

Bales College

Independent school progress monitoring inspection report

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, and under the Care Standards Act 2000 having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.^{1,2,3}

The inspection was conducted at the request of the Registration Authority for independent schools in order to monitor the progress the school has made in implementing its action plan following the previous inspection.

Information about the school

Bales College was first registered as a school in 1989 by the present proprietor and was formerly known as the Modern Tutorial College, founded in 1966. It is based on a single site near Kensal Green in North West London. The school is registered to provide for students between 11 and 18 years of age. From September 2010 the school started taking boarders under 16 years of age. Currently, there are 80 students on roll aged between 11 and 21 years, 13 of whom are boarders. The motto of the school is 'perseverance' and it aims to 'enable all to achieve their potential'.

The school enrolls students with a range of academic achievements from a number of different countries. A small minority of students speak English as an additional language. There are currently no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. A high proportion of students, studying for A-level qualifications, have joined the school from other schools to retake their examinations and are seeking to improve on their previous results.

Context of the inspection

The educational provision was last inspected in September 2010 and the boarding and welfare provision in October 2010. Following these inspections, the school drew up action plans outlining its proposals to address the regulatory requirements and national minimum standards that were not met at the time of the inspections. Evaluations of these action plans were carried out in February 2011. The school's proposals to improve the education provision were judged to be inadequate; those to improve the boarding and welfare provision were judged to be satisfactory, but in need of improvement. This progress monitoring visit was carried out jointly by an education inspector and a social care inspector to evaluate the progress the school has made in implementing its action plans.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

Summary of the progress made in implementing the action plan

Education

The inspection of the education provision in September 2010 found that the attention given to the students' welfare was inadequate; safeguarding procedures had not been updated in line with current guidance, and health and safety arrangements were inadequate. The majority of the associated regulatory failures had been identified at the time of the previous education inspection in 2007 and the school had made limited progress since then in meeting them.

At the time of the inspection in September 2010, the school's safeguarding policy was out of date and it did not identify the designated person responsible for safeguarding students. The school submitted an action plan which included proposals to ensure that staff were familiar with policies related to students' safety and welfare, but did not address the key issue raised in the report. This second progress monitoring visit found that the Principal has taken on the role of designated person. However, neither he nor any other member of staff has undertaken training at the required higher level. Evidence from this visit indicates that not all staff, including those having regular responsibility for the welfare, safety and well-being of students, have received suitable training or have a clear understanding of safeguarding procedures.

The September 2010 inspection found that the school did not effectively ensure students' health and safety. The school's security arrangements were inadequate. The quality of the fire safety equipment was not monitored effectively, portable electrical appliances had not been tested regularly and no member of staff had undertaken the required first aid training. The action plan evaluated in February 2011 was judged to be unsatisfactory because, although the school included actions to improve unauthorised access by members of the public to boarding houses, it did not provide sufficient detail of other improvements.

This progress monitoring visit found that, although steps to improve the school's security were underway and improvements evident, it remained inadequate overall. While the school had arranged fire safety training for staff on 30 March 2011 and 26 April 2011, and for portable appliance testing to take place on 6 April 2011, it was unable to produce evidence to show that other required health and safety checks, such as an annual safety inspection of gas appliances, have been completed. A commercial fire safety assessment, undertaken on 26 January 2011, made a number of recommendations some, but not all, of which have been completed. The school has held three fire alarm tests at different times since 11 March 2011, but only during the day and not at night. The recording of other required regular fire safety checks and training has not been started. While two members of staff have recently completed first aid training and a new member of staff undertook relevant first aid training in his previous employment, the school does not ensure that there is a qualified first aider on the premises at all times.

At the time of the inspection report in September 2010, the washrooms were not clearly distinguished for separate use by staff and students, nor were there separate facilities for girls and boys in the classroom blocks. The school's action plan response was judged unsatisfactory as it did not include sufficient detail to ensure that the requirements were met. The evidence from this visit indicates that the washroom provision continues to fall short of requirements, particularly in regard to the arrangements for male staff and boys, and the lack of appropriate disposal facilities in the washrooms used by female staff and girls respectively. The inspection in September 2010 found that there were no suitable facilities for pupils who might become ill. The school did not refer to this failing in its action plan and continues not to provide the facilities required. The carpet in the main dining area, which was worn and split at the time of the inspection in September 2010, has been satisfactorily replaced.

The inspection in September 2010 found that parents and carers, prospective parents and others were not made aware of the availability of the school's particulars on admissions, discipline and exclusions; the educational and welfare provision for students who speak English as an additional language; or, details of students' previous academic performance. In addition, the school did not provide them with access to its safeguarding policy or details of its complaints procedures. When it submitted its action plan, the school included a copy of a letter sent to parents and carers of current students in January 2011 advising them of the availability of this information on the school website or on request.

At the start of this progress monitoring visit, only the information relating to complaints was available on the website. By the end of the visit, policies relating to behaviour, bullying, exclusions and safeguarding had been added to the website. However, parents and carers of prospective students, the Secretary of State, Chief Inspector or an independent inspectorate were still not made aware of the particulars of the educational and welfare provision for students who speak English as an additional language; the policy on and arrangements for admissions and students' academic performance during the previous school year, including the results of any public examinations.

The inspection in September 2010 found that while the school completed a range of checks when appointing staff, it did not undertake checks on their medical fitness. This visit found that the school has taken appropriate steps to meet this requirement.

The inspection in September 2010 found that students did not receive sufficient careers advice and guidance or support in choosing which subjects to study at GCSE and A level. It also found that the small minority of students who speak English as an additional language did not receive appropriate support to enable them to learn and make progress. No references were made to these shortcomings in the action plan evaluation in February 2011. Scrutiny of students' timetables shows that students for

whom English is additional language now receive additional support twice weekly. Information provided by the school indicates that careers education is included in: personal, social and health education sessions; through visits and visitors; and that students are provided with support in selecting courses and applying for university.

Boarding

The welfare visit to examine the boarding provision in October 2010 found that there was insufficient attention given to promoting students' welfare and safeguarding. Boarding facilities had not been kept clean or adequately maintained; there was an unsatisfactory division of accommodation between boarders and adults, resulting in some sharing of toilet and washing facilities; there was inadequate safeguarding and healthcare arrangements; there were no formal consultation systems for boarders; there were not enough activities and a lack of safe recreational areas available to boarders; there were inadequate health and safety arrangements; there were poor security arrangements; and, there were insufficient arrangements for boarders to maintain private contact with their families and friends. The school did not meet all the boarding schools national minimum standards.

At the time of the inspection in October 2010, the arrangements were inadequate to ensure boarding staff had an adequate level of experience or training so that boarders' welfare was safeguarded and promoted. Boarders did not have access to first aid and minor treatment by competent designated staff and there was no first aid box in the boarding house. The boarding supervisor was unaware of the national minimum standards used for the welfare inspection of boarding schools and had no previous experience of boarding. The school submitted an action plan which included issuing staff with relevant policies and indicated that further training was intended.

This progress monitoring visit found that the school has reduced the staffing levels across the boarding provision. The boarding supervisor has left and the position has been replaced by a boarding assistant. This individual is in full-time employment elsewhere and is therefore off the site of the school during the day and on one weekend in every four. The boarding assistant does not have any previous experience of boarding in schools. The caretaker and chef, who the Principal indicates are now responsible for undertaking boarding duties when the boarding assistant is off site, have not received any relevant training or induction to safeguard boarders' health and well-being. The school has made insufficient progress in making sure that staff responsible for pastoral care are appropriately skilled and experienced to undertake their duties and responsibilities. Evidence from this monitoring visit indicates that the staffing levels and the competence of staff are inadequate.

The October 2010 inspection found that boarders were dissatisfied with the catering arrangements in place. There was no fresh food available at the weekends and take-away meals were provided in place of this. The boarding supervisor had not received training in food handling and hygiene. The action plan evaluated in February 2011 was judged to be satisfactory as two places had been reserved on a food hygiene

course. However, this progress monitoring visit found that inadequate progress has been made to make sure boarders receive appropriate catering provision at weekends. The boarding supervisor's replacement has not received any training in food hygiene. Also, there continues to be a reliance on take-away food during the weekends.

At the time of the inspection in October 2010, the school was found to have inadequate policy and practice relating to child protection. The caretaker and the boarding supervisor were unaware of the school's child protection policy and of the Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) procedures. The caretaker and the boarding supervisor had not received any training in child protection and the boarding supervisor was unaware of the school's designated child protection officer. The school was unable to produce their child protection policy. The action plan was judged unsatisfactory, as no training had been arranged for staff, no evidence provided that staff understanding about child protection had been tested, and the school did not provide a copy of their child protection policy.

This progress monitoring visit found that, while the school has a child protection policy, it does not accurately reflect the arrangements in place. The caretaker was unable to clearly outline the school's procedure or of the course of action he would take in the event of an allegation or suspicion of abuse. The Principal, who is the school's designated person, has not undertaken any inter-agency training in child protection or training specific to the role of the designated person. The Principal is unfamiliar with the required level of training, the need to undertake this training or the required frequency for refresher training.

The inspection in October 2010 found that boarders were unaware of emergency procedures in the boarding houses. There were no records of fire drills or routine tests. Also, the exterior cast-iron staircase was being used by students as the entrance to and from the boarding provision. The school's action plan was judged unsatisfactory as there was no evidence that a fire drill had been undertaken, that fire alarms were regularly tested or that the caretaker was familiar with the school's fire safety policy. This progress monitoring visit identified that, while the school had arranged a fire risk assessment, undertaken on 26 January 2011, the recommendations made about conducting fire drills across boarding houses and providing staff with fire training have not been implemented. There are neither firm plans as to when the boarding assistant will receive training in fire safety nor any indication as to whether the caretaker has received any fire safety training.

The inspection in October 2010 found that the school's system for recruiting staff was not robust. The boarding supervisor had started working in an unsupervised capacity in advance of the school having satisfactorily completed a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. The school submitted an action plan, which included a note that its policy is that all staff must have undergone an enhanced CRB check. At this progress monitoring visit, an assessment of the checks and references undertaken by the school on the boarding assistant took place. This found that the checks

conducted by the school had failed to include contact with the individual's current employer, only one written reference had been obtained and this had been received after the person took up their position. An enhanced CRB check was not satisfactorily completed by the school until after the individual had unsupervised access to boarders.

The inspection in October 2010 found that boarders were not adequately protected from safety hazards. There were concerns about using the external metal staircase in the winter and no evidence of a risk assessment having been undertaken. Windows accessible to boarders above ground floor had not been fitted with suitable opening restrictors or alternative safety measures. Also, a room in the main boarding house led directly onto a balcony. The school did not have an effective system of risk assessment and there were no records to identify and minimise risk to boarders. The school's action plan indicated that necessary arrangements had been made to fit windows with a suitable opening restrictor or alternative safety measure. At this progress monitoring visit, it was seen an appropriate mechanism had been fitted to the majority of windows above ground floor to restrict opening and minimise risk to boarders. However, there was no window restrictor in room 304 and in the two bedrooms where there was easy access to a low-level balcony the concerns had not been addressed. Furthermore, while a premises assessment dated 24 March 2011 was in place, this failed to reflect the observations made during the detailed tour of the boarding accommodation on this visit.

The October 2010 inspection found that the boarding facilities had not been adequately cleaned or maintained. The school's action plan included: introducing a cleaning rota; renovation of the laundry area; fitting a new carpet to the dining area; introducing a pad for boarders to record minor maintenance matters requiring attention; and, for the boarding supervisor to induct and oversee students who are required to do their own laundry. At this monitoring visit, it was found that while steps have been taken to improve the appearance of the laundry area and to replace the dining room carpet, the general cleanliness and upkeep of the boarding facilities are poor. This visit found evidence in support of: ineffective monitoring of the laundry arrangements; the cleaning rota not being adhered to; inadequate cleaning and upkeep of boarders' bedrooms and bathrooms; and, an absence of any log indicating any maintenance matters attended to in the boarding accommodation.

The October 2010 identified poor site security. The school's action plan indicated that work would be undertaken on this. At this progress monitoring visit, some work had been started. A fence and gate were being installed at the time of the visit. However, this was not operational at the time of leaving the site at the end of the visit. While further attention is needed to improve site security, the school's future plans regarding this are unclear.

The inspection in October 2010 found that there were no formal systems for consulting with boarders; no written agreement between the school and the adult not employed but living on the premises; no person outside the school who boarders

can contact; insufficient activities and safe recreational areas for boarders; and, inappropriate sharing of facilities between adults and boarders. This progress monitoring visit found that the school has taken appropriate action to address these matters.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

As a result of this inspection, the school must take action to meet The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010⁴ ('the Regulations'), as follows:

- ensure the safeguarding policy has regard to the guidance issued by the Secretary of State and is reviewed annually and contains details of the designated person for child protection (paragraph 7)
- ensure there are effective measures to ensure pupils' health and safety by making improvements to the buildings and grounds having regard to DfES guidance *Health and safety: responsibilities and powers* (DfES 0803/2001) (paragraph 11)
- comply with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13)
- ensure the first aid policy is implemented and that appointed staff attend first aid training (paragraph 14)
- improve the security arrangements of the grounds and buildings (paragraph 23(d))
- provide sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils, including facilities for pupils with special needs and disability, which take account of regulations 3 and 4 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23(j))
- ensure there are appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 23(k))
- make available to parents and carers of pupils and of prospective pupils and on request to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate, particulars of: the educational and welfare provision for students who speak English as an additional language; the policy on and arrangements for admissions; and, students' academic performance during the previous school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

In order to meet the national minimum standards for boarding schools and associated regulations, the school should:

- ensure boarding staff have an adequate level of experience or training in the management and practice of boarding to ensure that boarders' welfare is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 8.3)
- provide meals to boarders which are adequate in quantity, quality and choice (NMS 24.1)

⁴ www.legislation.bngov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made

- ensure staff involved in preparing food for others have received appropriate training in food handling and hygiene (NMS 24.7)
- ensure adequate laundry provision is made for boarders' clothing and bedding (NMS 49.1)
- ensure the school has and implements an appropriate policy on child protection and response to allegations or suspicions of abuse, which is consistent with Local Safeguarding Children Board (LCSB) procedures, and is known to staff (NMS 3.1)
- ensure the boarding assistant and ancillary staff are given a briefing or training on responding to suspicions or allegations of abuse and know what action they should take in response to such suspicions or allegations (3.5)
- ensure boarders and boarding staff are aware of emergency evacuation procedures from boarding accommodation; make sure that any recommendations made about fire safety are complied with and regularly carry out and record risk assessments in relation to fire, together with fire drills and any routine tests (NMS 26.1)
- ensure CRB checks are obtained before, or as soon as practicable after, appointment and that until the check is satisfactorily completed, the individual should be appropriately supervised (NMS 38.2)
- ensure suitable and adequate security measures are in place to prevent unauthorised access by the public to boarding houses and other school buildings used by boarders (NMS 41.5)
- ensure windows accessible to boarders above the ground floor and presenting a risk to safety are fitted with suitable opening restrictors or alternative safety measures (NMS 47.3)
- provide an effective system of risk assessment, with written records to identify and reduce risk to boarders from inherent hazards in the school buildings, activities or grounds (NMS 47.9)
- ensure boarders have access to a telephone to contact parents in private at reasonable times without having to seek permission from, or inform, staff (NMS 19.3)
- ensure boarder bedrooms are appropriately lit and heated (NMS 40.1)
- ensure boarding houses and other areas for boarders are clean, particularly the laundry and dining area (NMS 40.3)
- ensure all staff with boarding duties have job descriptions reflecting those duties, receive induction training in boarding when newly appointed, and receive regular review of their boarding practice, with opportunities for continuing training in boarding (NMS 34.1).

■ School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Secondary day and boarding		
Date school opened	1989		
Age range of pupils	11–21 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 50	Girls: 30	Total: 80
Number of boarders	Boys: 9	Girls: 4	Total: 13
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£7,650 to £9,255		
Annual fees (boarders)	£16,050		
Address of school	742 Harrow Road London W10 4AA		
Telephone number	020 8960 5899		
Email address	info@balesschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	William Moore		
Proprietor	William Moore		