

# GEMS Bolitho School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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<b>Inspector</b>	Chris Passmore
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	22/11/2007

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

## 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

GEMS Bolitho School is an independent day and boarding school. It has a Christian foundation with a Church of England Chaplain, and is wholly owned by Global Education Management Systems. The school is co-educational and takes pupils aged from four to 18. Boarding arrangements are a mix of full-term boarding and weekly boarding. There are two boarding areas one of which is off site and accommodates sixth form boarders. Boarding staff are made up of both teaching and non-teaching staff with appropriate gender balances. The school offers a bi-lingual section of the curriculum, in English and French, as an option for pupils from Year 4 and operates the International Baccalaureate in the sixth form. The school attracts students from several European countries and the Far East. GEMS Bolitho School is set in a residential area of Penzance with views out to sea and the surrounding coastline. It is within walking distance of the main town facilities as well as more local small shops such as newsagents. The school has a small fleet of mini-buses that are used for school trips and for boarders' activities at weekends. The school makes use of its location, local heritage and proximity to the coast by arranging regular outings with educational and leisure activities for boarders.

### Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced inspection of the school against national minimum standards for boarding schools. It focussed on the key standards but also took other non-key standards into account where appropriate. The school has no substantive head in post and is managed by two joint acting heads. The head of boarding has been in that post since September 2010. His predecessor left the school on a promotion to headship. The new head of boarding has previous extensive experience as a house parent at the school. The school was taken over wholly by GEMS in February 2010 following the previous operating company going into administration. The school has reduced its boarding provision in response to need and lower numbers and is carrying out upgrading work to sixth form boarding accommodation to make its gender provision equitable.

Within the overall outcome judgement of satisfactory there are many aspects of the boarding provision that are good. The school's approach to countering bullying and its response to incidents is very strong. There are sound processes in place to safeguard and promote boarders' welfare, general health and healthy lifestyles. Recruitment procedures are sound as are the day to day application of health and safety principles.

Boarding accommodation is to a good standard overall. Rooms are comfortable and

not overcrowded. There is work in progress to upgrade standards across the gender mix and in response to the revision in boarding facilities. Boarders report there are issues with drafts and room temperatures sometimes.

Boarders have a wide range of activities and outings they enjoy at weekends as well as suitable recreational activities during the week. They are polite and considerate and generally enjoy good relations with boarding staff. They are clear in their answers to questionnaires that they have adult figures within the school they trust and can turn to for help. They are unanimous that if unwell they are cared for and they feel safe in their boarding accommodation.

There are areas relating to premises management and some systems that have suffered slippage. These are largely due to financial constraints and outside of the remit of the acting heads to address. The new proprietor has acted promptly and appropriately to take remedial action to address these shortfalls.

Boarders' comments in questionnaires ranged from 'Sometimes it's good and sometimes it's bad' to 'It's an awesome school and place to live in'. Boarders like the staff, teaching and boarding, dislike some of the practical issues such as bedtimes, lesson duration, internet cut-off times and rules. There was mixed reactions to food and catering but no one goes hungry.

The commitment of staff to the continuity of education and pastoral care throughout changes in the school's circumstances is evident and ably summarised by one boarder who states '..I've been in Bolitho since the GEMS takeover, things have rapidly begun to improve, and I am always confident that any problems I have are seen to.'

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

There were a number of recommendations made at the last inspection. However, the circumstances of the school and key personnel have changed significantly. It is therefore not appropriate to hold the new proprietors and management team accountable for these.

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

The provision is good.

Arrangements for health care are well managed. The school employs a qualified children's nurse in the capacity of school nurse who is also a house parent. Professional health advice is therefore available to boarders and boarding staff at most times. The nurse has links with a range of other health professionals from whom students can seek advice or counsel. Issues include areas such as eating disorders, mental health and bereavement.

Since the last inspection the school has responded appropriately to a number of communal health issues such as pandemics and gastric upsets. There are two single

bedded sick-bay rooms available in school thereby providing a facility for the health supervision of either gender during the day. These facilities are also used for individual boarders who may be unwell during the school week. They are close to the nurse's duty room and she can monitor their welfare through the day. Boarders reported that they were confident they would be looked after if unwell and observations of the daily routines in the surgery showed the breadth of issues dealt with by the nurse.

General health and well-being, including sexual health and relationships, is taught through the school's personal, social, health education and citizenship programme. These principles are continued in boarding by boarding staff. First aid training is provided for key boarding staff and GEMS have a comprehensive medical policy available as source of advice and guidance. Medication is administered by the nurse and is recorded appropriately. Boarding staff are given instruction and training in medication administration by the nurse. She then assesses individual competency before any staff can also administer medication to boarders.

Catering is in-house from a central kitchen. The business manager and a GEMS representative are currently working with catering staff to ensure a smooth transition and continuity of service under the new proprietorship arrangements. Catering staff are trained and the catering operation is regulated by the local authority health and safety department. The last inspection was carried out in November 2009 and made recommendations to improve as well as legal requirements. These areas are in the process of being addressed.

Local produce is used as far as possible and most meals are prepared from base on site. Menus follow GEMS catering principles, are balanced nutritionally and provide a varied range of meals that include vegetarian options. Consideration is given to the international nature of the school and meals provided reflect ingredients from other cultures while retaining an overarching appeal.

The school has a food committee with input from students and the nurse. Sixth form students have domestic style kitchens in their boarding houses. These are used mainly as a self-catering option for certain meals at the weekends and for snacks during the week. These facilities are in the process of being upgraded. The main school dining room is adjacent to the kitchen and is a busy area during meal times, especially at lunch times. The school day has been rearranged to accommodate three sittings for lunchtime. The area has been made lighter through redecoration and the provision of new furniture and there are improvements to the food serving area that have improved the flow of student traffic.

Boarders' responses in questionnaires placed their satisfaction with food in the middle band. Boarders reported fluctuations in quality and that sometimes certain dishes contained too much oil. Based on the inspection experience and observations of boarders the catering provision is judged to be good.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders' questionnaire replies showed that the school's approach to countering bullying works well with the majority of boarders saying they are never bullied and two replied they did not know. When bullying does occur the school deals with it in a firm and timely way. Boarders are aware of the trend towards cyber bullying but again confirmed they are not subjected to it. The school has issued a general guide to e-safety which it has shared with parents. Existing policy does not fully cover the new national minimum standard 2A but the school is pro-actively addressing these issues, not only through policy and procedure but also through the use of outside agencies to deliver essential messages to all students in an age appropriate way.

Boarders are protected from abuse through staff training in child protection and an overall awareness of safeguarding throughout the school. The school nurse and primary head are the nominated school liaison persons for child protection. Both have a background in this area and have the appropriate safeguarding training. Boarding staff are given induction and update training on child protection and know how to manage any concerns they have. There are good links with the Local Children's Safeguarding Board and single referral team. Safeguarding is viewed in its widest context by those responsible and its practical applications are discussed with boarders as part of the boarding staff role. Where issues of safeguarding have been raised the school has acted appropriately and in conjunction with the relevant authorities.

The behaviour of boarders and pupils around the school and in the boarding houses is good. Boarders have time to relax as well as study. Discipline is fair and sanctions are used in moderation but appropriately. Boarding staff have clear, updated guidelines on permitted levels of discipline as well as what is inappropriate sanctioning. More serious behaviour is dealt with by the acting heads and records of incidents and punishments are kept.

A fire safety consultant is retained by GEMS to advise on matters of fire safety and fire prevention. GEMS commissioned a full fire risk assessment of the school and boarding houses when it took over ownership of the school. The outcome report includes areas of prioritised work required to upgrade the standards of fire structural prevention. Work to carry out these upgrades is continuing. In terms of day to day protection measures there are good records of fire drills, systems tests and equipment monitoring being carried out. Regular fire drills involving boarders are activated in each of the boarding houses. Reports of these are collated by the business manager but the forms do not always specify which location it relates to. Fire detection systems and fire fighting equipment are maintained by professional contractors as well as being tested on a regular basis by the head of maintenance.

Boarders stated that staff respect their personal privacy and generally felt that personal information was handled sensitively. Staff demonstrated an awareness of

the individual boarder's strengths and needs and treated them in an age appropriate way.

Staff recruitment is well organised and managed. All staff were re-vetted on takeover and there is a comprehensive recruitment policy in place. Criminal Records Bureau applications are made online using pre-purchased blocks of applications. These cover the checking of applicants against criminal offences against children only but the school often admits students over the age of 18. Recording practice now involves a comprehensive single central staff record database. Personnel checks cover all staff, spouses who reside on school premises, gap students and independent listeners. The school has also taken practical steps to assure that drivers employed by the new transportation group have been suitably vetted.

Supervision of visitors and contractors is well managed. Visitors report to reception where they sign-in and are either given a badge or escorted around the school. Contractors report to the head of maintenance and are supervised while on site.

Boarding Houses are out of bounds to boarders through the school day. All boarding houses are secured by key-pad locks on their main doors and boarders said they feel safe and secure while in their houses.

The school has a health and safety committee that meets regularly through the year and the proprietor's health and safety representative has carried out a thorough review of risk assessments. There are comprehensive GEMS policy and procedures in place as well as specialist support personnel. Risk assessments for boarding and boarding activities are generally still managed by boarding staff and monitored by the head of boarding and acting head teachers.

Suitable checks are in place to monitor and maintain the safety of mains services and equipment by regular testing and certification by professional contractors. An extensive survey of the electrical hard wiring systems took place during the summer and work to bring these up to date continues.

Many of the arrangements in place to promote and safeguard the welfare of boarders while they are living at the school are good. There are areas of slippage due to previous financial constraints. The new proprietor has acted responsibly to assess the school's health and safety status. Overall, appropriate arrangements are in place to protect the day to day safety of boarders and students in the school however there is a significant volume of essential work that needs to be completed to bring the physical safety aspects up to standard.

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

The provision is good.

Each boarder's day comprises a balance of free and structured time. There is free time either side of the school day as well as organised times for meals, prep and bed times. Activities are varied and interesting with more potential for weekly boarders



during the spring and summer terms. Full boarders are able to enjoy a programme of arranged activities made up from popular choices or specific requests with more free time at weekends. Boarders have access to the internet for relaxation as well as learning, subject to carefully filtering and monitoring by the school's information technology department. Boarding staff have access to the school sports hall for supervised games or gym sessions after school. Planned activities for weekends this term include opportunities for trips to town, bowling, cinema, local coastal walks, surfing, body boarding and visits to local places of interest and theme parks. There are parties and events throughout the year, including Chinese new year and other culture calendar dates.

Responses to questionnaires indicate there are adults in the school boarders can take problems to or seek personal guidance from. These persons varied between individual boarders and not all those named were boarding staff. Other academic staff and independent individuals were examples given by boarders.

The school is an international school in boarding and inclusive in practice. Staff with appropriate language skills are available to students whose first language may not be English. The school has a Christian (Church of England) ethos but embraces the multi cultural nature of boarding, in particular sixth form boarding. Pupils from other cultures have dietary and other arrangements to support their cultural needs.

There is no evidence of any discrimination between boarders of different nationalities or cultures. Boarders said they enjoyed meeting and forming friendships with boarders from other countries.

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

The provision is good.

Boarders clearly know how they can have their say about boarding. Most quoted the regular house meetings and the school council. It was unclear if there were specific boarder representatives on the school council. The lower number of boarders and the changes to boarding accommodation now makes it much easier for boarders to share their views with staff.

Boarders maintain contact with family and friends through email or mobile phone communication. Alternatively there are land-line phones available to boarders in their boarding areas. Boarders are given email accounts by the school and can use these for family contacts. Other examples of contact arrangements used by boarders include social network site and instant messaging systems, subject to time curfews and parental permissions. For overall security purposes personal laptops have to be scrutinised to ensure compliance with school standards. Post is received at the school and distributed to boarders in their houses. Overall boarders are able to have contact at reasonable times of the day using means that are popular with them and their peers and appropriate to the distances from home.

## Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Lower boarding numbers and a rationalisation of facilities has resulted in boarding accommodation up to year 11 being provided in the main school building. The Cottage, a separate building in the grounds, ceased as a boarding facility with effect from the beginning of September 2010. Consequently at the time of this inspection there was still some 'settling-in' to be worked through between the genders.

There were comments between the genders regarding the respective noise levels but these were more to do with banter than complaint. Overall boarders have adjusted to the new arrangements. They are able to mix more easily and benefit from better staff supervision.

Standards in St Clare, the main school site, have improved through the reduction in numbers. The rooms are less crowded and can be more personally organised. Windows have been repaired and front facing windows have restricted openings. These are simple chain lengths rather than any integral mechanism and these are prone to breakage. There is appropriate separation between genders and access to floor levels is controlled by key pad locks. Accommodation for the youngest boarders is on the top floor in two double rooms each with full en-suite facilities. There are boarding staff living on the same floor level and boarders have easy access to them during the night if required.

Boarders' pocket money for younger boarders is administered weekly by one of the boarding staff who also works in the school's business administration office. Older boarders are encouraged to open their own bank accounts and self-manage their finances. Business administrators also oversee the collection of passports and travel arrangements for European and overseas students each term. Boarders each have a lockable facility in their bedrooms but in practice these are used very little. There is a mutual respect for property evidenced by personal items being left on display in bedrooms.

Sixth form boarding is in converted accommodation off site but within walking distance of the school. Sixth form boarding was in the throes of reorganisation and upgrading at the time of inspection as a result of a reduction in the number of properties leased.

Room sizes in the sixth form houses vary but all are usable. Boarders change rooms each term in an effort to ensure a fair distribution of room size through the year. Bathing and toilet facilities in sixth form properties exceed the national minimum standards. Study provision in these houses is also good and the male house has a small kitchen and separate dining room. The girls' accommodation is being converted to provide separate kitchen and lounge/dining room facilities. On the ground floor there are communal rooms suitably equipped with games tables, television and music players. Staff have separate self-contained living accommodation within these houses.

## Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The school is responding positively to the management and re-organisation of boarding with lower numbers, reduced facilities and different key personnel. There are clear lines of leadership in boarding practice through the head of boarding, who is also appointed to the senior management team of the school. The new proprietor has put in place comprehensive policy and practice guidance which the school is personalising to reflect its own characteristics.

There is a commitment to improvements within the physical provision for boarding as well as in areas such as training and supervision for boarding staff. Performance management and professional development in boarding practice has yet to be fully implemented. Boarding staff are clear that they can seek advice from the head of boarding and that he regularly discusses boarding issues with them as well as being pro-actively involved with boarding life.

Boarding staff work co-operatively to provide mutual support in the boarding houses. There has been little or no formal training in terms of induction or professional development opportunities since the last inspection. Boarding staff are aware that there is now a training budget from the new proprietor and are keen to take advantage of training opportunities.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. It is an inclusive school that attracts boarders from Europe and Asia. It promotes students to learn, appreciate and tolerate different cultures and viewpoints. Boarders benefit from spending time together sharing different experiences and cultural celebrations. Information for boarders is evident on notice boards in the boarding houses, around the school and in the student diaries. The scope of information is wide ranging from local news to global issues.

The school's contact with parents included evidence of written, electronic and telephone communications. School reports do not yet contain any summary of boarders' social progress or experiences while in boarding arrangements.

There are two main areas for improvement within this section. The first is the responsibility of the proprietor to develop a system to monitor the welfare provision in the school. GEMS have systems in place to monitor the business management of school and these overlap with boarding in some areas, such as health and safety. As yet, however, there is no system to monitor the quality of welfare provision being delivered by the school on behalf of the owners.

Secondly, the school does not have a system to promote and safeguard the welfare of boarders placed in lodgings. The school arranges for a minority number of boarders to be accommodated by members of staff in their own homes during the half term breaks. All staff members have been checked for criminal convictions

against children but the school does not have a system of checking the accommodation arrangements that complies with national minimum standard 51.

## **What must be done to secure future improvement?**

### **Compliance with national minimum standards**

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- complete work required and recommended by local authority food safety inspection to catering areas NMS 24.8
- monitor progress to complete remedial and upgrading work in boarding areas to protect boarders from the risks of fire, in particular fire prevention and electrical installations NMS 26.5
- develop policy and guidance to inform boarders about the safe use of electronic means of communication and adequately safeguard them from potential harm NMS 2A
- revise the fire drill record form to show the location in which the drill took place NMS 26.3
- monitor the inwards opening windows throughout St Clare's boarding areas to ensure restricted opening is maintained NMS 47.3
- ensure the proprietor has a system in place to monitor welfare provision in the school NMS 8.2
- ensure there is an appropriate process for the regular review and appraisal of boarding staff NMS 34.5
- put in place a system to ensure the welfare of boarders placed in lodgings is safeguarded and promoted NMS 51
- ensure there are opportunities for boarding staff to undertake training and updating in boarding practice. NMS 34.7