

The Oratory Preparatory School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Maire Atherton
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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 Oratory Preparatory School is an independent day and boarding Roman Catholic school for about 400 pupils aged three to 13, although boarding is only offered from the age of nine. It positively welcomes all pupils, whatever their denomination or faith.

The school has a small boarding provision and, at the time of the inspection, accommodated 26 boarders on a full and weekly basis, with a further 24 pupils taking advantage of boarding at the school on a part time or flexible basis. The majority of the boarders are boys, with only eight girls taking up the boarding option at the school at the time of this visit.

The school is in a rural location on the Oxfordshire/Berkshire border close to Reading set in extensive and attractive grounds. Boarding accommodation is provided in the old main school building with two separate dorm areas for boys and girls. Boarders have supervised access to the majority of school facilities during boarding time.

Summary

This was an announced inspection to assess the school against the key national minimum standards for boarding schools.

The outcome areas assessed in this inspection were found to be either outstanding or good and no significant areas of concern have been identified. The key to the many outstanding features of the school is the high level of commitment to team work under the strong leadership and management of the headteacher. All staff employed by the school feel they have an important and valued contribution to make to ensuring that boarders experience their time at school as happy, safe and fun while they are learning. Boarding is very well organised by the boarding housemaster and the staff team, who successfully promote a family-like atmosphere in the boarding setting. Boarders say 'It is really fun when I board', 'I am happy' and 'It's homely and a blast'.

The excellent systems in place and the implementation of these ensure that boarders are properly safeguarded. Boarders are confident that the staff will listen to what they have to say and will take the action necessary to promote their welfare and try to accommodate their wishes where possible. Medical and health care needs are well met. The areas identified for improvement relate to a deficit in the monitoring of accidents and a shortfall in medication records.

There are generally very high levels of satisfaction expressed by boarders and parents. One parent commented 'Overall the boarding provision is excellent' and a boarder said 'The boarding house staff make it feel like home'.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

There were 18 recommendations made following the last inspection by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The school has responded positively to these. Those relating to medical records, child protection policy and training, and information for children have been met.

The accommodation for boarders both communal and in dormitories has been significantly improved, as has security with the fitting of keypad locks. The recommendation about improving the kitchen and dining facilities is under consideration, and plans for a new building have been drawn. The financial implications are being considered by the Governors in their development plan. Fire awareness is much improved and there are clear systems in place to ensure that staff and boarders have the knowledge they need in this area.

Boarders confirm that they have more unstructured (but still supervised) free time, evening snacks are available upstairs in the boarding house and that time in the 'San' is no longer used as a sanction.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders' health and welfare is thoroughly supported and promoted by staff who know them well. The comprehensive personal, social and health education programme is delivered through the curriculum and in tutor groups. The subjects covered include keeping fit and healthy, self esteem, cycle helmet initiative and drugs awareness. Boarders are given lots of information and support to achieve physical activity, good levels of personal hygiene and healthy eating.

The nurse and matrons, supported by the school's GP who visits weekly, work effectively as a team to provide a high standard of medical care for the pupils. Staff keep up to date with regular training appropriate to their role, including a range of first aid training, such as appointed person and paediatric. Boarders say that they are well looked after when they are ill and find the nursing staff 'easy to talk to'. The detailed forms in place are designed to elicit from parents the information required to enable the team to provide boarders with the medical care and support they need to meet their individual needs, including those arising from medical conditions, culture or ethnicity. The administration of medication is recorded by the nurse and matrons using a system that ensures effective monitoring of any medication given. There is no controlled drugs register nor is there a stock control system for the over the counter remedies held in stock. Accident recording and monitoring is insufficiently robust to enable any trends to be identified and appropriate action taken.

Boarders are complimentary about the food provided, with very few negative views expressed. Breakfast is described by one as 'awesome', another said 'food is amazing, always a choice and a veggie option'. The catering is of a good standard providing boarders with a varied, balanced and healthy diet. There is robust consultation with pupils and implementation of some of their suggestions, which they are appreciative of, such as puddings at supper and bowls of fruit in the boarding house. There are good management systems in place to ensure that the limitations of the size of the dining hall do not give rise to queues and a hurried lunch.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' welfare is promoted by a thorough, robust and proactive approach to all aspects of safeguarding. Boarders say that there is very little bullying and any such incidents are dealt with promptly to their satisfaction. One example of the proactive approach is the use of drama in prep time in which a number of boarders have taken on different roles, experiencing being the bully, the bullied, a friend and an authority figure. Boarders engaged whole heartedly with evident enjoyment and the acting prompted discussion on the subject of bullying.

Boarders are safeguarded by the excellent attention paid to ensuring that all staff know how to respond to any child protection concerns. This is achieved by all staff receiving induction and regular refresher training at a level commensurate with their role in the school. Prefects also receive a briefing from the housemaster on what they should do should a child protection concern arise. The safeguarding policy, which is also available on the website, and prompt cards for staff are written in accessible language and underpinned by the local area safeguarding procedures. The designated child protection officer in the school has well established links with the local authority and seeks advice if necessary. There have been no child protection referrals nor has a pupil been absent without authority. Boarders' privacy is properly respected and promoted.

The school ethos outlined in the policy and implemented in practice, is in the promotion of positive behaviour. The boarding house rules emphasise what should be done, rather than what should not. There is a merit system in place that is valued by the pupils. Boarders say that sanctions are rarely used and consider them to be fair and proportionate, for example an earlier bedtime for persistent talking after lights out. Prefects can recommend boarders for merits and sanctions but cannot award them directly.

There is a strong emphasis on the establishment and maintenance of open relationships between the staff, parents and pupils. The success in this enables low level concerns to be expressed and addressed as they arise which reduces the need for recourse to the complaints procedure. There is lots of readily accessible information for boarders about who they can approach with any concerns and surveys show that all boarders can identify a number of adults that they would approach.

There are strong systems in place to support prefects in their role. These include a prefect's handbook, induction and regular meetings with the housemaster which together provide information and ongoing support.

The robust implementation of the policies and procedures relating to fire safety ensure that boarders, staff and visitors are safe from the risk of fire. The designated Health and Safety adviser has well established links with the fire safety authority and they visit regularly and give verbal feedback. All boarders know what to do in the event of the alarm sounding and have walked through the evacuation procedures as well as participating in regular drills. Staff undertake fire safety training and routine servicing of equipment takes place.

There is an excellent commitment to ensuring that safer recruitment practices are used and several senior staff have attended training on this matter and can identify improvements made as a result. Recruitment checks are thorough and staff do not start work until the checks are complete.

The committed and enthusiastic Health and Safety advisor is highly proactive, with a determination to promote a culture of health and safety within a 'can do' framework. Risk assessments are comprehensive and proportionate and are seen as an enabling tool to identify risks or hazards and taking steps to reduce these. Thus boarders are kept safe whilst enabling them to undertake activities ranging from a rugby and hockey tour to South Africa to a shopping trip in Oxford. The same vigilance is applied to environmental risk assessments, with reviews taking place annually at a minimum, thus providing safe accommodation for pupils.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent relationships between staff and boarders. There is a strong team approach adopted by all the staff deployed to care for the boarders at the school. This is communicated effectively to the boarders so that they are able to confidently name a wide range of adults, including matrons, house staff, Gap students and tutors that they could go to for support or help. The range of staff provide a secure and family like environment. Boarders say 'staff are kind when you are homesick', 'boarding staff make it feel like home' and 'always people to talk to if feeling unhappy'. The school is currently recruiting two independent listeners so as to provide boarders with a choice. The tutor system works well with children staying with the same tutor for years five to eight.

The school has an outstanding commitment to ensuring that all are treated equally in accordance with their 'belief and recognition that all pupils are of equal value, regardless of race, religion, gender, ability or background'. Girls say 'although we are outnumbered we are treated the same'. Pupils from overseas are well supported to integrate through a range of initiatives, including a buddy system. An additional English class during prep time was voluntarily attended by English speaking boarders because it was fun. Boarders who have additional needs are very well known to the staff who are guided by the written support plans that are in place so that children benefit from a consistent approach to particular behavioural difficulties.

Parents comment 'Boarders receive a lot of fondness', 'Staff make parents feel welcome and secure that their child is well cared for' and 'There is lots of interaction with the staff and the Gap year students, my boys get lots of attention. The emphasis is definitely on making the whole experience a very positive one'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are frequent opportunities, both formal and informal, for boarders to give their views about boarding. All boarders know about the suggestion box and can give many examples of how it works in practice. That cited most often is the changes to supper and evening snack. Another was the use of one room as 'pets' corner' where boarders could keep their small, caged pets. This room is not being used for any pets currently and boarders have requested that it become an additional games room. Plans for this are in development. House meetings are held weekly and suggestions made through the box are responded to in this meeting. Boarders are confident that their views are properly considered. One said 'the housemaster does something about it' another said 'people listen to me'.

Boarders are provided with a variety of means of keeping in touch with family. The majority have mobile phones which they may have in the evenings. A landline telephone for use by boarders is conveniently sited where useful telephone numbers are displayed. Boarders also have daily access to computers to enable email contact and the housemaster has established a 'skype' account which boarders may use. Parents are kept well informed of any concerns and the school engage positively in partnership with parents to address issues as they arise.

There are excellent systems for introducing boarders to the routines and rules of the boarding house and these are constantly reviewed and refined. The school adopts a flexible approach to boarding and offers full, weekly, regular part-time and flexi-boarding. All receive a thorough

induction and this is an area that the school is well practised in. Boarders from overseas are welcomed and a number who plan to stay for one term stay for the year. New handbooks have been written for parents and boarders. One parent said 'the handbook makes it clear how boarding works and what to do if you've got a problem'. The boarding house guide is written in accessible language and illustrated with photos and clip art making it a very child centred document. The school's website is also a useful source of information.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

There are good systems in place to ensure that boarders' possessions are properly looked after. All have their own locker and a box in a cupboard that staff hold the key to for mobile phones, electronic games and other high value items.

Boarders are provided with warm, comfortable and well maintained accommodation. There are high standards of cleanliness. The completely refurbished common room provides a popular room that is adaptable for a range of uses, such as film night for all or groups doing different activities. Boarders are very appreciative of the new beds and matching furniture in all the dormitories. The largest dormitory has 10 beds and is the most popular with the boys. The girls' and boys' dormitories are in different areas of the boarding house, separated by the central communal area. The dormitories are well personalised by the boarders and there is fierce competition for the termly dormitory awards. Communal areas such as the hallway have also been made more homely by the use of child friendly displays and digital photo frames which show boarders enjoying boarding life.

The toilet and bathing facilities have been identified for improvement and a budget has been allocated to this project.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The headteacher provides strong management and leadership of the committed and dedicated staff team. All staff involved in boarding under the leadership of the housemaster are clear of their role in working together to ensure that children boarding at the school are safe, secure and happy. There are clear lines of accountability within the team structure and staff are strong at identifying areas for development.

The school's mission statement is clear and the information on boarding is written in accessible language and accurately reflects the practice. The same is also true of the updated staff handbook which provides staff with clear guidance. Staff work together effectively to monitor and promote the welfare of boarders through open lines of communication underpinned by regular meetings and clear record keeping.

There is a high ratio of staff to boarders at all times. Staff are deployed so as to give boarders ample opportunity to engage with adults if they choose to. Boarding staff are positive about the role of the house master and his wife and the support and communication provided. Staff are appreciative of the induction and training opportunities they receive. A rolling programme of training in child protection, fire safety, first aid and food hygiene is provided to ensure that all staff receive refresher training when required. Staff are also appreciative of the appraisal system in place. The various elements of boarding are well planned and organised so as to

minimise any potential issues arising from the changing dynamics of the mix of flexi, short term and longer term boarders.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The commitment to equality and diversity is clearly outlined throughout the policies and procedures and in the implementation of these. Boarders say 'I am happy' and 'No one gets left out'. The school has received an international school award made to schools that demonstrate an ongoing commitment to global education. The award team said 'Their portfolio... demonstrated that the international dimension has been strongly embedded in the school'.

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):

- establish a robust system for monitoring accidents, treatment and first aid by a designated senior member of staff (NMS 15)
- establish a stock control system for over the counter remedies, such as paracetamol, and obtain a controlled drugs register (NMS 15)