

# St Margarets School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC019551
<b>Inspection date</b>	10/11/2010
<b>Inspector</b>	Martha Nethaway
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Head/ Principal</b>	Lynne Crighton
<b>Nominated person</b>	Lynne Crighton
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	27/09/2007

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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**

St. Margaret's School is an Anglican based, independent boarding and day school, set in extensive grounds, which provide a country setting for the school. The school provides places for girls aged between four and 18 years, with full or weekly boarding available for those over 11 years. Boarders are accommodated in the main school building, and are organised by age, under the supervision of housemistresses. There are currently 67 boarders in the school, a high proportion of whom are from overseas. The school is sited in a residential area of Bushey, and has become part of the local community over the years. There is a local library and small shops nearby and Watford town centre, with its extensive facilities, is a short bus ride away. There are also easy transport links to London near to the school.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection undertaken by one Ofsted inspector. The inspection looked at the boarding school national minimum standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall quality of boarding is good with outstanding features. Boarders enjoy boarding because they have the space to grow and the security of support and care from a dedicated group of boarding staff. Boarders benefit because they have a varied programme of activities and excursions which means they have a lot of fun. Boarders develop in confidence and independence because their individual needs are being met. As a result of this visit no recommendations for improvement have been set.

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

The school has fully addressed the seven recommendations from the previous Ofsted inspection visit.

The school was recommended to improve recruitment procedures so that a full employment history is always clearly recorded. The school has strengthened this by improvement with the application process and through an interview screening process.

The school was recommended to ensure they regularly review their boarding practice. This has now been addressed because some boarding staff are studying accredited formal qualification with the boarding schools' association.

The school has addressed the recommendation related to improving and refurbishment of the shower facilities. There is a programme in place to continue to update and modernise washing facilities.

The boarding staff have improved the recording systems in respect to boarders' welfare. New welfare plans are now in place for boarders that require extra support and guidance. Boarding staff ensure that records are kept safe and secure.

Boarding staff have a formal system in place to record the fridge temperatures and this promotes good health and safety practice. Boarders' food is regularly checked and safely disposed of.

Parents and significant stakeholders know how to contact Ofsted because the school's complaints policy clearly provides this information.

The school has reviewed the telephone system and made a capital investment to ensure that all dormitories have a telephone to use for incoming calls.

In summary, the school has demonstrated its commitment to improving the boarding provision so that at all times boarders' welfare is properly promoted and protected. The boarding experience is well-ordered and safe and provides a supportive environment. This means that boarders are having a positive experience.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health is successfully promoted. This is because boarders receive excellent help, support and guidance to keep themselves fit and healthy. Boarders learn about how to live a healthy lifestyle through the highly developed personal and social development programme at the school. This covers areas related to major health risks with alcohol, smoking, substance abuse and sexual health. The school has an excellent rolling programme of external key note speakers visiting the school on health related matters, which alerts boarders to the indicators of harm to health. These key messages are reinforced further because of the different health leaflets covering a variety of issues that are displayed in the waiting area of the medical centre. Another example, includes how the boarding house has increased access to sport in the evening for older boarders and during the day for sixth form students to help maintain and increase their fitness levels. In addition, the school nurse is working one night a week and this allows boarders another opportunity to discuss personal health issues in privacy.

The promotion of boarders' personal and social development is fundamental to helping them build their personal identities, confidence and self-esteem. One boarder commented, 'I have developed and I enjoy and manage my life since boarding at the school.' For example, the school has completed the improvement of laundry facilities for sixth form boarders and this means they can manage this practical job independently. One boarder commented, 'I feel more skilled now at managing

household tasks and this means I am more prepared to manage independently, which will help me later with university life.'

The recently refurbished medical centre is staffed by a qualified school nurse who works all day including before and after school to provide medical care. The school nurse commented, 'The school makes first rate provision for the health of the girls.' In addition, the school nurse is on call and provides direct support and advice when this is needed. All house staff receive first aid training, which means medical emergencies can be dealt with effectively and without delay. The school nurse has a very proactive approach by ensuring all boarders attend a yearly medical examination. This excellent approach ensures that full screening and monitoring of all health matters takes place. For example, measuring height and weight. One senior member of staff explained, 'Records are meticulously kept by the school nurse.'

The standard of catering at the school is excellent. Boarders enjoy nutritionally balanced meals and snacks throughout their day. The dietary and cultural needs of boarders are considered by the catering team when planning the menus. Boarders take meals in the school dining room for breakfast, lunch and supper. One boarder commented, 'Since the catering team has been changed the food at the school has consistently improved.' Boarders like the variety of food on offer and also enjoy the opportunity to prepare different snacks in the boarding house kitchens.

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

The provision is good.

Boarders' welfare and protection is being promoted by the school. This is because staff play a crucial role in the support and protection of boarders and understand the actions to take to safeguard and protect boarders. Staff are provided with a good range of policies that address anti-bullying, child protection and safeguarding, complaints, behaviour and discipline, safe staff recruitment and health and safety. These are implemented effectively in practice, which means staff are able to identify and respond to concerns over boarders' welfare and that boarders in their care are not harmed.

Boarders understand that bullying is entirely unacceptable at the school. Boarders are reminded through the school assembly, tutorials and by external key note speakers, such as the community police liaison officer. This means that the anti-bullying ethos of the school ensures that all boarders are briefed thoroughly about the expected standard of behaviour. The school has a highly effective system to ensure that all incidents of bullying and the school's response to them are clearly recorded. This means staff have clear processes to report, monitor and prevent bullying incidents from taking place.

The school encourages dialogue between parents, boarders and staff. In the first instance any complaints are brought to the attention of the school and all complaints and concerns are taken seriously. Records show a positive professional approach

taken by staff and this means that investigations are thorough, fair and completed within a reasonable timeframe. The school shows a keen interest to learn and put right what it got wrong and this helps to improve the service that it provides.

Staff understand their responsibilities for safeguarding boarders in their care. Staff recognise that they are well placed to observe outward signs of abuse, changes in behaviour and failure to develop and this is because they have daily contact with boarders. Staff understand their duties to provide safe and effective care while providing opportunities for optimising boarders' life chances. All staff receive child protection and safeguarding training. The designated senior person for child protection has attended advanced training. This means that they are fully conversant with the proper procedures and policies with regard to child protection issues.

The school has high expectations with regard to behaviour and boarders are expected to show mutual regard at all times. Boarders learn about how to behave appropriately and to show consideration to others. Boarders learn about these expectations through form times, assemblies, chapel and through the personal, social health and education programme. For example, the school rules are available in the homework diary to help reinforce the behaviour, etiquette and safety required in the school environment. One staff member commented, 'The importance of making good choices and taking responsibility for one's own actions is also recognised.'

Boarders' safety is a priority for the school. Boarders' welfare is protected by comprehensive health and safety procedures and detailed risk assessments which are completed for all activities that the boarders participate in. Boarders demonstrate a very good understanding of the school's evacuation procedures, which helps keep them safe. This is because they regularly participate in fire drills. The school has had a recent visit from the fire and rescue service and are currently working to complete a number of improvements to the school's fire protection measures.

Boarders' protection and safety is promoted through clear, thorough and robust systems for the recruitment and selection of staff. The staff personal file records are well maintained and show that all staff appointed have undergone rigorous checks and are suitable to work in the school.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders benefit from the excellent level of support provided by boarding, health and teaching staff. Boarders are confident about which members of staff they can go to for personal support and the school has clear guidance for staff and boarders about how support is provided. Boarders identified their positive relationships with staff as an enjoyable feature of boarding life at the school. One boarder commented, 'Every girl is individually known and knows this to be the case.' Boarders are able to choose from an excellent range of activities and events which include evening and weekend activities. Staff work hard to ensure the range of activities on offer is interesting and engaging. Many boarders expressed great satisfaction because of the range of

activities available. One boarder commented, 'We have had visits and fun activities at no extra charge which includes theatre trips or visits to theme parks.' Older boarders are able to visit London in small groups and regularly use the local public transport while younger boarders develop their independence through local visits.

The school makes excellent arrangements for meeting any boarder's religious, cultural, racial or linguistic needs. Boarders benefit from the school's commitment to equality of opportunity. The school supports the diversity of all its boarders and provides individualised support to those boarders whose first language is not English and boarders who may require additional academic or personal support. Many boarders highlighted and valued the benefits of high levels of achievement in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, speech and drama, music, dance and the Young Enterprise scheme. These events are celebrated at the school assembly, school displays and exhibitions and on the school's website.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are offered excellent support. Boarders are actively encouraged to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school. There are formal boarding house meetings, which are facilitated by a boarding house tutor. Boarders understand that staff are always willing to listen. As a result of listening to boarders, the school has provided additional kitchen facilities by creating a snack bar for the use of younger boarders, provided new furniture and equipment in the common room, including a large screen television and games console and placed more mirrors in rooms. In addition to these meetings, there are house meetings which take place twice a week for specific year groups. Boarding house staff ensure that agendas are displayed in advance to facilitate input from boarders and display minutes after meetings in the common rooms so that boarders are kept well informed.

Boarders are supported to have appropriate contact with friends and family. Staff recognises the value and importance of communication and contact with parents. Boarders are able to receive private telephone calls, use e-mail or write to relatives, friends and family.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

The boarding accommodation is sited on the top three floors of the main school building. The boarding accommodation is divided in relation to specific year groups. From Year 10 boarders are accommodated in small single bedrooms, which are simply furnished. The lower sixth form are accommodated in two identical boarding wings and there are single rooms with the addition of wash basins. The upper sixth form are generally accommodated at the top of the building and their rooms are generally single but there are opportunities to share as there are some double rooms. These rooms are well furnished with a wash basin.



Older boarders have access to washing machines, tumble driers and ironing boards, which means they can take advantage of these to do their own laundry. As a result, this helps to develop key skills for later adult life. All of the common rooms in the boarding environment are well equipped and boarders have access to kitchen areas where they can prepare and cook simple snacks. Overall, the standard of the accommodation is pleasant and maintained to a good standard. This is because the school employs a dedicated team of ancillary, maintenance and ground staff to ensure the buildings and grounds are kept in good order. Staff are loyal and take great pride with the school environment.

There are an appropriate number of washing facilities for the number of boarders accommodated. Some of the washing facilities have been significantly upgraded and modernised since the last inspection. This is especially noted by boarders in the upper sixth form. The school has a development plan, which focuses on the up-grading of shared areas and facilities, such as bathrooms, laundry, kitchens and common rooms. The heating system at the school is under review.

Boarders can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money. Boarders are protected because the school makes good provision for the security of personal possessions. Boarding house staff distribute pocket money on request, and keep clear records and the boarders are encouraged to plan ahead.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The leadership and management of the school is good. The school successfully promotes good lines of communication. One senior member of staff commented, 'This is because staff are provided with good clear lines of management from the pastoral deputy head of boarding who directly supports the senior housemistress. She spends a lot of time in and around the boarding house'. The boarding provision makes a valuable contribution to school life. One boarder summed this up, 'Boarding means lots of fun with extra activities.'

Boarders are guided through and know what services they can expect from the school, how they will be cared for and who they are likely to share with, and a clear statement of how the school operates is available for parents and others needing this information. The school provides this in the format of booklets and brochures with plenty of information, which are informative, helpful and useful. The school also has a website that is well presented and regularly updated.

The headteacher is skilled, experienced and provides excellent leadership and has a full understanding of strengths and areas for development within the school. The headteacher competently undertakes the complex task of leading, planning, implementing and evaluating the school in providing all-round education. The management style includes a collaborative approach, which means that all staff

contribute effectively to the running of the school. As a result, boarding is viewed as a distinctive feature that is at the heart of school life.

The staffing structure for the boarding house means that boarders have access to two members of staff in the morning and evening. House staff meet on a regular basis through a variety of forums to ensure they are kept informed of any specific issues relating to the house or boarders.

The school has a good system for monitoring of relevant records, such as complaints, child protection and discipline records, which are scrutinised by the headteacher. As a result, this formal scrutiny promotes the welfare of boarders. Where shortfalls are identified, these areas are addressed without delay.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school combines a successful tradition of providing for international boarders with an environment where respect and tolerance of other cultures, beliefs and points of view are encouraged.