

Polam Hall Boarding School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC000830
Inspection date	11 February 2010
Inspector	Leonard Hird
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Polam Hall School Grange Road DARLINGTON County Durham DL1 5PA
Telephone number	01325 463383
Email	infomation@polamhall.com
Registered person	Marie Green
Head / Principal	Marie Green
Nominated person	
Date of last inspection	25 September 2006

© Crown copyright 2010

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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 an independent day and boarding school with charitable status. It is set in its own large grounds on the outskirts of a large north-eastern town. The school offers independent education to children from the North-East of England, and further a field, including Hong Kong. The school provides education for children between the ages of seven to 18 years and boarding school facilities for girls between seven to 18 years. The school maintains a strong Christian tradition, but welcomes pupils of other faiths. The school provides boarding facilities in three houses for up to 60 girls between the ages of seven to 19 years during term times.

Summary

The purpose of the visit to the school was to carry out an inspection of all key national minimum standards relating to boarding schools in the outcome areas of Every Child Matters. The boarding provision at the school is providing the pupils with a caring, enabling and safe environment that is highly supportive of their social, educational and emotional needs. The school is meeting all of these outcome areas and is outstanding in the areas of helping children make a positive contribution and the promotion of equality and diversity. There are a small number of areas in which the school needs to improve and these are in the training of staff in the safe handling and administration of medication, ensuring the school's nurse has a named doctor for clinical supervision and ensuring systems are put into place for the management review and supervision of ancillary staff working in the boarding houses. The leadership and management of the school is good and offers effective leadership and support to boarders and boarding house staff.

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 has ensured that the two recommendations made at the last inspection which was undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection have been addressed. Boarding house staff now receive opportunities for training commensurate with their role and all are in receipt of regular appraisal.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Members of the boarding community receive high levels of encouragement from the boarding house staff team to lead a healthy lifestyle. Boarding and educational staff give consistent and supportive advice on health and personal care matters to the boarders. This advice is delivered in accordance with school's age appropriate personal, health, social education and citizenship curriculum.

There are clear policies and procedures in place for the management of the health needs of boarders including parental permissions for the administration of emergency health treatment and medication. Members of the boarding house staff team receive regular training in first aid but some of them have not received training in the safe handling and administration of medication. When boarding pupils are unwell they are looked after by the nurse and members of the boarding house staff. Parents are kept fully informed of the progress of their child's health by personal contact wherever possible by the staff. The school's registered nurse has

good working relationships with all of the local health services and is receiving informal clinical supervision from the school's doctor.

The school has developed a healthy eating menu to encourage boarders as part of the school's healthy living programme to eat wisely. There is a wide range of well prepared meals available for the boarding pupils to choose from each day. Menus are well-planned by the catering manager in consultation with the boarding pupils. All of the meals prepared at the school take account of any cultural or specialist dietary requirements of the boarders. Boarders and parents commented that the food was of a good standard with occasional exceptions and that, 'the food is always healthy and well prepared'

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders feel extremely safe at the school and are very supportive of each other. There are effective anti-bullying and complaints policies and procedures in place. Parents, boarders and staff are able to access a boarding house handbook which details how concerns or complaints will be addressed. Detailed records are maintained of any complaint or incidence of bullying occurring and these are monitored by a senior member of staff. Boarders said that, 'bullying very rarely occurs and if it does then staff deal with any incidents effectively'. Both the house and educational staff operate an 'open door' policy for boarders to speak to them about any concerns or worries. Boarders confirm they are able to raise any concerns they may have with staff or the school's independent listener and that it will be dealt with appropriately.

Members of the governing body and staff receive the appropriate levels of briefing and training in safeguarding. The staff team are aware of the relevant policies and reporting procedures regarding safeguarding. Members of staff demonstrate a good understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures and how they would address any suspicion of abuse. The headteacher is the designated person who with the assistance of two qualified members of the senior management team provides safeguarding guidance and support to all staff.

Effective recruitment and vetting procedures are in place to ensure staff, governors, gap students and volunteers are suitable to work with boarders. An audit of staff personnel files and the school's single central register found that all checks, such as enhanced criminal records bureau checks, references and gaps in employment are made. The school has, as a matter of good practice, introduced a three-year rolling programme of enhanced criminal bureau record checks to ensure that all staff are compliant with both local and national guidance on the employment of staff, governors and volunteers.

Comprehensive systems are in place to monitor, record, and prevent risks to health and safety at the school. Regular checks are made of fire and safety equipment and fittings. Fire drills are held during the day and at night. One boarder was able to give an accurate description of the procedure to be followed in case of fire.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Members of the boarding house staff team liaise closely with educational staff, carers and parents to ensure that boarders are given the individual support and help they require to promote their educational progress while living in the boarding house.

An independent listener regularly visits the school to offer support and is well-known to the boarders. The school is ensuring that for the international boarders who speak either Mandarin or Cantonese and who may require support there is an independent listener available to them who can converse with them in these languages. The boarders can contact the independent listeners in person or by telephone and these numbers along with that of Childline are prominently displayed.

The school practices a policy of equal opportunity for those attending the school. The school ensures that full account is taken of the differing needs, abilities and backgrounds of the boarder, so that no individual boarder is disadvantaged. Boarders are supported by members of the house staff who understand their diverse needs enabling them to fully enjoy their life at the school. Boarders confirm they live and work well together and are treated fairly by this enthusiastic and hard-working staff team.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent arrangements in place at the school to consult with the boarding community. Boarders are encouraged to take part in the day-to-day running of the boarding houses and can influence major decisions made in the school through the school's council meetings. The boarding houses have their own boarding groups which meet under the direction of the head boarder and they help plan the different activities taking place in the houses. The boarding house staff's 'open door' approach is highly significant in ensuring that boarders can successfully influence the day-to-day decisions made in the boarding community.

Boarders confirmed in writing and verbally that they could influence decisions made in the houses and the school by their involvement in the various school and house groups. The boarders were complimentary of the 'open door' policy operated by the school's staff which enables them to be able to speak to different members of staff about subjects that are important to them.

Boarders can use the public telephones in the houses, their own mobile telephones, e-mail, Skype or even letter writing to keep in touch with their friends and family. Many of the boarders have family either living or working abroad and the school enables them to keep in contact at convenient times with each other.

Great care and attention is given to the support of boarding pupils, when they first come into the boarding house. The house staff team ensure that there is a friendly welcome and that a watchful eye is kept on them, so that homesickness does not become a problem.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders have individual secure storage facilities in their rooms and other valuables including small amounts of money can be stored securely by house staff. The boarding house staff ensure records are kept of all boarder's monies and valuables stored in the house.

The accommodation provided for the boarding pupils is very clean and generally well maintained. The rooms are well decorated, warm and personalised by the boarders. Some of the international boarders did comment that their rooms had been cold this winter but they said, 'the school has

tried to improve the heating during the coldest winter for many years'. There are good levels of privacy for washing, toileting, showering and bathing in the boarding houses and boarders confirm there are no issues in this most important area of communal life.

There has been a significant amount of refurbishment and redecoration work undertaken in the boarding houses since the last inspection and this has improved the accommodation and living facilities for the boarders. As well as the ongoing refurbishment and re-decoration programme, which is happening at the school, all other minor repairs and re-decoration work required in the boarding houses is carried out quickly and efficiently, by the school's maintenance team and boarders were complimentary of the work undertaken.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding, with policies and procedures that underpin the excellent work of the school. The school, with the assistance of the boarding and school community, has appointed for the first time in its long history two international boarding pupils as head girl and head boarder with excellent effect for the school and boarding community. Boarders confirm the school really does try to understand their often diverse backgrounds and that the boarding staff really do involve all of them in boarding life while they are resident.

The school's statement of its principles and practices on boarding and related policies and procedures can easily be accessed by parents and boarders from the boarding handbook or the school's website. The senior management team provides enthusiastic and effective levels of management and support for the boarding house staff. There are formal supervision and appraisal systems in place at the school for staff but there is a need for the senior management team to develop a more effective system for the review of the performance of ancillary staff working at the school. There are excellent systems of risk assessment, management and recording practice in place to ensure the health and safety of boarders. The organisation and management of the boarding facilities by this experienced staff team is creating a safe, comfortable and homely environment for boarders to live in. All of the boarders spoken with said that, the staff team looked after them and that they were very caring at all times.

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
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the designated school nurse can access a named doctor for professional guidance and these meetings be formally recorded (breach of NMS 15.4)

- ensure opportunities are provided for training boarding house staff in the safe handling and administration of medication (NMS 29).
- ensure there is an appropriate process for the review of the performance of each member of ancillary staff.(breach of NMS 34).