

Boundary Oak School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Kevin Whatley
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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

Boundary Oak is a co-educational independent preparatory school situated in 23 acres of parkland in southern Hampshire. It is close to the M27 and easy to access by car. The school offers places to young people between the ages of two and 13.

The boarding house currently provides weekly boarding for approximately 20 young people but has capacity for many more. There are, in addition, flexible and casual boarders. All young people return home for at least one night every weekend.

The school provides a range of services including: nursery for children between two and four years of age; breakfast club starting at 8.00am; after school clubs with refreshments available and activities during the school holidays.

Summary

This inspection was announced at short notice and took place over the course of two days during the school week. Boarders benefit from healthy meals and have their health care needs met well. Suitable policies and procedures are in place to address keeping young people safe and free from the risks of harm, however these are not followed consistently. Risks posed to boarders and staff alike are generally identified and acted upon, although responses to health and safety audits are not always clear. Boarders have their particular individual needs met in an excellent fashion with staff ensuring boarders are enabled to have their say easily. Boarders live in a suitable environment and benefit from the extensive outdoor space; some living areas require attention; the implementation of a development plan would improve facilities further. The monitoring of records could be improved. Boarding staff receive sound guidance and support with the school's leadership working hard to improve life for pupils living at the school. The ethos of the school places boarding in high regard and boarders are an important and vibrant aspect of school life. Boarders all said they really enjoy staying at the school.

The overall quality rating is inadequate.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Six recommendations were made at the last inspection. The first concerned the need to introduce a more comprehensive approach to meeting the health and emotional needs of boarders. New boarder information processes have since been introduced; the approach now ensuring the needs of boarders are considered more holistically. The second recommendation focused the need for boarders to have more opportunities to express their views about boarding. Boarders said that their views are listened to and acted upon. Regular house meetings enable young people to contribute their thoughts and ideas easily. Four recommendations related to the need to improve boarding facilities and provide greater privacy in bathing areas. Parts of the boarding environment have now been redecorated, including communal hallways and dormitories. Nevertheless a few areas are still in need of some considerable decorative attention. No significant improvements have been made in regard the use of curtains for privacy in a few bathing areas or in providing a washbasin in one toilet; although a hand sanitizer has been provided. No boarder raised any concerns that their privacy was being compromised in any way. A development plan is currently being constructed which should address all of the shortfalls.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders have their health care needs met well with good systems in place to address specific issues. The physical and medical needs of boarders are identified prior to joining the school. Clear records are kept of medical histories including immunisations and injuries. Where boarders have particular health care needs plans strategies are implemented to ensure these are addressed. Health care planning considers the emotional needs of boarders and is holistic in content.

A well equipped medical centre is operated with a matron in charge who is aware of all the needs of young people including pastoral support and care. A suitable sick bay is available, although this is seldom used for any length of time as boarders live locally and would return home if they were particularly ill. Staff are trained in first aid with guidance readily available for boarders who require specific treatment. A robust approach ensures medicines are stored and administered safely. The administration of medication is completed in an accurate manner with sound monitoring systems ensuring staff and parents alike know exactly what treatment boarders have received. Boarders spoke positively about the medical centre and staff with no concerns expressed that they were not cared for when not feeling well.

Boarders enjoy a good standard of meal provision which includes the addition of fresh local produce wherever possible. The menu offers a good level of choice with a focus on healthy eating. Fresh fruit is readily available at meal times and within the boarding house itself. Boarder's likes and dislikes are acknowledged and planned for before they join the school with any special dietary needs being considered. The school council allows pupils an opportunity to request different meal choices. Boarders felt their requests are not always taken into account via this route and noted that a specific boarder's representative on the council may help to alleviate this issue.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

A clear anti-bullying policy and procedure is in place which covers the whole school. Boarders understand what constitutes bullying and are encouraged to respect and treat each other with care and thought. When issues arise staff are mindful to address them swiftly. Boarder's house meetings allow staff an opportunity to further nurture the idea of respect and understanding.

Staff are provided with training and display a sound understanding of the key aspects of child protection with designated staff given lead responsibilities in safeguarding matters. The school have appropriate child protection policies and procedures which take into account local safeguarding protocols. However such procedures are not consistently followed with examples of poor record keeping and delays in reporting concerns to the head of child protection within the school and indeed the local children's services.

Robust recruitment procedures ensure staff do not work with boarders until all required checks have been confirmed.

The use of sanctions are appropriate with an ethos of rewarding positive behaviour, effort and attitude. Boarders are clearly aware of the rules, boundaries and expectations of behaviour and feel these are fair. The boarder's handbook explains the ethos of the school and the expectations of behaviour. The atmosphere within the school is one of mutual respect with a relaxed and

open feel to interactions observed between staff and boarders. Where appropriate boarders views in respect of the sanctioning system are considered with amendments made to the sanctioning criteria as a result of their requests.

A clear complaints procedure ensures boarders and others know how to make a formal complaint. Boarders stated they can express their opinions easily including when they wish to raise a concern. No complaints have been recorded in relation to boarding since the last inspection and none have been received by Ofsted.

Health and safety policies and procedures address all areas including the living environment and trips away from school. Risk assessments focus on factors which can effect boarders on a daily basis and are detailed. The routine servicing of fire safety equipment and electrical installations takes place with regular fire fighting equipment being tested. Fire drills involve the whole school with records kept to confirm the effectiveness of the evacuation. Experts are commissioned to complete annual risk assessment audits of the whole school environment. However actions taken by the school following recommendations made at the last such audit were difficult to confirm.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are enabled to participate in a variety of activities and pursuits. Daily routines place a considerable emphasis on activities with boarders enjoying physical exercise and sport, interactive games and reading. Boarders benefit from spacious surroundings with lovely grounds available. All weather courts allow sports to be played all year round. Trips also occur away from the school which involve both interesting and active pursuits such as leisure centres and cycling. The school also has a swimming pool on site with designated staff holding necessary life saving qualifications.

Boarders are provided with excellent care which matches their individual needs. Staff clearly understand the boarders in their care and strive to meet their specific needs and wishes. Staff who work in boarding also have roles within the main school this enhances communication between all staff with information relating to boarders being passed easily. Regular whole school staff meetings occur with the pastoral needs of all pupils being considered routinely.

The relatively small size of boarding enhances the quality of relationships between staff and boarders. Since the last inspection new house parents have been appointed which has helped to continue the schools philosophy of nurturing boarders welfare alongside a positive and inclusive learning environment. Many of the boarders have parents who currently serve in the armed forces. To ensure staff are aware of the particular issues that families experience contact was made with the supporting agency for armed forces who were able to visit the school and provide an information seminar. This further heightened staff awareness with how boarders may feel when their parents are away on active service. The atmosphere within boarding is homely and family orientated. All boarders said they enjoyed staying at the school.

Boarders are encouraged to take age appropriate responsibilities. Older boarders can earn greater privileges based on respect for others and leading by example. This has the desired affect of creating an atmosphere where progress through the year groups is replicated in boarding and is seen as a springboard for younger boarders to aspire to. Boarders felt that there were no issues of discrimination with staff treating them fairly and in a kind fashion.

Boarders are clearly encouraged to treat each other in a respectful and understanding manner. It is clear staff are proactive in involving boarders in the daily life of the school and are mindful to support boarders in the things they are good at and enjoy.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' views are taken seriously and where appropriate are acted upon. The open and relaxed atmosphere allows boarders to express their views and opinions easily. A suggestion box provides a more formal approach for ideas and wishes to be considered. Recent amendments to the giving of sanctions came about directly as a result of consultation with boarders.

The school ensures boarders maintain contact with parents and family members. Boarders stay a maximum of six nights therefore contact with parents is regular. A number of telephones are situated in the boarding areas with boarders able to call home if they wish; email communication is encouraged and facilitated. A majority of boarders live locally to the school.

An outstanding approach to supporting boarders has been implemented through the introduction of the school's 'circle of care' ethos. Soon after joining boarders are encouraged to consider who can help or care for them at any given time from parents and siblings to house parents and teachers. Such a culture allows staff to understand who the important people are in the lives of boarders and indeed enables boarders themselves to consider their own support networks. Boarders who are new to the school are assisted to ensure their move into boarding is planned in a sensitive and thoughtful manner. Prospective boarders come for taster visits, while new boarders are provided with a buddy via older boarders. Boarders said they felt they looked out for each other especially those who are new.

Interactions between boarders and staff were seen to be friendly and relaxed. Boarders appeared comfortable in the presence of staff with a nice balance maintained between high spirits and excitement and boundaries and respect for others.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders live in an environment which offers them an adequate standard of accommodation and comfort. The school is situated in the heart of Hampshire being surrounded by playing fields and open countryside. Accommodation is provided within the main school building on the upper floors. A part of the school itself dates back many years and is a listed building.

Boarders are provided with dormitory accommodation, predominantly fitted with bunk beds, although a majority of boarders sleep on the lower bed. Boarders who are old enough and who consistently display appropriate levels of effort and behaviour can sleep on the top bunk. Boarders are encouraged to personalise their own living space with photo's and pictures.

Boarders are provided with a good level of communal space with a common room offering comfortable sofas, pool table and TV/DVD. Some communal areas are showing some signs of wear and tear although boarders generally spoke positively about their living environment.

Since the last inspection improvements have been made to some living areas including redecoration of hallways and dormitories. Curtains are still used as partitions in some bathing

areas and although this is not entirely suitable a development plan is currently being finalised which should improve facilities further. No boarder raised issues or concerns that they were not provided with adequate privacy.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

Suitable information is available regarding the school in general and boarding in particular. The aims of boarding are well known with an ethos of family living with an emphasis on mutual respect for each other. Boarders and parents are provided with a handbook each year which summarises boarding life including daily routines, expectations of behaviour and activities. A useful website is also available with a boarding section.

Since the last inspection a new head of school has been appointed. Leadership across school is obvious and well defined with staff who hold boarding responsibilities understanding their roles. The culture within school encourages pupils to achieve to the best of their abilities with pastoral support, guidance and care a significant focus. Staff are guided well with boarding seen as a key aspect of school life. House parents have clear job descriptions and feel supported by the school in their tasks.

In general the senior management team are aware of all matters which affect boarding including staff practice, boarders well being and their family situations. However as noted previously in this report some issues were identified which indicate a lack of robust monitoring procedures.

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 matters which indicate a child protection concern are accurately recorded and addressed in line with the schools own practices and procedures and in accordance with local safeguarding protocols (NMS 3.2 & 3.3)
- ensure recommendations made as a result of health and safety audits are considered in full and acted upon where required with clear records kept of actions taken (NMS 47.9)
- ensure development plans to improve the standard of boarding accommodation are finalised and implemented (NMS 10.1)
- ensure a robust process is implemented to monitor records relating to boarding. (NMS 23.1)