

Mill Hill School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Tola Akinde-Hummel / Jackie Graves
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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

Mill Hill School is an independent school which became fully co-educational in 1997. Mill Hill School is situated close to Mill Hill Broadway with good transport links to central London. The school currently has a total of 150 boarders. The age range for boarders is between 13-19 years. The school has three boarding houses which accommodate both genders. The school encourages academic excellence and provides a wide range of opportunities to pursue sporting, cultural and social interests.

Summary

This full inspection looked at all the key national minimum standards. Overall this is a good service with outstanding features.

Boarders receive good medical care which is continually improving. Access to counselling services and health advice is forthcoming. Boarders are very involved in menu planning and have access to fresh and varied meals.

The school has robust safeguarding procedures which translate into good practice ensuring boarders are properly protected. Monitoring of records is generally good but some gaps were identified. One parent stated, 'The school has shown great care and concern for boarders' welfare and well-being is always top of their agenda.'

Boarding is central to the school's operations. Regular consultation with boarders has influenced improvement and made the boarding experience more positive. The boarding house facilities are comfortable and welcoming.

Boarders enjoy a high level of support from staff working in the school. The staff team encourage tolerance and respect for others. Integration into the life of the school is evident throughout boarding practice and activities.

The school has an effective leader in the head teacher supported by a strong management team. They have a clear vision to improve all aspects of the provision for boarders and increase training for staff. While clear messages are disseminated and staff are clear of the expectations upon them, boarders recognise that staff operate an open door policy and they can approach anyone for help.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The head teacher was asked to address a number of actions from the previous inspection. These included the recording of medication, first aid training for house staff and evidence of nurse registration. The head teacher was also asked to remind staff of the school's child protection procedure, make the complaints procedure and access to the counsellor accessible to boarders and make arrangements for portable appliance testing and ensure boarders are clear about permissible electrical items. The head teacher was also asked to analyse and monitor the composition of boarders in houses and arrange for internet access to be installed in all boarding houses.

The school has undergone major changes in the management structure since the last inspection. The school has a new head teacher who has been in post for nearly 3 years. The head teacher is committed to improving pastoral care and immediately appointed a head of boarding. The professionalism and dedication of the head of boarding has raised standards. This change has had a positive impact on boarders' happiness in the school and the way in which pastoral care is provided. All outstanding actions have been met ensuring the health and safety of boarders is not compromised.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders receive guidance through a varied and age appropriate personal, social, health, religion and education programme. Boarders are supported to understand the impact of illegal substances, smoking and alcohol on their health. Information and advice is provided to boarders to promote good sexual health. The school recognises that pupil involvement is an effective way of delivering positive messages about their role in the wider society. The school is sensitive to the way in which certain aspects of the programme are delivered in relation to religious and cultural practices. Parents are made fully aware of the programme and can choose which elements they participate in.

Mill Hill school have recently completed a review of their medical practice. A nurse manager has been appointed to oversee the operation of the medical centre. Boarders are able to seek assistance from a medical team who respond to boarders' health needs in a sensitive and confidential manner. Medical records are securely stored in the centre and duplicate records with medical consent are kept in the boarding houses. The nursing team provide training in the administration of medication and health advice to house staff as necessary. Boarders state that contrary to some feedback from surveys, boarders receive good quality food in the school. One survey stated, 'It's designed to provide a balanced diet, but sometimes forgets the importance of taste.' The menus are varied and nutritionally balanced. Currently, boarders' favourite meal is breakfast. The quality and presentation of food is good and the boarders' food council is usually well attended. The catering team are responsive to boarders' requests for changes to the menu and this is implemented immediately. The catering team seek to provide inspiring menus and themed meals to accommodate the many nationalities and preferences in the school. Cultural religious and dietary needs are discreetly catered for. Boarders with allergies of any kind can be assured that meals are clearly labelled and displayed separately. Boarders' snacks in the houses and around the school strike a good balance of treats and healthy options. Fresh fruit is always available. When asked, pupils stated they are generally happy with the food provided. One boarder wrote, 'The food at Mill Hill is excellent compared to others.'

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders are protected from bullying. This is achieved through action taken by staff following clear policies and procedures. The summary of this policy is translated into five languages. Surveys and discussions suggest that bullying is not a feature in the school. Boarders have a variety of people that they can approach to help deal with a problem. Boarders are represented on the anti-bullying mentor council whose members have regular meetings with senior managers to discuss any issues and concerns. Meticulous records are maintained and all trends are analysed. The school is active in addressing any emerging patterns. For example, the school had noticed

an increase in cyber bullying. This resulted in external training for staff pupils and parents to raise awareness and address the issues. Support is always provided to the victim and perpetrator. Monitors and school staff receive training in identifying and dealing with bullying and unkindness. One boarder said, 'There is always someone who helps, especially if we tell them.'

Excellent systems are in place for responding to and managing safeguarding issues within school. The designated child protection officer is responsible for ensuring that all members of staff within the school are trained to recognise and report any concerns. The designated child protection officer has a good relationship with the local authority designated officer and seeks support and advice as appropriate. Examples of ancillary staff sharing concerns demonstrate that the training is effective. Records confirm that staff receive safeguarding training on a regular basis to capture those staff who begin work midway through the academic year. Safeguarding information is shared on a need to know basis. All monitors and school staff receive training twice in the year and carry small cards making very clear their role and responsibility. One parent added that the school is 'concerned about the students well-being and is mindful about their problems and issues.'

Boarders understand what is expected of them and know what the consequences of their actions will be. Mill Hill has a standards and expectations document which is given to all boarders and day pupils outlining how discipline and reward is managed in the school. Mill Hill has an electronic sanction and reward system which allows detailed analysis of discipline and rewards. The school is reviewing its practice to focus more on rewarding positive behaviour and encouraging commendations for effort as well as sporting and academic achievement. Senior managers are reviewing how students are rewarded to ensure all pupils who make a contribution are recognised in some way. One parent said, 'I am very happy with the firm boundaries on all aspects of behaviour.'

Boarders, their parents and guardians know how to make a complaint. The guidance is accessible on the school's website as well as in parents' and boarders' handbooks. A summary of the complaints document is translated into Mandarin and the English language version is also displayed in houses. Boarders are advised about how to make a complaint during their induction and meeting with the head teacher. Complaints are taken seriously and dealt with swiftly. In all cases, an early informal resolution is preferred. This does not preclude individuals making formal representation. Complaints are logged and monitored by the head of pastoral care. Very few complaints are made about the school.

Mill Hill school has good arrangements for managing the risk of fire. Boarders understand the need to participate in fire drills within the boarding houses and undertake at least one drill a year at night. Boarders have clear written guidelines about what goods are permissible in the home and in their rooms. All personal electrical items are portable appliance tested before they can be used. Records of fire drills, emergency lighting and call point tests are regularly monitored by the head of pastoral care and the deputy bursar.

Boarders say that their privacy is not compromised by house staff in their bedrooms or when using toilet and washing facilities.

Mill Hill school carries out recruitment checks on staff. All staff have Criminal Records Bureau checks; however, there are gaps in some records. Omissions include references, application forms, some proof of qualifications and certificates of good conduct for gap students.

Boarders have keypad access to their boarding houses and these are exclusive to the boarders that live there. Keypad codes are changed regularly. Other boarders enter the house by invitation only. Maintenance staff and visitors do not have unsupervised access to boarders. Visitors are unable to gain entry to houses without showing identification and being allowed in. The school has discreet security patrols that tour the grounds and the areas of the boarding houses. This is in addition to patrols that house staff undertake. CCTV cameras are placed inside some parts of the boarding houses to monitor access. These are not routinely checked for position to ensure boarders' privacy is not compromised.

Excellent attention is paid to the management of health and safety in the school. Detailed building risk assessments are carried out with feedback included from house staff. Windows are restricted and repairs of a health and safety nature are carried out quickly. Private roads, the trees in the grounds and outside lighting around the school and to and from boarding accommodation is regularly maintained and monitored. Boarders are aware of the areas that are out of bounds for their own safety and respect this. Boarders also know when they can use restricted areas with staff supervision.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders enjoy a range of activities within the school and value trips outside. A recent questionnaire is seeking boarders' opinions on other activities they may wish to be included in the programme. Some weekend activities for boarders rely on the goodwill of house staff to work during their time off. This is a measure of their commitment to supporting the boarders and ensuring that they have a good time. Comments from parents include 'there is a full programme of activities which help to keep them engaged in their free time', 'The facilities are wonderful and there is a variety of things for them to do in their free time at the house.'

Boarders have a number of people they can approach to discuss any personal problems. The school operates an open door policy enabling boarders to speak to any staff they feel comfortable with. The school also has a well developed monitor, house prefect and sixth form team system. Boarders who undertake these roles are chosen for their maturity and their ability to be calm, diplomatic and approachable. House staff know their boarders well and offer support. In addition tutors and the English as an additional language department develop relationships and offer support to boarders from overseas. The strands of support come together through excellent communication between staff and senior boarders and weekly meetings between senior managers responsible for boarding. Additional support is identified and provided as required and detailed welfare plans are put into place and monitored for effectiveness. This is done with the support of parents and guardians and boarders are involved in the process. Parents commented that 'Boarding staff provide a family environment, an atmosphere of belonging and inclusiveness, good pastoral and welfare care from house staff; pastoral care is excellent.'

Boarders have improved internet connection in the boarding houses. They are able to communicate with relatives using email and Skype. Further improvement will take place over the summer. The school has good safeguards in place to promote online safety. Although boarders have mobile phones, payphones are available in the houses to make personal calls.

Mill Hill school works hard to recognise and minimise discrimination within the school. The school has good systems in place for addressing the needs of their diverse population. Students

from abroad are supported in a variety of ways. Induction takes into account their need for orientation into a new culture and country. Sensitive boarding house allocation ensures a good mix of gender and nationalities. The mixed boarding community is represented on the food council; an area of great importance to all boarders. Chinese students have the support of a liaison officer to offer advice and information to new arrivals. Boarders receive language and academic support through the English as an additional language team. Boarders have a quiet area they can utilise during the school day and also have access to a multi-faith prayer room. Boarders have a spiritual council which has been influential in ensuring the needs of different faiths are met at weekly chapel. Boarders state, 'We are taken care of really well in the boarding house, Mill Hill is such a nice school, everyone is friendly that surrounds me,' Parents state, 'The school observes important dates in boarders' own countries which is fantastic... furthering an understanding of life, people and different cultures.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders participate in a variety of councils that enable them to express their views. Aside from other councils included in the report, boarders also have an eco council, house year group councils and are able to raise issues in house assemblies. Records show that boarders' views are carefully considered and a good system is in place to feedback decisions made following representation. Minutes of all meetings are posted on the house notice boards.

Boarders enjoy regular contact with their parents. Parents are encouraged to visit boarders if possible. Boarders are encouraged to spend time with friends, guardians and parents each weekend. The school is active in maintaining contact with parents and guardians both personally as necessary and via the fortnightly e-newsletter.

Boarders entering the school for the first time have good preparation prior to arrival. All new boarding pupils receive a range of high quality information about the school. On arrival day, parents and their guardians meet with the head teacher and the head of boarding. The school insists that guardians play a significant role in the life of the boarders while at the school. Boarders enjoy a carefully planned social programme to assist with their integration. New pupils are introduced to key members of the support team in the school. International students meet in groups and additional information is provided in their language to ensure rules and guidance are fully understood.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

All boarders have lockable storage in their bedrooms. Boarders also have the opportunity to store other possessions in the safe which is held by the housemaster or housemistress. Good records are kept of personal possessions handed in for safe keeping. Boarders do not report any thefts of personal belongings.

Mill Hill has three boarding houses, these are of a high quality. Boarding houses are bright and airy. Entrances are personalised by boarders and nationalities in the house are represented there. Pictures displayed are chosen by boarders to give a more homely ambiance. Shared and single bedrooms are spacious and well furnished. Boarders have beds that are suitable if they are particularly tall. Boarders are able to personalise their rooms if they choose. Good bathroom and toileting facilities are available in the boarding houses. Boarders have ample space to study.

Desks for two houses have confirmed the school's commitment to green issues and recycled material is used for this furniture.

All houses have kitchen and laundry facilities available for boarders to use. Arrangements for doing laundry are good. The kitchens have modern appliances to enable boarders to cook and make snacks at their leisure.

The rooms used for games and the lounges are welcoming. Excellent quality furniture is provided. Equipment such as football and pool tables, televisions, garden games and furniture encourage boarders to utilise the facilities. Boarders like their houses and feel very comfortable there. There is a good standard of cleanliness in the houses. All houses have a system for reporting repairs and maintenance issues. These are dealt with swiftly to ensure the high standard is maintained. Parents state, 'The premises are well maintained for boarders, there is a positive friendly atmosphere in the house.'

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equalities and diversity is outstanding. Mill Hill School is particularly strong on inclusion. All boarders are made to feel part of the school regardless of nationality, language and personal circumstances. Boarders who struggle with settling in are supported by an array of people including buddies, mentors counsellors and house staff. Boarders from abroad have the support of an excellent additional language team. Policies and procedures are translated into other languages to ensure boarders have an understanding of what is expected. Activities are carefully arranged to appeal to all groups and to promote new friendships. The variety of school councils encourage boarders to get involved in the life of the school and boarding. This promotes taking responsibility and representing fellow boarders.

Mill Hill has a clear statement of principle. This is available on the website and in literature provided by the school. The information enables prospective boarders and their parents to have a good idea about what to expect from the school.

The school has a good system for monitoring records. Risk assessments, complaints, discipline, accidents and punishments are analysed at senior management team meetings and any trends are explored. Action is taken to address these.

Boarders state they are well supervised. The house staff ensure there is sufficient cover should boarders require assistance. White boards in the houses give emergency numbers of the matrons and housemasters out of hours.

All staff have job descriptions that reflect their duties within the boarding house. Induction training is well planned and covers mandatory areas such as child protection, fire safety and medication.

The school has an effective system in place to make sure supervisions and appraisals take place. The senior management team undertake their line management responsibilities and explore what training is required to help staff maintain their professional development.

Training for pastoral staff is encouraged. Staff know that if they attend training they are expected to share their learning with their colleagues. The head master's common room has

enabled staff to cascade training. A recent presentation on the needs of overseas boarders was well received. Training is in place for matrons and housemasters. However, some gaps have been identified, in particular EpiPen training. This becomes relevant when members of staff are required to cover other boarding houses which may have a boarder who uses one of these.

Management of key areas in boarding have been centralised and a more consistent approach is in place. This minimises any discrepancies in practice and gives security to boarders.

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 that the school's practice for recruiting staff includes all the elements outlined in standard 38.2 and 38.5 (NMS 38)
- review the position of CCTV cameras to ensure they do not intrude on boarders' reasonable privacy (NMS 41.7)
- ensure boarders are looked after by staff who have continued training in meeting all of the boarders' needs. (NMS 34)