

Bloxham School

Inspection report for Boarding School

Unique reference number	SC013027
Inspection date	17/11/2010
Inspector	Debbi Flint
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	10/10/2006

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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

Bloxham School is an independent, co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years. The school was founded by Philip Reginald Egerton in 1860 and joined the Woodard group of schools in 1896. The Woodard group of schools is the largest group of Church of England schools in the UK and consists of over 40 schools located in England and Wales. Bloxham School is a Christian school and places considerable emphasis on both Christian teaching and pastoral care. The school is set within its own grounds in a small village in Oxfordshire.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This inspection of the boarding provision took place at the same time as an inspection of the school was conducted by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. At this announced full inspection all key standards were inspected. While the overall quality rating is good; it was noted that the school has many outstanding features.

This is a co-educational boarding and day school with a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The school's emphasis on pastoral care is evident in the sound relationships among pupils and also between pupils and staff. The school's chaplain and deputy headteacher are popular figures with pupils and they receive a lot of praise for the support that they offer. Pupils are also able to access support from many other avenues such as peer listeners, the school counsellor and nurses. Boarders are offered a traditional boarding experience within an environment which is not only supportive but also inclusive. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding throughout the standards inspected. Pupils are valued as individuals and staff ensure that all pupils from differing cultures and backgrounds are able to make an equal contribution to the school.

Three recommendations were made at this inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection five recommendations were made and these were: to ensure that a snack is made available to boarders after prep; to ensure that kitchen areas in boarding houses are regularly checked to ensure that there are no fire hazards such as toasters positioned under cupboards; to remove one helpline from school publications as it is no longer in existence; to ensure that recruitment procedures are consistently applied across all departments and to ensure that all windows above ground floor level are risk assessed in order to ascertain whether restrictors are necessary. All recommendations have been met with the exception of the

recommendation around windows which is partially met. While the school has risk assessed all windows and commenced a programme of installing new ones or fitting restrictors, some windows that could present a risk do not yet have restrictors fitted.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health needs are very well supported by the provision of a medical centre which is open for 11 hours everyday. The medical centre is staffed by three registered nurses who also provide 24-hour on call cover. The head nurse lives on site. Nurses confirm that they are well supported to maintain and develop their particular skills and the school is always sympathetic to any developmental requests that they may make. A male doctor provides a surgery on a Tuesday and Friday afternoon and also visits the medical centre every Monday morning. A female doctor is available on request. The medical centre is a large, clean and comfortable facility which has a day ward and a ward for longer stays. There is also an en-suite room available for isolation purposes should a boarder have an infectious illness. The medical centre is efficiently managed and administration systems are robust. Consents are in place for the administration of first aid and non prescribed medication. Pupils generally administer their own prescribed medication and there are risk assessments in place for self-administration which have been signed by each individual pupil. Good systems are in place for the storage of controlled drugs and for recording the administration of any controlled drugs. There is also a good audit trail of all medication and any medication returned to the pharmacy is appropriately recorded and signed out.

Boarders' health is promoted through the provision of a comprehensive personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) programme. The PSHCE programme covers all important issues such as bullying and cyber-bullying, sexual relationships, alcohol, drugs and tobacco. Visiting speakers such as the police, fire brigade and ex-offenders participate in the programme. Boarders' mental health is promoted through the provision of counselling and peer listening.

The school offers a very good range of menus on a four weekly rota and catering standards are high. For example all dining areas are bright, clean and attractive facilities and all catering staff have received appropriate training. A good range of choices are available at lunch and supper times such as three hot dishes, a large and varied salad bar, baked potatoes, pasta and vegetables. The catering department will also prepare food for pupils with special dietary needs and sandwiches can be made to order at supper time. Catering staff organise monthly international theme nights such as a Brazilian night. Pupils report that they are happy with the catering provision overall. They also state that staff are responsive and that if they do not like something staff will always find them something else. The catering department has a five star award from the local environmental health department. Boarders are also able to make their own snacks in the boarding houses outside of regular mealtimes.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school's pastoral team is led by the deputy headteacher who works closely with the chaplain who is the school's designated child protection officer. The school has good policies and procedures in place to safeguard the young people and staff are vigilant in adhering to them.

The school has a countering bullying policy which includes information on cyber bullying. Pupils also learn about appropriate use of the internet through PSHCE and ICT lessons. There are a large number of people who pupils can approach if they are concerned about bullying and these include peer listeners, the chaplain, the school counsellor and any other member of staff. Pupils state that incidents of bullying are low. One pupil writes, 'At my last school I was bullied and I felt there was no one who cared. This, I believe is the difference between Bloxham and other schools; here everyone cares. The pastoral care has been very beneficial to me.' Another pupil states, 'When I came here some years ago there used to be a lot more bullying. Now there is hardly any.' The school's chaplain keeps a bullying log to ensure that any incidents of bullying are always followed through.

There is a comprehensive pastoral handbook which includes key policies and gives good guidance to staff. The school's safeguarding policy has recently been reviewed and is very thorough. The chaplain has received safeguarding training at level 3 and he delivers safeguarding training to all other staff. All staff confirm that they have received this training. The school has a good relationship with the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board and any safeguarding incidents have been referred to this board and dealt with appropriately. The school also has appointed a child protection governor who carries out an annual review of any safeguarding incidents. There is an appropriate complaints policy and details of how to complain are displayed on posters around the school and on other documents. The headteacher keeps a central record of any complaints.

The school has a discipline procedure which is detailed in the staff handbook. The deputy headteacher takes the lead on any disciplinary issues. She also works closely with the chaplain when dealing with any disciplinary matters. Staff state that they take a pastoral approach to discipline. There is an expectation that all members of the community will care for one another and discipline will only be necessary when one member of the community has hurt or harmed another member of the community. The school has a list of designated sanctions and a central record of sanctions is kept by the deputy headteacher. The standard of behaviour around the school is very good and pupils state that disciplinary measures are fair.

Health and safety is monitored closely within the school and all boarding houses have been risk assessed. Fire alarm panels and fire extinguishers are serviced regularly and all electrical portable appliances have been tested for safety. There are regular fire drills in all boarding houses and these are recorded. All fire doors are closed and there are no visible fire hazards around the school. Boarding houses are

secure and there are electronic keypads at entrances to prevent access by unauthorised visitors. The school also uses CCTV at all main entrances. Risk assessments have been carried out on all windows within the school; however some windows have not yet been fitted with window restrictors. The school ensures that all activities, visits and excursions are risk assessed. There is a policy which gives guidance on the recruitment and selection of staff and staff dealing with recruitment have attended a safer recruitment workshop. There is vigorous selection and vetting of all staff working with boarders.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils state that they feel very well supported at this school and there are a large number of people that they can approach should they have any concerns. The school has a group of peer listeners who are very popular with pupils. Peer listeners fill in an application form for the post and are interviewed and chosen from different houses and backgrounds. They undergo a three-day training course with Relate and they also receive safeguarding training. Their photos are displayed on the school's website and around the boarding houses. They can also be identified by the badges and special ties that they wear. Peer listeners have been trained to know when to pass on anything of concern to staff. There are a large number of other people that pupils can approach with any worries and concerns and these include the deputy headteacher, the chaplain, the school counsellor, housemasters and housemistresses. The chaplain in particular is very popular with pupils. One pupil writes, 'The amount of support on offer to staff is amazing at the moment. I hope you realise how approachable staff are and in my opinion the standard of care couldn't be higher.' Another pupil writes, 'I am completely happy here. If I had a chance I would stay forever.'

The school is inclusive and staff have ensured that there are good facilities and adaptations for disabled pupils. These include ground floor bedrooms, access ramps to all buildings, disabled parking, lifts and disabled toilets. The school also operates a specialist dyslexic course. Staff state that they promote equality and diversity through charity work and also through pause for thought. This is a daily lunchtime meeting where pupils can discuss and reflect on diversity issues with the chaplain. Other religions are discussed and, while the school has a Christian ethos, the chaplain is happy to arrange for pupils to visit the local mosque. The school has good links with other European countries and there are annual visits to Paris and annual exchange visits with French families in Bordeaux. There is also an annual visit to Germany. The school provides lessons in English as an additional language for pupils whose first language is not English. The school's catering department also arranges monthly international theme nights. Overall there is a strong emphasis on mutual respect and inclusion within the school's community.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The school has a good induction programme to ensure that new boarders settle in and this programme is effective. One pupil writes, 'I have just joined Bloxham and found it to be a wonderful place. There is always a wonderful atmosphere and always pupils to help if you are in need.' All new boarders visit the school in advance and are given a whole day induction to their boarding house and the school. Each boarding house produces its own guide book which is issued to pupils on arrival. These guide books are full of information about boarding. All pupils are also issued with a school calendar each term and this contains very good information about life in the school. Staff state that they are very aware of the possibility of homesickness and that the headteacher works closely with parents to prevent this. The school has made great efforts to ensure that communication with parents is effective. For example there is a comprehensive parent handbook which is issued to parents and parents can also log on to the school's data base and view their own children's reports. Boarders are able to contact their parents by email and the school also has phones available in the boarding houses which boarders can access. However, most boarders prefer to contact their parents by mobile phone. The school sanctions this form of communication outside of lesson time.

There are many different ways in which pupils can contribute to the operation of the school. For example, tutors take suggestions as to who should be a prefect and prefects are then appointed by the headteacher. The school appoints a wide variety of prefects such as charity prefects; sports prefects; music prefects; boarding prefects and prefects for certain year groups. The prefects state that they are role models and a voice between staff and pupils. All prefects have a weekly meeting with the deputy headteacher. The school has a food committee and some prefects confirm that they have worked with catering managers on menus. Other prefects confirm that they have been involved in recommending social activities. The school has a sixth form social committee. While there are many different ways in which pupils can involve themselves in the operation of the school there is not currently a School Council and some pupils state that they would welcome such a council. Staff state that they are aware of this and are exploring the possibilities of establishing one. The school distributes its own questionnaires to pupils on an annual basis and this means that staff are very much in tune with pupils' suggestions.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school has seven boarding houses. Park Close accommodates younger boarders of 11 and 12 years of age while the other six boarding houses accommodate boarders from age 12 years and above. Park Close is on a self-contained site a short walk away from the main school campus where as all other boarding houses are on the main school campus. All boarding houses have kitchens, lounges and social rooms. Boarders begin their boarding life in dormitories which they share with

several boarders. As they advance through the school, boarders may share a room with one other pupil and then eventually have their own room. All dormitories and rooms are personalised by boarders and the furniture in these dormitories and rooms is of a high standard. All carpets in all dormitories and rooms are also in very good order. Boarders are able to access good study provision. They either have a desk in their own rooms which can be used as a study facility or, where this is not appropriate, they can access a study room within the boarding house. All boarders have an individual lockable drawer and cupboard in their rooms.

The bathing facilities in all seven boarding houses are good. Showers and toilets are sufficient in number and they are maintained in good order. They are also designed in such a way as to ensure the privacy of each individual boarder.

Boarders within this school do not report any complaints about accommodation either in individual discussion or through the questionnaires which have been sent to them.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The deputy headteacher is responsible for the overall management of boarding and she is assisted by the school's chaplain. Boarding staff generally praise their leadership and state that they feel well supported. The school has a mission statement which accurately describes its ethos and aims. The school's mission statement is available on line. The deputy headteacher ensures that all logs including complaints, sanctions, medical records and students' files are regularly monitored.

The organisation of boarding operates well and provides appropriate protection and separation of boarders by age and gender. The standard of boarding across all boarding houses is of a broadly similar standard as appropriate to boarders' age and other needs. There are sufficient staff in all of the boarding houses. All boys' houses have a housemaster, assistant housemaster, a team of at least four tutors and a matron and assistant matron. Girls' houses are staffed to a similar standard but are managed by a housemistress and assistant housemistress. All staff are issued with a staff handbook which details all key policies. Staff also confirm that they receive annual safeguarding training and regular appraisals. However, some matrons state that their first aid training is overdue and that they have never been offered Boarding School Association (BSA) training.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Staff make great efforts to meet the individual needs of each pupil and they ensure that all pupils are well supported. Staff also nurture a culture which promotes equality and mutual respect.

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 the programme of fitting windows with suitable opening restrictors (breach of NMS 47.3).
- consider establishing a School Council (NMS 12.2).
- ensure that opportunities are provided for all staff to update their training and access further training. In particular these training opportunities should be offered to matrons and assistant matrons (breach of NMS 34.7).