

Dulwich Preparatory School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC024065
Inspection date	7 October 2009
Inspector	Liz Daniels
Type of Inspection	Key

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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

Dulwich Preparatory School is situated in the heart of the Weald of Kent, close to the rural town of Cranbrook. As the school has increased in size, the older buildings on the campus have been sympathetically and effectively updated to provide an excellent range of facilities for the children.

The school has responded to the decline in parental demand for full boarding by providing flexi boarding, which the parents arrange on a termly or incidental basis. Although this appears very popular, the number of regular boarders is relatively small. The age range accommodated is nine to 13 years; the boarding areas are separated by gender with the boys' house situated on the edge of the school campus and the girls' provision within the main building of the school. Both areas offer good security and clean, suitably furnished living accommodation.

Great emphasis is placed on providing the individual and specific support required for each child to realise their full potential. The school continues to celebrate the academic success of its pupils, with a proven track record of securing places at prestigious independent senior schools and state schools, when pupils leave at age 13.

Summary

This announced full welfare inspection was undertaken to fulfil the three year inspection requirement for boarding schools. All of the key National Minimum Standards (NMS) were inspected. The visit provided the opportunity to meet with the Headmaster, housemaster responsible for the boarding provision and other key staff who have a role in boarding. The inspectors met with some of the boarders to hear their views; the children speak enthusiastically about boarding and see it as an enjoyable and positive experience. In addition, 19 young people's surveys were completed and six surveys returned from parents. The feedback was extremely positive and praised the school for its boarding provision.

The school provides comfortable boarding accommodation and a small team of staff ensure the children's good health is promoted and that they are kept safe whilst they stay. The staff believe the children's views are important and ensure there are different avenues available for them to voice any concerns. They provide excellent support whereby the children can develop as individuals. Where areas of shortfall in practice are identified, the senior management team are responsive and demonstrate a willingness to explore changes to improve the provision.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last full welfare inspection of the school was undertaken in February 2007. One recommendation was made, which has been partly met. As a result, a 'medi-fridge' has been purchased, enabling medications to be stored safely. However, the laundry facilities within the medical centre, although remaining, are not used to launder any infectious material nor are articles at risk of becoming infected during their laundering. The recommendation is therefore no longer required.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The staff provide excellent support for the children and ensure their health is promoted when they board. A fundamental ethos across the school is that the children's well-being is paramount. Personal, social and health education is a part of the curriculum and the boarding staff support the programme. They promote healthy living by appropriately discussing the risks associated with smoking, alcohol, drugs and sexual activity with the children.

Comprehensive medical information forms are completed when the children join the school; appropriate additional information is then gathered prior to them boarding. The information is safely stored and accessible to staff on a need to know basis.

Effective arrangements ensure that first aid is provided and minor illnesses are treated by a team of competent staff who are appropriately trained. The boarders are local children and therefore remain registered with their own General Practitioner (GP), opticians and dentist. A nurse registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) oversees the management of any health issues for them. She links closely with a local GP for her own professional guidance and consultation. Protocols and care plans are well circulated for those children with particular medical needs; good communication between the nurse and the house staff also ensures that prescription and non-prescription 'household' medications are appropriately administered and recorded. Most medications are stored in a locked cupboard, although some that may be needed in an emergency are stored in a cabinet which could be accessed inappropriately. Administered medications are correctly recorded in the medical room daily log. However, although this is safe, the lack of individual medication records makes it difficult to track how frequently particular medications are given. Parent's consent that first aid and appropriate non-prescription medications may be administered to boarders when required.

There are very good arrangements for any boarder who is ill. The children initially contact one of the house staff if feeling unwell and where possible the staff arrange for them to go home. Alternatively they are transferred to the 'Sick Bay' where they are cared for by the nurse. The staff are mindful of the risk of the spread of infection; the 'Sick Bay' is in a separate building with its own toilet and wash facilities.

There is excellent catering provision and the children are enthusiastic when discussing the food at the school. A varied nutritional menu with plenty of choice is developed each week and the food is locally sourced wherever possible. The catering staff are all well trained and many special dietary needs are accommodated. The school is imaginative in the way it explores multi-cultural foods and meal times are happy, sociable occasions, held in the school's spacious dining room.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school's policies against bullying are well publicised and the procedures protect the children from bullying. The staff are good at providing guidance and support for the children. They are vigilant and recognise those children who have the potential to bully as well as those who are vulnerable. The incidence is low and good communication throughout the school staff ensures behaviour is managed fairly and consistently.

Similarly there are policies and procedures to protect the children from abuse. A senior staff member is designated to take responsibility for safeguarding and facilitates a good rolling programme of training; this ensures all staff are trained in safeguarding, either during 'In Service Training' (INSET) or individually when they join the school. There is good monitoring of all internet use, greatly reducing the opportunity for children to access inappropriate sites.

Behaviour is well managed at the school. Considerable emphasis is placed on responding positively to good behaviour but any punishments for poor behaviour are consistent and not excessive. The children are aware of the consequences of poor behaviour and believe that the staff are fair. One incident necessitated the use of physical intervention, although the action taken was not recorded in detail.

The school responds positively to any queries or concerns raised by parents and boarders. Information as to how they can raise any issues is readily available; various avenues are accessible for them and the school responds promptly to any concerns, investigating them as necessary. The Headmaster co-ordinates the investigation of any serious complaint whereby he can monitor any trends and frequencies. Details of external organisations such as 'Child Line' and the numbers of the 'out of school listeners' are well publicised.

Regular procedures are undertaken to protect the children from the risk of fire. Appropriate checks of emergency lighting, fire fighting equipment and fire alarms are undertaken and fire drills are carried out during 'boarding time' each term. Some improvements have been made in response to the fire safety assessment of one of the boarding houses in 2007. However, there has not been an updated risk assessment to address other issues raised in the report. In addition, some staff have not been trained in fire safety awareness, although a session is planned for INSET in January 2010.

The staff respect the personal privacy of the children. They are readily available to monitor and care for the boarders but they are not intrusive. The children confirm that they believe their privacy is respected.

Good processes are now in place for the selection and vetting of all staff who care for the children who board. Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures are sought and references are required prior to employment. The school employs Gap students and similar checks are undertaken. However, a 'certificate of good conduct' or equivalent has not always previously been obtained, although this has been applied for, for all the Gaps being employed in January 2010.

In general, there are good arrangements to protect the boarders from unsupervised contact with adults who have not been appropriately checked, as well as to ensure the boarding accommodation is secure from public intrusion. Both boarding houses are protected by keypads and neither are a thoroughfare for children, staff or visitors. Once boarding starts, the children are well supervised and there are good security arrangements for the buildings. In addition, the school provides written agreements for any adults who stay overnight in the same building as the boarding accommodation. Similarly, as stated previously, all staff are checked through the CRB when recruited to work within the boarding area; however, similar checks have not been undertaken for all 'long standing' employees, employed prior to the requirement for such recruitment checks.

Health and safety is high on the school agenda. There are appropriate maintenance contracts and the staff undertake the required safety checks. Designated staff with responsibility for health and safety monitor and co-ordinate the necessary risk assessments; however, the risk of a burn from an un-lagged hot water tank in one boarding area has not been minimised.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school encourages the children to share any anxieties or concerns with staff. Each child has a tutor they can turn to for personal guidance or support and the school's ethos is to enable them to speak with whoever they feel most comfortable with. Details of 'out of school listeners' are also well publicised whereby the children can contact them in confidence. Similarly they can use the 'worry box' as a means of sharing anxieties. In addition, good communication between all the staff involved with boarding ensures that welfare concerns are shared, enabling a cohesive plan of support and care to be introduced. Feedback from the children and parents confirms that they believe the staff help and support them.

The school promotes its policy of equal opportunities, thereby facilitating a theme of respect amongst the children and the staff. All the children live locally and English is their first language. Although historically Christian, the school embraces pupils from differing ethnic backgrounds and religious faiths. Many of the children require special diets although not usually for cultural or religious reasons; their needs are well met within the excellent catering provided. The staff are alert to those children who struggle to integrate and ensure support is in place to prevent them being isolated.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school uses the school council as the forum to discuss any boarding issues, as many of the children enjoy the boarding experience during their time at the school. The school promotes the importance of hearing the children's views and takes them into account when developing boarding practice. The children confirm that they know the school considers their views about boarding are important. Extremely positive feedback about boarding at the school was also received through questionnaires prior to the inspection.

As the school now just offers flexi-boarding the children live at home and stay at the school for incidental nights. Mobile 'phones are not permitted but telephones are readily available for the children to contact their families and speak privately with them. The numbers for help lines and outside contact numbers are well publicised, for them to call if they have concerns or are distressed.

The 'Boarding Handbooks' provide comprehensive information for a child who wishes to board at the school, as well as for their parents. Children boarding for the first time stay alongside those who have boarded previously; this enables them to have a 'buddy' and feel less isolated. 'Trial nights' have also proved to be a positive experience for the children. Good communication amongst the staff ensures any child who is initially anxious about being away from home is very well supported.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school's policy of discouraging the children from having money or valuable personal items with them reduces the risk or opportunity for items to go missing. Sufficient lockers are available for personal possessions and can be used for any extraordinary situation.

The children stay in light, heated and well ventilated dormitories which are welcoming, homely and comfortable, despite being occupied by different groups of boarders each night. The rooms are clean and well-maintained. There are separate houses for boys and girls, each protected by doors with keypad access. Each house has dormitories with either single or bunk beds although some of the beds in the girls' dormitories are closer together than required by the NMS. The house staff have their own sleeping accommodation within or adjacent to the boarding areas.

The girls' accommodation has sufficient toilet and washing facilities but there are only sufficient washbasins in the boys' area for 24 of the 36 beds to be used at any one time. However, wash times amongst the boarding groups are well organised whereby the shortfall in facilities does not impact negatively on the children.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is comprehensive up to date information available for boarders, parents and staff, that clearly outlines the school's boarding principles and practice.

The school offers flexi-boarding to accommodate varying numbers of boys and girls. There are separate boarding houses with the girls in the main school building and the boys in a building within the school grounds; each house has a secure entry system. All the accommodation is furnished to the same standard whereby the boys and girls have access to similar facilities.

A small staff team manages the boarding aspect of the school. Staff communicate effectively with the head of boarding to ensure he is aware of any incidents which result in the management of behaviour, any accidents or any complaints made. He discusses them with the Headmaster, as necessary. Subsequently, although there are no formal process in place to monitor incidents, behaviour management and complaints at least twice a term staff identify patterns or trends and take appropriate action. A named governor meets regularly with the boarding team and visits the boarding areas; she is proactive in taking any issues to the governing body. Key staff are identified to monitor accidents and to ensure risk assessments remain relevant; decisions are made following discussions at the monthly health and safety meetings.

Boarding is arranged from Monday through to Thursday with some boarding on a Friday to fit around planned Saturday classes. The head of boarding, two boarding house mothers and four Gap students, supported by house tutors and an assistant matron, provide good levels of supervision for the boarders. The children are clear about which member of staff is responsible for them at all times.

Staff involved with boarding initially undertake an induction which includes training in child protection. Their job description identifies their role and who they are responsible to. Some subsequently have reviews to discuss their personal development although this is not formally undertaken with all boarding staff.

All the staff who have a role within boarding have a wealth of information to guide them in the school's approach to boarding, as well as how to safeguard the children and promote their welfare.

The promotion of equality and diversity at the school is good. The staff promote a theme of respect amongst all the children; those from differing backgrounds and other religious faiths are welcomed and any special diets are well catered for. The staff are alert to those young people who struggle to integrate and ensure support is in place to prevent their being isolated.

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 all medications are stored safely (NMS 15)
- ensure any use of physical restraint is by reasonable and non-injurious means, and the details always recorded in writing (NMS 4)
- ensure there are fire risk assessments for each boarding area that include reference to the risks identified in the fire assessment undertaken in 2007 (NMS 26)
- ensure the school does not allow any member of staff to work unsupervised with boarders unless that member of staff has been satisfactorily checked with the CRB (NMS 39)
- ensure there is an effective system of risk assessment, with written records, to identify and reduce the risk to boarders from inherent hazards in the school (NMS 47)
- ensure all the dormitories are of adequate size and that beds are no less than 900mm apart (NMS 42)
- ensure that each boarding house has at least one washbasin for every 3 boarders (NMS 44)
- introduce an appropriate process for the regular review of the performance of each member of staff with boarding duties by a more senior or experienced member of staff (e.g. through individual supervision meetings or a staff appraisal system). (NMS 34)