

St Joseph`s College

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Dorrit Andrews
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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

This is an independent, co-educational school located in a residential area approximately two miles from Ipswich town centre. The school was originally set up for boys in 1937 as a Catholic foundation by the Brothers of the De La Salle order. An amalgamation took place with a local Catholic girls' school in 1995. Today, this is a Christian school maintaining the traditions of its La Sallian foundation and is part of the international La Sallian network of schools.

Education is provided for pupils between the ages of two and 19 years and boarding is currently offered between the ages of 10 and 19 years. There are approximately 500 day pupils and 114 boarders, the majority of whom are boarders from overseas.

Boarding accommodation comprises of two boarding houses, Goldrood House and The Mews. Boarders' sleeping arrangements range from single rooms to small dormitories. There is good communal space in each boarding house and boarders are encouraged to participate in activities across the school community.

The school's extensive grounds provide a wide range of sporting and recreational opportunities. Facilities at the school have been developed and extended during recent years to meet changing needs.

Summary

This was a short notice announced inspection aligned with the Independent Schools Inspectorate. All key standards were inspected. Outcome areas for being healthy, staying safe, economic wellbeing and organisation are all judged as good. Enjoying and achieving and positive contribution are judged as outstanding.

Pastoral care is a strength of the school and boarders receive outstanding individual support across the school community. Boarders' views are actively sought and listened to and help to shape the boarding provision. Positive behaviour is promoted and standards of behaviour are very high.

Staff are very aware of their responsibilities towards the young people in their care and sound links have been established with other professionals concerned with safeguarding children and young people. The health needs of boarders are responded to well and there is good support from the school nurse, local health centre and medical officer. The services of external consultants are engaged to support the school in providing a safe environment for pupils, staff and visitors.

Refurbishment of Goldrood House continues in consultation with boarders and staff work hard to provide a welcoming environment in each of the boarding houses. The leadership and management of boarding is strong and there is an ongoing commitment to review and enhance the boarding experience for pupils.

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 inspection, in September 2008, asked the school to record the times at which fire drills take place in the boarding houses and to maintain a record of the work completed in relation to the fire risk assessment. Times for all but one boarding house fire drills have been recorded and a new action plan for the fire risk assessment is in place and progressing appropriately. The school was also asked to ensure that all health and safety policies reflect the day-to-day life of the school and to update the contact details of Ofsted displayed in the boarding houses. A health and safety consultant has been engaged by the school to advise and assist with health and safety matters, and contact details of Ofsted are appropriately provided to boarders. The action taken, in response to the recommendations raised, support the safeguarding of pupils' safety and welfare.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The emotional and physical health care of boarders is promoted and they receive health care as necessary. The school's registered nurse is in attendance each day Monday to Friday. Outside of the school day, boarders' health needs are responded to by house staff, the school medical officer and out of hours services. First aid training is provided to all groups of staff and regular updates are provided. Boarders have access to both male and female doctors and can choose whether or not they wish to be accompanied by staff during consultations. Access to optical and dental services are also arranged as required.

The school holds medical information on each pupil provided by parents and obtains parental consent to medical treatment and first aid. The school nurse has access to regular training and study days to update her knowledge and to support her role. Records are maintained of accidents, treatment and significant illnesses and staff are fully conversant with the handling of confidential information. Health care plans for the management of specific medical needs are compiled and shared with parents and pupils. Good systems are in place for the secure storage and administering of medication, including that held by pupils. Monitoring of medication and accident records regularly takes place by both the school nurse and designated Vice Principal.

Personal, social and health education primarily takes place within the teaching environment of the school and is supplemented by tutorial sessions, assemblies and advice from house and medical staff.

Boarders are provided with a balanced, healthy diet and good opportunities for exercise and relaxation. Special diets and a range of cultural backgrounds are catered for. Boarders confirm they have access to fresh fruit, drinks, a range of provisions and snack making facilities in their house kitchens. They may also bring in their own food. Fresh fruit is readily available from the dining hall during the day and hot snacks are available at morning break.

Meal times are well organised social events and sufficient time is allowed for boarders to finish their meals properly. Boarders are given opportunities to make suggestions and provide feedback in relation to the food offered. Some boarders think that some aspects of the menus could be improved whilst the majority refer positively to the choice available. The provision of a healthy diet is taken seriously by the school and a review of the catering provision has recently been conducted by an external consultant. A change made as a result is the provision of a toaster in the dining hall to enable pupils to make fresh toast as required.

There are no outstanding recommendations from the environmental health service and all catering staff receive appropriate training for their role.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The welfare of pupils is taken seriously and strongly promoted. Staff are provided with written guidance and appropriate training to support them in their role. However, the school's safeguarding procedures does not specify referrals are to be made within 24 hours of all allegations or suspicions of abuse to the local children's services department. This has the potential to impact on the welfare of boarders.

Bullying is not tolerated and is not identified as a problem at the school. Boarders acknowledge that there are sometimes difficulties living with others and are confident in seeking support from members of staff and peer mentors. They state that any issues reported are dealt with effectively; records of incidents are recorded. All staff receive a child protection briefing on joining the school and are regularly updated as part of a rolling programme of training. Staff with designated responsibility for safeguarding matters attend Local Safeguarding Children Board training and access refresher courses as appropriate. The school's child protection officer has recently completed training with the Local Safeguarding Children Board to deliver level one inter-agency training within the county. Pupils involved in the pupil mentoring scheme and those holding positions of responsibility receive guidance on how to respond to and report any concerns coming to their attention.

Positive behaviour is promoted and standards of behaviour are very high. Emphasis is placed on changing unacceptable behaviour rather than punishing it. Clear expectations are relayed to boarders regarding their conduct in the boarding houses and boarders consider the use of discipline to be fair. Sanctions are used for more serious offences or when warnings have not been heeded; few sanctions are used.

The school's complaint procedure is made available to parents and pupils and the raising of concerns is encouraged at an early stage. Boarders are clear in what they can do if they have a complaint and identify a range of adults within the school community they feel able to go to. They are also able to leave a note for house staff in a suggestion box if preferred. No parent or boarder has contacted Ofsted to raise concerns about the care of pupils.

Boarders' personal privacy is respected and house staff are sensitive to such matters. For example, staff knock on doors and wait for a reply before entering, give gentle reminders to boarders about being suitably attired and make themselves available without intruding unnecessarily at sensitive times.

Robust procedures are in place for the recruitment of staff and key senior staff have completed safer recruitment training. However, some checking procedures in relation to agency cleaning staff are not routinely shared with the school. A record is maintained of visitors and proof of identification is requested. Outside visitors to the boarding areas are appropriately supervised to safeguard the welfare of boarders. Wherever possible, maintenance staff carry out work in the boarding houses during school time or when boarders are not present. When this is not possible, workers are supervised. The public use of the school's sports hall does not establish substantial unsupervised access to boarders. Usage by local groups is formally monitored by the school caretakers.

Boarders' sleeping areas are for their exclusive use and clear guidelines are in place in relation to the boys' and girls' sleeping areas. The communal areas of the boarding houses are for boarders and other pupils designated to share these facilities. Boarders report that they feel safe in their boarding houses.

Significant emphasis is placed on health and safety matters and a range of policies and risk assessments are in place to support the maintenance of a safe environment for pupils, staff and visitors. Boarders confirm that they are made aware of health and safety matters affecting them including out of bounds areas, fire evacuation procedures and use of the school's gym. Fire drill notices in the boarding houses are displayed in both English and Chinese. Fire drills take place at different times and staff and boarders are familiar with fire evacuation procedures. Fire alarm systems and extinguishers are regularly tested and serviced and a fire risk assessment is in place. Fire safety training is provided for staff and professional advice is sought regarding fire safety matters. Regular roll calls are conducted and clear expectations are placed on boarders to sign in and out of boarding accommodation at all times in order that their whereabouts are known.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are provided with an outstanding level of pastoral care across the school community and identify a range of staff whom they feel able to approach about any worries and concerns they may have. Those identified include house staff, academic staff, the principal and the school's chaplain. A new independent listener has recently been appointed and a newly formed peer mentoring group, monitored by staff, offers peer support to individual pupils. External counselling services may also be sought.

Form tutors provide day-to-day pastoral guidance and support to pupils. However, it is clear that pupils may, and do, go to who they wish with any worries and concerns. House staff readily provide opportunities to chat with boarders in the boarding house and to support individuals participating in events. Good communication is maintained between staff to support the individual needs of pupils with information being shared on a 'need to know' basis.

There are sound relationships between staff and boarders and their interactions were observed to be genuinely caring and warm. House staff know the individuals in their care very well and are highly committed to providing a supportive environment that contributes to pupils' development.

The school positively promotes the integration of all pupils and acknowledges their individuality. Excellent systems are in place to support and assist pupils who have specific cultural needs. For example, the induction of new staff includes strategies for supporting overseas pupils, faculties provide vocabulary lists to overseas pupils to assist them in accessing the curriculum and all newly appointed academic staff undertake boarding duties to support their understanding of the 'whole' pupil. In addition, the school's overseas development officer is fluent in a number of languages and plays a key role in supporting boarders and communicating with parents and host families; a full-time translator is also employed. Boarders state there is a good choice of activities for both girls and boys during evenings and at weekends. The girls are particularly appreciative of being able to access the gym two evenings a week when it is booked solely for their use. This arrangement is in direct response to their request and respects their privacy.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are actively encouraged to express their views and contribute to the operation of the school and boarding houses. A range of formal and informal opportunities are made available. These include suggestion boxes, school council and boarding committee meetings and talking to staff. In addition, consultation continues to take place regarding the refurbishment of boarding accommodation. Changes to the use of some rooms and additions to the activity programme have been made as a result of listening to boarders. Agendas for committee meetings are formulated by pupils, minutes are publicised and committee members are clearly identified on house notice boards. Boarders report that their suggestions are taken seriously, they feel listened to and feedback is received.

Boarders are able to maintain private contact with their families and friends. Payphones are available for pupils' use in the houses although the majority have their own mobile phone. House telephones are also made available by staff when necessary, particularly during times of family crisis and illness. A high proportion of boarders also use email as a means of communication. Appropriate safeguards are in place to protect pupils when they are using the internet and these are made known. Helpline and outside contact telephone numbers are displayed on notice boards and in written information provided to boarders. Staff contact parents regarding their child's progress and any concerns and welcome visits from parents. Specific support is available when communicating with parents of overseas pupils, including the services of a translator. At least once a year the principal and overseas development officer visit Hong Kong and invite parents and families of pupils to meet with them to discuss their child's progress.

New boarders are introduced to the operation of the school and boarding house routines and are helped to settle in. Written information is provided to new boarders and their parents; pupils also engage in a comprehensive programme of induction supported by a peer mentor. In some circumstances specific arrangements are made for a pupil to experience a trial period of boarding. Boarders describe their own experience of induction as 'good' and 'useful and supportive' adding that house staff and mentors discussed the boarders' handbook with them and were 'helpful'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Secure, lockable storage is provided for boarders' personal possessions and valuables. Important documents such as passports and visas are handed to house staff for safekeeping. A pocket money system with records of transactions is in place and the opening of bank accounts is supported.

There is a rolling programme of refurbishment and upgrading of the boarding provision. Refurbishment and redecoration of Goldrood House continues and boys report that they are involved in a review of room usage within the house. For example, a new laundry collection area has been developed and changes have been made to communal areas to the benefit of boarders. Both houses are clean, well lit and warm and offer a range of communal areas for both quiet and more noisier pursuits. New beds with study spaces and a range of good storage provision are being installed in Goldrood House together with new items of furniture in

communal areas. Several longer beds are provided for very tall boarders and the personalisation of bedrooms and dormitories is encouraged in each of the houses. The standard of accommodation and decoration in The Mews is good and boarders have ample storage space.

Sufficient showers, baths and toilets are available to boarders and include a large shower room in The Mews suitable for use by someone with an injury. Separate facilities are provided for staff and visitors. Problems with the hot water supply to Goldrood House have been investigated and a solution arrived at. Work has commenced to remedy the problem and is scheduled to be completed in the next two weeks.

The welfare of boarders placed with host families is safeguarded and promoted. Robust procedures are in place for the checking of host families and the accommodation they provide prior to placements being made. A signed formal agreement is obtained and written guidance is provided by the school to support the pastoral care of the pupil concerned. Staff discuss lodging arrangements separately with each pupil on a regular basis and undertake follow up visits. Host families are invited to attend school events, some of which are hosted by boarders.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is good leadership and a continuous commitment to improve the boarding provision and its benefit to pupils. Governors also take an active interest in the boarding provision. Documentation regarding the school's boarding principles and practice and relevant policies are made available to parents, boarders and staff. New prospectuses are being prepared for circulation later this Spring.

The organisation of boarding provides appropriate separation of boarders by age and gender and no discrepancies are reported regarding the quality of boarding practice for boys and girls. Good systems are in place for the effective monitoring of records by the principal, designated members of the senior management team and the school nurse.

The provision of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school positively promotes the integration of all pupils and values their individuality. A range of age, gender and different cultural backgrounds are represented by pupils holding positions of responsibility and there is excellent support for pupils from other cultures and linguistic backgrounds. Boarders report that staff are 'nice and helpful' and 'sort things out', including accommodation matters.

Boarders are adequately supervised by highly competent staff and are informed of who is on duty and who is responsible for them at specific times. Boarders state they are able to contact staff during the night if they need to and are responded to positively. Details of the houses' duty telephone numbers are provided to boarders as a means of additional support and for reporting any problems when away from the school site. Suitable arrangements are in place for covering staff sickness and absence and there is a high number of resident staff who can be called upon for additional support.

Staff know pupils very well, are proactive in their approach and are highly committed to their role. Good systems of support are established for house staff and regular meetings are held to discuss boarders' pastoral care and the day-to-day running of the houses. Written guidance and a range of training opportunities are also provided to assist staff in promoting and

safeguarding the welfare of boarders. Job descriptions are in place and are regularly reviewed. There are clear lines of management and systems are in place for the annual appraisal of staff.

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's safeguarding policy includes a requirement for a referral to be made within 24 hours of allegations or suspicions of abuse to the local children's services department (NMS 3.2)
- ensure a formal written agreement is made with agencies supplying cleaning or other staff to notify the school of disclosed information received as a result of a Criminal Records Bureau check (NMS 38.1).