

# Millfield Preparatory School

Inspection report for boarding school

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC032495         |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 25 November 2009 |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Heather Chaplin  |
| <b>Type of Inspection</b>      | Key              |

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| <b>Head / Principal</b>        |  |
| <b>Nominated person</b>        | Kevin Andrew Cheney  |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 11 October 2006  |

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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

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|---------------|---|
| 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

Millfield Preparatory School is an independent school, registered as a charity, which provides co-educational facilities in the age range of 7 to 13 years.

At the time of the inspection there were 90 boys and 64 girls boarding, accommodated in five boarding houses. Two houses are period properties and three are purpose-built modern buildings. All of the boarding houses are located within walking distance of the main school site.

The school is within easy reach of the towns of Street and Glastonbury and stands within extensive grounds. Large areas of the grounds are used for sporting and leisure activities, and there is also a swimming pool, equestrian centre and provision for a wide range of non-sporting activities. The pre-preparatory department shares the same site, and was the subject of a separate inspection.

Children at the school are from a range of countries including the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, China and Thailand.

### Summary

This was an announced inspection conducted over three days by three inspectors, including a boarding school additional inspector.

The school has achieved excellence in every outcome group, and provides an exceptional boarding experience for all children irrespective of nationality, ethnicity or gender. The director of boarding and all boarding staff work together to ensure that children's individual needs are met. Any minor issues are addressed without delay, and staff work very hard to ensure that children enjoy their boarding life to the full.

Children's questionnaire responses were almost without exception, very positive: 'I am living in a great family boarding house where everyone is friendly', 'the houseparents are just like our parents' and more colloquially, 'Millfield rocks!'.

A very wide range of sporting and leisure activities is available on site, and children can also access the facilities at Millfield School approximately three miles away. There is a holistic approach across the curriculum, and all children are encouraged to find an area in which they can excel. One young person said: 'we can try so many different things here. If we become good at something, we are encouraged to do well, but we are never pushed too hard'.

The boarding houses provide spacious, clean and well designed accommodation and furnishings, and are promptly maintained by a professional in-house maintenance team. The extensive grounds and sports fields are also kept to a very high standard.

Management arrangements within the school are clear so that staff, children and parents understand the various areas of responsibility. Staff at all levels are totally committed to the school. Many have been in post for many years. They take a pride in the school and work long hours to achieve and maintain the highest standards for the children.

No recommendations have been made on this occasion. Some very minor issues were discussed with the head of boarding and headteacher, most of which were addressed before the end of the inspection.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Seven recommendations were made at the last inspection, which was conducted in October 2006. All areas identified for improvement have been resolved, and the school continues to work to raise standards through continual monitoring and appropriate action.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

The school has an excellent personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme which helps young people to make sensible choices in connection with bullying, drugs, relationships and other important issues which may impact on their lives. Staff who specialise in specific areas all contribute to the programme, which is also delivered to parents on occasion. For example, the head of information technology presented the subject of internet safety to parents and children. Outside speakers bring variety to the programme. Children are encouraged to work on their own presentations; for example Year 7 pupils gave an excellent assembly presentation on the subject of food wastage, which showed that they are very aware of issues around world food shortages.

Boarders' health and welfare needs are well supported by high quality, securely-kept documentation. Parents are asked to complete a questionnaire before admission, covering allergies, medical issues, major illnesses or injury, medication needs and drug reactions. The medical staff may access the local doctors' surgery's computerised records for individual children. Communication between the medical staff and the teaching and boarding staff is discrete but effective, to ensure that children have any special provision needed.

The school has exceptional facilities for providing health care to children. There is a purpose built surgery on site which is very well equipped. The surgery is staffed by three part time qualified nurses during and beyond the school day, and also on a Saturday. All boarders are registered with the school's designated doctor, who attends the surgery for four days per week. Children may ask to see a female doctor if they wish. Boarders commented very favourably on the high level of support they receive from the surgery: 'it's easy to go to the surgery, and they will always help you.'

The medical centre also has excellent in-patient day provision. At the time of the inspection, children were attending the medical centre following minor sports injuries. Nurses are very caring with the children and many children told the inspectors how well they are cared for when unwell. One pupil said 'when I was ill, they helped me straight away and as much as they could'.

Children who are too unwell to attend classes either go home or are cared for in their own boarding house at night. Each boarding house has its own sick bay with bright, airy and attractive en-suite accommodation, and a call bell for summoning assistance.

The senior nurse also delivers staff training in relation to medicines. Records show that all boarding staff received medicines handling training in September and November 2009 to help to ensure that medicines are correctly stored, administered and recorded. There are policies and procedures in place regarding the use of prescribed and non-prescribed medicines. Medicines administration is well recorded and effectively monitored to ensure a complete audit trail.

Medical practice at this school is highly reflective, with a strong desire to continue to improve. The senior nurse has developed advisory information for non-medical staff on specific medical needs, for example, food allergies. All staff involved in the care of boarders either has a recognised first aid qualification or is in the process of achieving one.

Children whose first language is not English, or who may have other specific language needs, such as dyslexia, receive excellent support. Referral to the Educational Psychologist may be made, and all staff who teach that child are made aware of their needs.

Any incidents of bedwetting are responded to openly and in an appropriate, matter-of-fact way. Very few children report feeling homesick, but those who did all said that they receive excellent support from staff and other pupils. Boarders say they can talk to anyone; teaching or boarding staff: 'everyone is really nice...if you are not very happy, they will make sure you are okay'.

Catering is provided to a high standard by an external company with many years' experience in providing quality catering services to schools. The choice and healthy balance of food is very good, and has improved since the last inspection, when 70% of children were happy with their meals. On this occasion, 82% of children surveyed said that they enjoy the meals and that the food is healthy: 'they have the best puddings I have ever had.' Another child commented 'they set (the food) out well and there is variety'.

Staff offer advice to children on what constitutes a healthy plate of food: 'the dinner lady tells you what you need for a balanced diet'. Some children in their questionnaires talked knowledgeably about correct proportions of protein, carbohydrates and fats.

The remaining 18% commented on how they thought the meals could further improve, but in many cases this reflects their own personal preferences, for example for more or less salt and for how long the vegetables are cooked. Many of those responses also acknowledged that although not to the individual child's taste, the menus are healthy. Food sampled during the inspection was very well presented, hot and tasty.

The catering staff go to considerable lengths to stage special meals reflecting cultural events such as Chinese New Year, Halloween and West African Day, with foods reflecting this. Water is freely available in the school and the boarding houses.

All boarders are happy with the snacks provided in the evenings and at weekends in the boarding houses. Some commented favourably on the variety of snacks and the opportunity to sample foods from other cultures.

All personal laundry is completed within each boarding house and only bedding is sent to the main laundry. Staff and boarders reported that there was a very quick turnaround for laundry and, if a special item of clothing is needed, staff would make every effort to provide this.

## **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

The school has clear policies to guide staff on how to protect children from bullying, and these emphasise openness and good communication. Boarders interviewed said that bullying is not a concern for them and that any low level issues are addressed immediately. They frequently mention the need for respect and that they 'look out for one another'. All are clear that bullying is not to be tolerated and that they would report any incidents to staff.

There is a strong child safeguarding policy. This incorporates a whistle-blowing policy and a statement guiding staff on how to respond should a child go missing from school. The school has had no recent incidents of a child protection nature. Recent staff changes, including the post held by the designated person for child protection, have been covered effectively.

All staff interviewed, and the gap year students, are well aware of how to respond to a child making a disclosure. Ancillary staff confirmed that they have received child protection training, and there is documentation to show that all staff received updated training in September 2009.

Boarders say that they are rewarded for good behaviour by receiving report ticks in the house log, and if behaviour is poor, they receive a cross. Rewards consist of small privileges such as later bedtimes at weekends or a trip to the cinema. Sanctions may involve extra house-tidying jobs, or earlier bedtimes if they are disturbing others late at night. The sanction fits the issue, so that it makes sense to young people, and all pupils spoken with said that sanctions are fair.

The school has a good complaints procedure which is made known to parents. Issues raised by parents and children are resolved at a very early stage and very few become formal complaints. Children have numerous ways in which they can communicate their views before the matter becomes more serious. Any ongoing concerns are recorded on each house file and signed off regularly by the head of boarding.

There is no prefect system in the school, but monitors are appointed each term, along with the head of house, so that each child shares the responsibility. Monitors help with bedtime routines, keeping the house tidy and other similar tasks, but do not have any disciplinary role over other pupils.

Some pupils have a guardian to look after them during shorter school holidays, but the school does not appoint these and hence is not responsible for checks on their background and identity. The school goes to considerable lengths to deliver pupils by coach or minibus to airports or major cities where they can be collected by parents or guardians. Pupils spoken with are happy with these arrangements.

Fire safety has a very high priority and records show that drills, training and fire equipment safety checks are all carried out regularly and at the frequencies advised by the fire service. Boarders spoken with all said that they fully understand fire evacuation procedures.

Fire risk assessments are in place for all the boarding houses and the whole premises, which were inspected because the school buildings are used extensively at weekends for boarders' activities. Boarders engage in many activities at the weekends, all of which are thoroughly risk assessed.

Groups of children and others use the school facilities in holiday periods, and this is very well managed by the organisation so as not to impinge on boarders in any way. Groups of children who arrive for exchange visits have their own staff with them to meet their welfare needs.

Privacy in the boarding houses is maintained very well, and pupils say that staff always knock before they enter the room. Some rooms have en-suite facilities, other rooms have access to shared bathroom facilities, but all individual showering and bathing takes place in private. Staff supervise children discretely.

Seven staff files were examined across the two school sites. Although the files are not currently very well ordered, they do contain all the necessary information to help keep children safe. There is a recently appointed human resources manager who is actively working on a number of improvements to the systems in place for recruitment. There is a file audit in progress, and every file now contains evidence of all the necessary checks to ensure that staff are recruited as safely as possible.

Because the school employs its own maintenance team and transportation team, all these staff are fully checked including Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) checks. The headteacher confirmed that he always ensures that written references are verified with a telephone call.

Boarders all reported feeling very safe and secure in the school. Although it is an open site, it is far enough away from the town not to attract unwanted attention from the public. There is CCTV in place, key pads on all boarding house doors and security personnel patrol the site at night.

Records of accidents show that there have been very few in the boarding houses. The site is in exceptionally good order, with no obvious safety hazards. Children are very clear about where they may and may not go, and explained to inspectors why the pond is fenced off, and that it is out of bounds.

The school has a health and safety committee which meets regularly to monitor risk assessments and any incidents. The health and safety manager is responsible for ensuring the safety of the site and is also involved in training staff and pupils on safety issues. Maintenance staff confirmed that the school takes staff safety very seriously and that they are not allowed to use any equipment until they have been properly trained to do so.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The activities provided at Millfield Preparatory School are exceptional. Children throughout the age range said that they are kept busy, they can try a huge range of activities, and that they are never bored.

One boarder told inspectors: 'if you don't know whether you have a talent when you come here, there are so many things to try that you can always find something you're good at.' Another young person said 'I love Millfield because it gives sporty and creative children a wide curriculum of sport, music and activities'.

Activities involving music, art, drama and crafts are promoted as well as a wide range of sports, with extensive facilities in all these areas of interest. Amongst the more unusual facilities, the



school has a large, purpose built music building with a professional recital hall, an area for stone carving, an indoor swimming pool, a very large sports hall and its own equestrian centre. Pupils may also use the sports facilities at Millfield School.

The grounds are very extensive, with a restored historic building used for story telling, a sculpture garden and a large pond, which the children explained is an important wildlife site, particularly for newts.

All children surveyed and interviewed said that they could talk to anyone about any problems, from the nurses to their teachers, tutors, the head of boarding or their house parents, as well as to their friends. The school has a very supportive ethos, which almost all interviewed commented upon: 'everyone looks out for each other'.

Staff who are involved in the support network link very well with each other so that there is excellent communication regarding pupils' welfare. The pastoral coordinator explained that the school employs a counsellor who comes in one day a week, and that parents are always consulted if the child is under 12 years. Parents are often involved in the counselling process for the younger age group children.

Children can also readily contact the two listeners, whose phone numbers, together with that of Childline, are displayed in the telephone booths. They may also be referred to external sources of professional support if needed, and the counsellor works closely with the school doctor to ensure that children's needs are being met in the best way possible. The Chaplain is also closely involved, and visits all the boarding houses regularly.

The school achieves exceptional outcomes for children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and no one reported any discrimination; on the contrary, all said that they are very well supported when they first arrive in school. Overseas students often visit friends who live in Britain during exeat weekends, and the school encourages sharing of cultural knowledge through well-organised theme days.

The school teaches acceptance and respect for all beliefs, and although all boarders go to Chapel, the services focus on moral values rather than specifically one particular Christian ethos. Roman Catholic children can attend Mass if they wish to do so, and one of the school's listeners is a Roman Catholic priest.

Although pupils are kept very busy and several said that they certainly need their sleep, there are no overly onerous demands made upon them, and they all enjoy the activities and opportunities open to them. Comments ranged from 'I'm happy at school' to 'I am satisfied because of the range of activities and how kind the teachers are'.

Recreational areas around the school are safe and well constructed, and playtime is appropriately supervised by experienced staff.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have many ways to communicate their views and make suggestions, through a suggestions box, daily boarding house meetings, and the school council, which has representatives from each year group.

Boarding house meeting minutes show that a number of suggestions had been implemented, for example maintenance to the showers, choice of DVD's, a request for more fruit as snacks, a drum kit and growing their own vegetables. Another suggestion that was acted upon immediately was allowing pupils who have travelled long distances from homes overseas to sleep in the next day. Boarders confirmed that if a change is not possible, rational reasons are always given.

All children interviewed said that they are able to keep in touch with their families and friends. Each boarding house has a phone that can be used, and many have their own mobiles, although there are boundaries around their use. Children can also email their parents and there is a plan to introduce communication systems to facilitate contact.

The school has a sound admissions process which, through effective communication with parents and any previous school, helps to ensure that this school is right for the child and enables child and parents to be fully involved in the introduction process. Two boys who had recently started boarding both said that they were welcomed into school and had settled in very well.

Boarders have access to an excellent library where they may borrow books and order publications from external sources. They have ready access to television, radio and newspapers to keep them in touch with the outside world. Music performances take place in residential homes in the area, and each term, one of the boarding houses hosts a talk from an outside speaker, for example on working in the fire service, or as a doctor. Children were very socially aware and this was demonstrated by the excellent assembly presentation on food waste, as well as comments made to inspectors about the importance of recycling and looking after the environment.

There are trusting and productive relationships between staff and children in the school. Children and young people are respectful, confident and articulate. Some children approached the inspectors to volunteer positive information about their experiences at the school, and all those who proudly showed the inspectors around, were relaxed and comfortable in that role.

## **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are enthusiastic about their accommodation, and only one questionnaire out of 143 made a less than positive comment. Children said 'the rooms are nice and clean, and they are new', and this is borne out by observation. All boarders have a bright, attractive room with plenty of space to study, access to lockable storage space and sufficient space to store their clothing. Children can spend up to £15 per term in the school shop, and they have a weekly allowance of £1.50 to spend on tuck.

Three out of the five boarding houses are purpose built. The remaining two houses have been adapted from older buildings, but have considerable character. One of these is due to be refurbished, but already provides homely and attractive accommodation and exceptionally, backs onto the school's golf course, which the children felt provided added value. All boarding houses have furniture and fittings of high quality.

Boarding houses are decorated with photographs and posters and children can bring in their own bed linen. Every house is spotlessly clean and boarders clearly take a great pride in their

living areas by keeping them tidy. There are no bunk beds in any of the boarding houses; children sleep in good quality modern cabin beds, and most children said that these are comfortable.

All the boarding houses have excellent toilet and washing facilities. A minor issue found in one house with hot water temperature, of which staff had been previously unaware, was responded to immediately. Safety checks are carried out routinely on hot water quality.

The school's team of maintenance staff, comprising carpenters, electricians and plumbers, respond quickly to any problems with the buildings. There is a system in place for prioritising work.

Changing rooms provided in the school premises for use during the day are large, bright and clean with good personal storage space. The school has its own shop, which is well stocked and provides replacement uniform items, sports equipment and stationery as well as cards and other items.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school ensures that all children and young people are valued, irrespective of background. One pupil said 'you are allowed to be different and everyone is treated the same, in a kind way'.

The houseparents' handbook states 'there is equality of opportunity, regardless of ethnicity, culture, gender or special needs', and this was borne out by observation throughout the inspection.

Children of both genders are able to participate in a range of subjects, for example, football, stone masonry, woodwork and electrical work. Cultural diversity is celebrated through a range of theme days, incorporating meals, crafts, music and drama; for example on a Chinese Day, children made a 'Terracotta Army' in pottery classes, and West African Day included carving wooden masks, producing a superb printed wall hanging, and African drumming as well as sampling African food.

The school has a statement of boarding principles and practice which is made available to parents and children.

The school is managed on a day-to-day basis by the headteacher, who delegates specific areas of responsibility to a strong team including the director of boarding, who is also a housemaster, and the bursar, who line manages senior staff in charge of finance, estates, grounds and gardens, operations and holiday courses. The headteacher meets regularly with the senior management team and is fully involved in and aware of every aspect of school life.

The headteacher is accountable to the board of governors. The chair of the board explained that she is very involved in the school, and expects to be made aware of any significant issues. The board meets four times per year and has a clear role in quality assurance, and has recently completed an assessment of the heads at both the preparatory school and the senior school. This work involved surveying a random group of staff and parents.

Boarding is extremely well managed. The director of boarding is determined to raise standards through continuing improvement. All boarding, maintenance, catering and cleaning staff have worked very hard to achieve excellence through effective team work and in some cases, very long hours. The overall rating of outstanding reflects on all staff and indeed, on the pupils.

The director of boarding monitors all records of complaints, incidents and sanctions at least twice a term, and signs to confirm that he has read them. The school has a complex system of risk assessment, which is partly a reflection of the large number of buildings and extensive grounds, and also the links with the senior school where much of the health and safety information is kept. All risk assessments for the boarding houses are in place in the houses themselves. Immediate action is taken to reduce any identified risk.

Boarding provision is well staffed by house tutors, house parents, assistant house parents and matrons. Four staff sleep in at three of the houses, the remaining two houses have three staff sleeping in. The staff are also assisted by gap year students; currently one an ex-pupil, and the other a young person from a local school.

All staff and gap year students report an excellent induction. Five meetings are held before the beginning of their first term with the director of boarding to examine documents and forms, policies and procedures, meet all house staff and to go through the job description in detail. He also meets with new staff four times in the first two weeks, and thereafter weekly, and is always available for consultation.

There is a regular programme of training for boarding staff, which has covered bereavement, food hygiene (which all house staff received in October 2009), child protection and internet use. Staff are guided in their day-to-day work by an excellent boarding staff handbook, and many commented on the excellent support they receive from the director of boarding.

Any pupils who go off site on school trips are very well supported. Staff plan trips thoroughly, and will visit the proposed destination to conduct a full risk assessment.

## **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**

There are no recommendations.