

St Catherine's School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC013935
Inspection date	25 September 2009
Inspector	Kerry Fell
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	18 October 2004

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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

The school is a Church of England school that was founded in 1885. The school is made up of a preparatory school, and a senior day and boarding school for girls from four to 18 years of age.

The school offers full, weekly and flexi boarding to students between year 7 (Upper III) and year 13 (Upper VI).

The school is situated in extensive grounds in a village location, with easy access to the county town and rail and road links to London and Portsmouth.

Summary

All key national minimum standards for boarding schools were assessed at this full announced inspection. Recommendations made at the last inspection were also reviewed.

This is a good school, that provides very good support to boarders when they are new to the school. Boarders are supported to develop their skills and interests through an extensive programme of activities and opportunities.

Boarders' health needs are supported by the medical centre. However, the manner in which medication administration records are kept do not meet current best practice guidance. Some boarders are not fully supported due to the lack of formal welfare plans. The school provides a wide variety of good quality meals.

Boarders are safeguarded by the school's procedures with regard to countering bullying which staff understand well, and they do not report bullying as a concern at the school.

Boarders report they understand the school's rules, sanctions and rewards. Boarding logs demonstrate that few sanctions are actually given and when used are not onerous.

Boarders know how to raise concerns, and are supported by the range of people that they can talk to. Boarders feel that they are heard, and this is supported by the minutes of the school and boarding council meetings.

The school has developed a strong focus on health and safety since the last inspection, and the estates team are a credit to the school.

Boarders are supported by staff who understand their roles and responsibilities, however not all staff have had Criminal Records Bureau checks completed on them prior to commencing work.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school continues to grow and develop. Steps have been taken to meet recommendations made at the last inspection. Action is also taken to meet requests made by the students.

Housemistresses are trained to administer medication at the local health centre, and ancillary staff are trained in the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH).

The school's estates team is well organised and a credit to the school. Staff and students confirm that maintenance issues are responded to promptly. Risk assessment and regulatory checks are well managed and records are kept well. Signage has been put over hot water and drinking water outlets around the boarding houses, and hot drinking water is now provided by specific machines in common rooms, rather than by portable urns. The school has fitted window restrictors throughout the boarding houses, and students have to sign a form each term to confirm that they are in place and working. A programme of window replacement is in place. The school's swimming pool policy and maintenance has been reviewed to comply with the Healthy and Safety Executive's guidance.

The school has an excellent programme of induction for boarders especially for boarders from overseas. The school has taken proactive steps to promote equality and diversity, and the new senior school policy on integration will be put in place this school year. Boarders do not raise concerns about relationships with staff, and staff are very clear about their roles and responsibilities.

The handbooks for students and parents have been updated and now include information on how parents can complain, and how to obtain a copy of the school's complaints procedure. The school has not received any formal complaints.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Personal Health and Social Education (PHSE) is delivered through a PHSE programme, which addresses all the key areas which is reinforced by outside speakers. The school takes a zero tolerance approach to smoking, alcohol and drugs within school, and staff state that there are no signs of smoking, drinking or drug taking at the school. This is supported by the school's very good health and sex education policy, and drugs policy.

The school provides good medical and health support. The medical centre is staffed throughout the day and a nurse is on call out of hours. Four registered nurses are employed by the school, and the school doctor attends twice a week. Most boarders are registered with the school doctor but some living locally retain their own doctors. All of the boarding staff are trained in first aid and the housemistresses liaise closely with the medical centre. Boarders are able to access dental and optical treatment. Boarders who are unwell stay in the medical centre during the day, and if necessary with the on call nurse overnight.

The boarding staff support boarders suffering from homesickness and boarders are able to be referred to the counsellor if appropriate

Staff follow sound medication administration procedures, and housemistresses are trained in the administration of homely remedies at the local surgery. This is supported by an instruction sheet. Written parental permission is sought for the provision of household remedies, surgical treatment, anaesthetic and blood transfusions. The nursing staff have access to the school doctor for guidance and consultation. However record keeping of medication administered does not fully protect boarders and does not meet current best practice guidelines. Medication administration records are kept on loose sheets, or in a notebook, however these are not easy

to read and unexplained gaps and comments are seen in these records. There is also a lack of clarity about the monitoring of the medical records.

A basic medical record is held on cards in the medical centre. All other information is held on the main school file, or shared via the school's internal computer network. A medical policy, first aid policy and a procedure for the medical welfare of boarders are in place. Health information is shared with staff who need to know, for example, major allergies or illnesses such as asthma. The learning support coordinator also shares information with staff where students have reports from an educational psychologist or have specific learning support needs. Staff complete health care plans for boarders with specific medical conditions for example, allergies, diabetes and asthma, and these are held in the staff room, boarding house and medical centre along with any emergency medication. However, specific welfare plans are not completed. Welfare needs are discussed and recorded during boarding and school housemistress meetings, and within parent student discussion forms that are held on the boarder's file. Although the current system is identifying health and personal problems, the manner in which this information is being held does not provide a single comprehensive record of boarders' specific welfare needs and how the school will support the boarder, or meet the identified need.

Outside contractors provide the catering services at the school. All catering staff have food handling and health and safety training and certificates for these were seen. Good quality and balanced meals are provided and on a four week menu cycle. There is a wide choice of hot and cold options, which boarders can combine. A vegetarian option is always available as well as a varied salad bar. Boarders state that they do not like supper as much as other meals, and some concerns were raised about food running out late in the sittings and break times. However, sufficient food was available for boarders throughout the inspection, and fresh fruit and snacks are available at all times.

The catering manager goes to considerable lengths to satisfy pupils. Menus are sent home and can be returned highlighted to identify pupils' preferences. There is a food committee with staff and students, which meets twice a year. Boarders' views are taken into account. Boarders who have special dietary needs are served at a designated counter by designated staff. The kitchen provides meals linked to the national days of boarders.

There are no outstanding recommendations from the Environmental Health Service. The catering manager said that there has been a considerable improvement in kitchen equipment since the last inspection. There is also a very efficient laundry system for younger boarders and sixth form boarders are supported to do their own laundry.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school is proactive in its approach to bullying and operates a 'no blame' policy. Staff are aware of the school's policy and demonstrate how they have used this approach. Boarding house logs support this, and evidence that staff take a proactive approach to reported incidents of bullying or friendship issues. Boarders do not complain of being bullied, and do not feel that bullying takes place at the school.

Staff are trained and conversant in the school's child protection procedures. The school's updated child protection policy is very detailed and strongly linked to legislation. The head of

boarding also provides training to the senior boarders, who demonstrated a strong understanding of what to do if a younger boarder disclosed an incident of abuse to them.

The school keeps records of all safeguarding concerns, contact with the local authority, and any referrals to the local safeguarding board. A good approach is taken to child protection concerns, although the school has not always had a helpful response from the local safeguarding board. A policy is in place with regard to what to do if a boarder is missing.

Boarders know what the school's rules, rewards and sanctions are, even though there is no specific list of boarding sanctions. A clear whole school sanctioning and rewards policy is in place, which is made available to both students and parents via the handbooks and the school's website. Boarders' views on the school rules, raised in questionnaires, have already been discussed with the school by the school council. Sanction logs demonstrate that housemistresses take responsibility for giving boarding sanctions, but very few are given. Boarding sanctions are not onerous.

Staff are provided with guidelines on the restraint of pupils and use of force in the code of conduct and this is made available within the parents' handbook. The most recently updated procedure includes references to the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and Ofsted.

Where parents raise informal complaints that cannot be resolved by housemistresses or other staff, these are referred on to the head teacher, who in most cases invites the complainant to meet with them. Records of these meetings are held on the student's main file. A letter to appraise the outcome of the meeting is sent to the complainant, which advises them of the formal route if they are not satisfied with the outcome. The headteacher holds a log of complaints, which only contained a small number of complaints that related to day pupils. The chairman of the governors confirmed that no formal complaints had been made to the school or the governors.

Boarders feel that they are listened to and know how to make complaints, and those met stated that other than raising maintenance issues, they had not made any complaints. A complaints log is available in the sixth form boarding house and complaint sheets are on the notice boards in the junior boarding houses. Issues raised with inspectors during the inspection had already been raised with the school via the complaints sheets, the boarding council, or general discussion with staff.

Boarders can take on roles of responsibility and leadership. Boarders do not find these roles onerous, and are proud to do so. Although it is noted that a small number of boarders stated that they felt under pressure as they have a lot of responsibility in addition to their academic studies and extra curricular activities.

Sixth form boarders have the opportunity to be senior boarders. They describe their role as almost being a 'big sister' for the younger boarders. These students are very approachable, and they confirmed that they are given guidance on child protection. In discussions the boarders described preparing activities and events for the younger boarders, for example a recent games evening, as being a lot of fun.

Boarders are protected by the school's approach to health and safety. The estates and maintenance team's approach to health and safety is highly robust and organised. Records are well maintained and easily accessible. Risk assessments and record keeping is thorough.

Reporting systems for breakages and damages work well, and the inspectors were advised that the staff undertake a walk through each day to do a visual check on the school. The school's maintenance and ancillary team is a credit to them and are dedicated to the school as an employer. Some staff had worked at the school for 30 years and had family members that worked at the school before them.

A thorough approach is taken to fire safety. The school works closely with the fire officer and they will now not be revisited for three years until April 2010. The files held with regard to fire precautions are neat and orderly and well managed. All fire safety recommendations were complied with at the last fire officer's visit.

Records of evacuation demonstrate that these take place regularly and include night time evacuations. Housemistresses and boarders confirmed this. Fire safety equipment and lighting is regularly checked, and routes are clearly marked.

The school's evacuation plan is very detailed and clear. The procedures are split into how staff are to respond at different times of the day and where registers etc, are to be found during the evacuation. Staff roles are very clear within this document. The local senior fire officer or the fire team come into the school to raise awareness of fire safety.

The school plans high risk and off site activities very well. Evidence of forms that need to be completed by staff were provided to the inspectors. One member of staff oversees the risk assessment process for all activities, which provides for good quality and consistency.

The programme for the year 8 heritage week trip to Manchester was highly detailed and included risk assessments sought directly from the centres that the students would be visiting. The lead member of staff had then reviewed these and produced an easy to use overview of the risks for the whole week. This demonstrated a thorough and well thought out approach to safeguarding the students on the trip.

No concerns were raised during this inspection about the maintenance of privacy. Staff confirm that they are advised about monitoring students appropriately and about maintaining appropriate boundaries. Logs of meetings with gap students demonstrate that housemistresses discuss with them how not to disturb the students when monitoring them. Boarding logs also demonstrate that staff tackle issues of privacy when students are bathing and showering.

Restrictors are fitted to windows throughout the boarding areas, and the estates team asks that students sign to confirm that the restrictors are fitted. There is a rolling programme to replace all windows with restricted unit windows.

Relevant checks are undertaken with regard to water safety, gas safety, and portable appliance testing. The swimming pool is maintained well, and safety checks are completed and recorded appropriately.

The school has a health and safety committee which meets every term. A governor sits on this committee and reports to the governors' estates building committee once a term.

The school has improved its approach to recruitment following the last inspection and has completed a full audit of staff personnel files including contractors, peripatetic staff and volunteers. The review identified gaps in their files that the school had taken steps to rectify.

The headteacher was open with the inspectors and advised them at the start of the inspection that they had a boarding housemistress who they had not taken a prompt Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check on, which had now been applied for. It was noted from the member of staff's personnel file that all other checks had been completed, and an appropriate police check had been completed at the time of their appointment.

The catering team is provided by an external company. However, a catering manager is assigned to the school and they complete their own staff recruitment. It was identified that some catering staff had taken up post prior to their CRB check being received. The school confirmed that their contract with the catering company was that all staff were subject to CRB checks.

The appointment of gap year students include the same checks as for full staff members. Gap year students from overseas have had police checks completed in their countries of origin. The school knows that they will soon need to complete CRB checks on these students in advance of their arrival. The governor and the chaplain confirmed that they had been CRB checked.

The staff reference form has been updated to include clear statements as detailed in national minimum standard 38.2, with regard to the suitability of the applicant to work with children and for there to be no misstatement or omissions.

Regular school contractors are CRB checked. Other contractors are asked to provide proof of CRB checking. If not, the school will ensure that they are always escorted. All visitors are asked to sign in at reception and are given visitors' badges. All visitors to resident school staff have to be CRB checked, including their parents. Staff and pupils are trained to challenge anyone without a badge.

The school responded appropriately to a recent incident involving an intrusion by local boys onto the school grounds. The police were contacted and parents were informed about the incident. Boarders report that this was an unsettling experience. Steps have been taken to improve CCTV coverage of the school grounds, and the maintenance team undertake termly checks of security measures on doors and windows. The measures taken have improved security and helps to safeguard boarders.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school offers wonderful opportunities to boarders to develop skills and interests through the provision of a wide variety of activities and clubs. These are offered to boarders both during the week and at weekends.

Many boarders learn musical instruments and there are many bands and musical groups. There are also many sporting fixtures. In addition there are a number of activities, including ballet, street jazz, cookery, drama and mandarin which are charged for.

Boarders have an hour of free time (half an hour for boarders in year seven) each evening. Full boarders have activities organised by the boarding staff every weekend. There are trips on both Saturdays and Sundays and occasionally on Fridays as well. Weekly boarders can stay in at the weekend for trips, for example, they are all going to Thorpe Park. There are also planned socials with other schools. Senior boarders organise activities for younger boarders every Wednesday and occasional Fridays at Christmas, Halloween and the start and end of terms.

There is an activities week at the end of the year, which is compulsory for all students apart from the upper sixth form. There are a number of residential trips abroad, outward bounds in the Brecon Beacons, Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award, as well as creative arts workshops, volunteer work and a pre university week.

There is a code of practice for senior boarders for the proper use of modern technology. It covers responsible use and abuse. The policy states that emails cannot be regarded as private communication, and that the school may monitor and intercept emails. The boarders' council raise concerns that there is insufficient internet access for boarders in the lower school, because they cannot access the internet via their personal lap tops. However, it is noted that the school offers access to a large number of personal computers throughout the school.

There are a number of people to whom boarders can turn for personal guidance or with a personal problem. They can access their housemistresses, resident tutors and the head of boarding, as well as friends and parents. Senior boarders make themselves available to the younger boarders.

There is a student counsellor. Sixth form boarders have free access to the counsellor and can self refer, however younger boarders must have parental permission as they will need to pay for their sessions.

Boarders are introduced to the independent listener and are aware of how to contact them. Their contact details are displayed around the school, along with the contact details for the school counsellor and external organisations that can offer help and support. The independent listener confirms that they have not been contacted by students in the two years they have been in the role. However, they feel that the school offers students a wide range of people and has good support systems in place. The school chaplain is available for staff and students, but their role is mainly to provide religious support to the students.

If boarders have prep related problems, there are forums they can attend, such as the maths and physics forums, where they can get help.

Boarders are supported by the school's approach to equality and diversity. The school has a number of policies that relate to equality and diversity. The sixth form housemistress was able to describe a variety of ways in which the school promotes equality and diversity. All are valued equally. The school celebrates the national days of boarders, and has themed national food at meals. Boarders give talks on their homes and cultural differences. A learning support coordinator liaises with staff and provides strategies to improve English for those for whom it is not their first language. All pupils are screened for special needs but particularly for literacy problems.

Boarders are encouraged to mix with a wide variety of people, and this is promoted by the school's policy for students to change dormitories/rooms three times per year. The school displays national flags prominently on national days and gives information on the school messaging system. Maps, posters, coffee table books are provided as decoration and ready reference material in corridors, common rooms and duty rooms in each boarding house, relating to the overseas boarders within the house.

The equal opportunities policy, revised in June 2008, promotes equality for all regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation or disability. The school has the status of School with a Religious Character, which means they can give preference to a teacher sympathetic to the school's

religious principles. The governing body is responsible for overseeing the policy, and the headteacher for implementing it. The governors also monitor admissions, attainment, rewards and sanctions, parent and pupil questionnaires.

As a Church of England school, all boarders are required to attend chapel during the week and boarders on Sundays. There is also an active Christian Union. The chaplain addresses a range of cultural issues during their services and all faiths are respected. Boarders attending the school are from a range of countries, cultures and religions, however the school is clear about its Church of England ethos and the expectation that boarders attend chapel prior to admission. The school enables boarders who wish to worship outside school to do so.

Boarders have good provision for studying, boarders either have desks in their bedrooms and dormitories to study, or they have dedicated work areas.

Boarders have access to a variety of safe recreational areas in and out of school. They can access their boarding houses throughout the day. There are beautiful grounds, sports facilities, including tennis courts and a swimming pool. There are common rooms and kitchens. Boarders said they can be alone if they wish. Boarders are able to access the chapel and the Rose Garden, the field and the music block, as well as their bedrooms. The residential tutors and GAP students are clear that boarders are not allowed to access staff accommodation.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders can contribute their views to the operation of boarding, formally and informally. There is a boarders' council, with two representatives from each year group. Boarders confirm that their requests are heard, and either acted upon or given an explanation as to why action cannot be taken. This is reflected within the council minutes.

The food committee meets twice a year but boarders can email the catering manager with any requests. The eco committee meets twice a term with a representative from each year, and they focus on recycling, conservation and reducing waste. Minutes of boarder and school council demonstrate that the eco committee is active, and this was confirmed during discussions with boarders. Boarders can talk to staff directly and housemistresses confirmed that this happens. Boarders feel that they have good relationships with staff, although a small number report in questionnaires that they cannot talk to their housemistresses. Ancillary staff state that the students seem happy and relaxed, and resident tutors and boarders said that the boarding community is fun, with a very good atmosphere.

Boarders can contact parents by telephone, email and letter. There are enclosed telephone boxes available with contact numbers for Childline, the independent listener and drugs help lines. Boarders are allowed mobile phones but reception is poor. Staff phone parents if there are any concerns and always email after holidays. The school uses an effective system to contact parents called 'Clarion Call' which the school says has revolutionised contact with parents.

The school has an outstanding induction process, divided into two phases. The first focuses on welcoming the students and bonding, whilst providing all the necessary information. Students are also taken away to team build. The second phase takes place over the following few weeks and involves monitoring and ensuring that the boarders are settling in well and mixing with

students who do not share their language. Students confirmed that the process outlined in the parents' handbook is followed in practice.

The school has arrangements in place to ensure the safety of boarders when off site. Parents sign a permission form specifying this.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders are accommodated in boarding houses that are personalised, friendly and well maintained.

The main boarding house is situated over the upper floors of the main school building. The numbers of boarder's sharing bedrooms varies depending upon the age of the students. Year 7 and 8 students have the largest dormitories sharing in groups of up to six. Their dormitories are spacious and well furnished. Boarders in other year groups share dormitories of between three and four boarders. All dormitories are well furnished, personalised and decorated to a good standard. Photographs are displayed around the boarding houses, and students personalise their areas of bedrooms and dormitories. Good communal spaces are available, which includes two large common rooms with facilities including a pool table, an air hockey table and table tennis, as well as two large televisions, and piano.

The sixth form boarding house is used by day pupils as well as the boarders. It is attractively decorated and furnished, well lit and accessible to boarders with disabilities as it has ground floor bedrooms. It is bright and clean. The upper sixth form common rooms/kitchens are very well equipped, with large flat screen televisions, MP3 player facilities and comfortable sofas. A second sitting room is also available with a piano. Boarders complain about very thin walls in one part of the house and say that they can talk to each other through the walls, but they do not feel that their privacy is compromised.

The maintenance staff have a help desk, that staff email issues to. Boarders can contact the estates office directly in an emergency. All issues are logged and prioritised. The school has a rolling programme of refurbishment in place.

As bedrooms and dormitories vary in size and shape the school arranges for boarders to change rooms every term in order to promote bonding and ensure fairness. Boarders like moving around each term, saying that 'you never get stuck in a poor room.'

Some of the rooms in the main boarding house get very hot in the summer. Although the school has decided to cease using portable fans, steps have been taken to resolve this problem.

Bathing facilities are of a good quality and meet the needs of the students, any minor maintenance issues are identified promptly by the maintenance team. Changing facilities are available for the students, and sixth form boarders are able to change in their boarding house during the day.

The medical centre holds some supplies for students and can purchase personal requisites for them. The school is adjacent to a small supermarket which is used extensively by the students. All boarders, apart from those in year seven have easy access to the village. Year seven boarders

can ask staff to purchase items for them, or staff make arrangements for shopping trips to take place prior to weekend activities.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Boarders receive information about the school before they arrive. The school produces a number of good handbooks for boarders and parents. Information contained in the parents' and boarders' handbooks includes an outline of facilities and welfare support for boarders, special religious and cultural aspects of the school and relates to relevant school policies and practice. Parents and boarders also have access to information and policies on the school's website.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school provides an outstanding induction programme for boarders, especially boarders from overseas. The chaplain addresses a range of cultural issues during their services and all faiths are respected. The school has a number of policies that relate to equality and diversity and the equal opportunities policy, revised in June 2008, promotes equality for all regardless of race, religion, sexual orientation or disability.

The head of boarding monitors the boarding house logs, sanction logs and any complaints received are monitored by a member of the senior management team. The senior nurse keeps a record of accidents for staff and pupils, which is overseen by the estates manager, who holds the central copy and is responsible for reporting RIDDOR.

Boarders are well supported by staff who are themselves supported and understand their roles. There is ample supervision of boarders. The housemistresses and resident tutors live in the boarding houses and are supported by four gap year students. Staff are never on duty on their own, and rotas are available. Boarders confirmed that if they are late returning to school they can phone in to housemistresses. In the event of staff sickness in the main school, the head of boarding is always on call or the resident tutors would offer cover.

All staff spoken to confirmed that they had job descriptions and contracts and had been given clear guidance on their roles and responsibilities. Staff understood their roles well. Systems for supervision, support and appraisal are in place.

Staff state that the school is supportive about training that staff wish to undertake. All staff have child protection training every three years. Two out of the three housemistresses have completed the Boarding School Association (BSA) Boarding Management Training. Boarding staff and gap year students are supported to attend BSA courses and conferences. All other staff receive training as appropriate to their role. Boarding staff and gap year students receive a good programme of induction into their roles, that included training, a tour of the houses and an opportunity to meet the other staff.

The school produces a staff handbook that is reviewed annually, which includes a very detailed whole school policy on the conduct of staff. There are no major discrepancies in the principles and practice of boarding in the different houses, other than those which are age appropriate.

The school has a roll call system in place and boarders have to sign in and out of the boarding house. The school asks parents to sign a form giving consent for a range of things including travelling in cars with other boarders, leaving the site in free time (as appropriate) and for medical treatment. Staff are always available. Staff rotas demonstrate that appropriate cover

is provided throughout the weekend and the evenings, and on call support is available from other staff and nursing staff if needed.

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):

- review the manner in which records of medication are kept in order to meet current best practice guidance (NMS 15)
- formalise the approach to managing welfare and health needs in line with national minimum standard 17.2 (NMS 17)
- ensure that the recruitment of all staff and volunteers who work with boarders includes checks through the Criminal Records Bureau checking system (NMS 38).