has commenced. There was no evidence of the outcome of List 99 checks made prior to CRB clearance being received. The school has identified a need to improve recruitment practice and is in the process of appointing a Human Resources manager. Boarding scholars are protected from unsupervised contact at school with adults not recruited or checked by the school. Contractors working in boarding houses are accompanied or supervised by school maintenance staff if boarders are present. School staff routinely challenge any unknown people seen in any part of the school campus. Resident staff follow guidance in their Code of Conduct covering visitors to boarding accommodation. The school has written agreements with adult family members of resident staff who live in school accommodation, who are not themselves employed by the school. Boarding accommodation is suitably secure from public intrusion. External doors to boarding houses are all fitted with coded locks, with a system for regular and frequent changes of the code. Gates to the school site are closed and locked at night. Surveillance cameras are sited around the campus grounds and security staff patrol the grounds. Whilst there is some public access to some parts of the

school, including the theatre and swimming pool, this does not encroach on any boarding accommodation. Scholars are protected from safety hazards. The school has a comprehensive health and safety policy. A range of risk assessments are available covering buildings, activities and grounds. Processes are in hand for these to be available electronically to improve access, monitoring and thus reduce risks to boarders. All boarding houses have recently had health and safety audits.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Scholars are able to identify a range of people at the school who they can turn to for personal guidance or with a personal problem. All scholars have a designated tutor or tutor group, and for scholars in the first three years their tutors undertake regular duties in their boarding houses. As stated by one boarding scholar 'you can speak to tutor about anything'. Boarding scholars know about people unconnected with the school, such as a counsellor and independent listener, who they can also speak to. Plans are in hand to change the way that tutors are allocated for scholars in the lower sixth year, which will allow new scholars to the school to be able to make a more informed choice. The school ethos is of recognising and valuing the difference of each individual. All scholars are encouraged to show respect for others and take part in service in the community. This foundation ensures that generally boarders do not experience discrimination whilst at the school. Whilst Dean Close has a Christian foundation and tradition, students of other faiths are accepted and supported to follow their own beliefs. Scholars from a number of different countries attend the school and are a significant percentage of the boarding population. Educational support is provided through the English as an Additional Language department. Scholars' cultural dietary needs are met by the kitchen which offers wide choices at all meal times; these include a 'noodle bar' at supper time, holding theme events and accommodating special diets. The school also support integration and equal opportunities by encouraging debate and discussion about diversity and historic instances of discrimination, providing guidance information for staff and recognising a wide range of scholars' contributions and achievements.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Scholars identified a number of different ways in which they can contribute to the operation of boarding at Dean Close including via their tutors and tutor groups, talking to their house master/mistress or contacting a member of senior staff. In boarding houses, with slight individual variations, boarders meetings with house staff and/or prefects can lead to changes in the house or comments being taken further. Scholars' interventions have resulted in additional games equipment being provided, changes to tutor group sizes and different arrangements for house supplies. Scholars' views are occasionally sought through surveys. The school is considering introducing a School Council. Scholars are able to maintain private contact with families and friends. Personal mobile phones are the preferred means of communication for most scholars. There are payphones available in boarding houses, however, in one house its location offers little privacy to the user. All scholars have school email addresses and access to computers in their boarding houses. Parents of boarders are generally satisfied with their communication with the school and houses. New scholars reported variations in their experience of support when arriving and settling at the school. There are transition opportunities for pupils moving from Dean Close Preparatory School, taster days and early arrival for new scholars at the

beginning of the school year. New scholars in Year 4 and the sixth form have handbooks, although it is reported that they are to be reviewed. New boarders were positive about receiving personal communication from other boarders prior to arrival. The system of 'shadows' by fellow students is very dependent on the commitment of the experienced boarder. International students joining the school reported experiencing more difficulties with settling in and struggling to become familiar with new routines, rules and expectations.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Scholars are able to keep their belongings safe in most boarding houses. Most scholars are either able to lock their room, a drawer or cupboard or have a lockable tuck box. Boarding scholars are all encouraged to deposit larger amounts of money in 'house banks' and to lock away their valuables. Scholars reported some instances of valuables, personal items and money being taken in some houses. Where there had been multiple instances or particularly valuable items being taken some house staff have involved the Police; however, this is not consistent practice in all houses. One boarding house has locks on room doors planned but they are yet to be fitted. Scholars are generally satisfied with their boarding house accommodation, although there is significant variation in standards between the houses. Two houses have modern and high quality accommodation whilst the other three have had varying amounts of refurbishment and improvement. Boarders' accommodation is scheduled for regular re-decoration and re-carpeting, however, there is no overall programme for improvements in place. The standard of cleanliness in boarding accommodation is generally satisfactory. However, issues with ventilation layout and drainage of bathrooms in some houses affect standards of cleanliness. The adequacy of bathroom facilities is an issue in three houses. Sleeping accommodation is satisfactory. Scholars share dormitories with four or six others before progressing to two person and single rooms as they move up the school. Scholars have kitchen facilities in their boarding houses so that they can prepare snacks and drinks for themselves, these facilities vary in size and quality between the boarding houses. Boarding scholars appreciate additional common room space where it has been provided in houses allowing boarders of different ages separate spaces. This is not available in all boarding houses. There are no scholars placed in lodgings by the school.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

All scholars and their families receive a range of information about the school, including details of the principles and aims of the school. Each boarding house provides specific details for boarders and their families giving comprehensive information. The statements provided in the school documentation accurately reflect the operation of the school and boarding houses. Dean Close School is in a period of transition. The school has an acting Headmaster and major changes of the school senior management team are planned. Monitoring and accessibility of the school trustees has increased during this time. The school continues to operate effectively during this time with the safety and welfare of all scholars being maintained. However, the extended period of transition is unsettling and there are areas where this can lead to some confusion about roles and responsibilities for boarders' welfare. The school has systems for senior members of staff to monitor records of risk assessments, major punishments, complaints and accidents; so that any issues requiring action can be identified. Some records, such as those kept by the Estates Bursar, are being maintained electronically. Changes, including maintaining other

records, electronically are being developed by the school. Boarding scholars are all familiar with the staff who are responsible for them outside teaching time. Scholars know the house rotas and which staff are on duty, including house tutors, each day. The school is in the process of reviewing house staffing levels in particular the availability of matrons in the boarding houses. Staff undertaking duties, most of whom are also part of the academic staff, are clear about their roles and responsibilities when in the boarding houses. Training for academic staff is included within the schools' programme of staff training. House masters, mistresses and matrons have access to additional specific training opportunities. The school has a staff handbook and a range of policies and procedures to guide staff. A programme for supervision or appraisal of matrons is not yet fully established. The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school accepts scholars from many different countries and cultures. It has provided staff with written information about cultural differences. Comments from scholars and observation confirm that most scholars 'feel part of the Dean Close community'. The opportunities and arrangements for girls and boys at the school are generally similar. Initiatives to encourage scholars from minority groups such as in different sports activities and inter-house events are supporting increased integration.

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 school maintains accurate and complete records of all medicines received and first aid administered for all boarding scholars (nms 15)
- make suitable arrangements for boarders to be cared for when they are unwell (nms 16)
- ensure definitions of bullying are clear and understood by staff and all boarding scholars (nms 2)
- undertake amendments to the school child protection policy in line with recommendations from the Independent Schools Inspectorate (nms 3)
- ensure recruitment records for new staff and volunteers, who will work with boarding scholars, include evidence of all checks listed in standard 38.2
- ensure planned changes in arrangements for selecting tutors for new sixth form scholars and improvements to induction for new scholars from overseas are undertaken (nms 21)
- ensure that all boarding scholars have a secure place to keep personal possessions (nms 22)
- identify steps to achieve parity in the quality of accommodation available for boarding scholars, with particular attention to bathroom facilities (nms 44)

- ensure sufficient supervision of boarding scholars, particularly during the mornings and when scholars are unwell (nms 31)