

Talbot Heath

Inspection report for Boarding School

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Inspector	Jennifer Reed
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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

Talbot Heath School is an independent school catering for boys aged three to seven years and girls aged three to 18 years of age. Talbot Heath is a Church of England school, which was founded on Christian principles in 1886. It is an inclusive school, having a multi-faith chaplaincy team which aims to foster understanding between pupils of all faiths and ensure the spiritual support of all members of the school community.

Boarding provision is available for girls aged from 10 to 19 years of age and at the time of this inspection there were 33 boarders. The school offers full, weekly and flexible boarding arrangements. At the time of this inspection, 30 boarders were accommodated in St Mary's boarding house which is situated on the school campus. Three senior boarders and two gap students were residing in the adjacent building of St Katharine's.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced inspection to assess the school against the national minimum standards for boarding schools and to check the school's progress in addressing the recommendation made at the 2008 inspection. The Ofsted inspection of boarding welfare took place at the same time as the inspection of the school carried out by the Independent School's Inspectorate. Survey questionnaires were completed by six parents and 24 boarders and many boarders chose to participate in the inspection process. All views gathered contributed to the inspection process.

The school provides a satisfactory standard of boarding provision, with some good features. Boarders receive sound medical care and they are kept safe. Boarders benefit from the good personal support provided by staff and enjoy positive, well established relationships with their committed staff team; most girls say they like living in boarding. There is clear leadership of boarding practice in the school; however, further development and improvement is needed in relation to the management of some documentation; catering provision, risk assessment processes, the boarding accommodation and staffing arrangements and training.

Improvements since the last inspection

The school was asked to include contact details of Ofsted within their complaints procedures and information for boarders and their parents. The school's documentation has been amended to include these details.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The school delivers a personal, social and health education programme to pupils within the curriculum which includes external speakers delivering specialist knowledge and experience about particular topics. Boarders receive appropriate advice and guidance on the risks of alcohol, drugs, smoking and sexual health.

The school has clear policies and procedures which guide staff in promoting boarders' health and well-being. Boarders are registered with the local doctor's surgery which provides good support to the school nurse. Boarders can choose to see a doctor alone, or be accompanied by the nurse or boarding staff. Appointments are made with local dentists, opticians or other medical practitioners for boarders' arising health problems. Written parental permission is obtained for boarders for the administration of first aid, non-prescription medicines and medical treatment as required. These written permissions are kept securely in the school nurse's room; they are not accessible to boarding staff should an emergency situation occur in boarding time which could result in a boarder requiring immediate treatment.

The school nurse has substantial nursing experience and holds current nursing registration; she works closely with the boarding staff, who are trained in giving first aid, to meet the health needs of boarders. Good verbal communication between the nurse and boarding staff and the daily handover of the written record of any medication given to boarders makes sure that a holistic understanding of each boarders' health needs are known to relevant members of staff. This written record of health care is monitored by the headteacher on a regular basis to ensure an oversight of boarders' well-being. The administration of any medication within the boarding house is well documented by the housemistresses; however, these records are not monitored by a designated senior member of staff to ensure boarders' welfare is protected. Medication is securely stored within the boarding house and the school; boarders are required to give any medicines they have to staff for their safe-keeping and administration. Sometimes a boarder may be assessed by the school nurse as competent to self-administer her own medication and then suitable locked storage is provided in the boarder's room to make sure everyone is kept safe.

Boarders benefit from the sound medical care and emotional support they receive from staff. However, written welfare plans are not agreed with parents and put in place for any boarder with significant welfare needs. This does not provide clear guidance and direction to all relevant staff in the provision of the individual's daily care. Ill boarders are assessed by the school nurse and she may advise them to return to the boarding house to rest when they are unwell. On these occasions boarders can choose either to stay in their own room or in the boarding house's sickroom. As these arrangements do not provide boarders with dedicated toilets and washing facilities, the housemistress identifies specific facilities within washroom areas for the exclusive use of the ill boarder to limit the potential of cross-infection. Unwell boarders are cared for by boarding staff that regularly check how they are; boarders say they are very well looked after when they are ill. The boarding house

does not provide a call system whereby boarders are able to rapidly summon staff assistance when they are ill. At the time of inspection, this was dependent upon boarders using their personal mobile phones to call the housemistress or the close locality of staff on duty. The school keeps parents informed of their child's welfare; however, some parents disagree that the level of communication is sufficient.

Boarders eat breakfast and supper in the boarding house and lunch in the school dining room during the school week; at weekends all meals are taken in St Mary's. Boarding staff assist in heating and serving the evening meals at weekends; however, boarding staff have not completed training in safe food handling and hygiene. The implications of food allergies are clearly understood and managed by the school to ensure each pupil's health is promoted. Boarders have a choice of main courses at lunch and supper; this includes a daily vegetarian option of salad. Menus provide a varied diet, offering boarders both healthy options and 'fast food' treats. In addition, bread for toast, fresh fruit and drinks are always available, or alternatively, boarders may appropriately store their own food items to make snacks of their choice. Food meetings are held with boarders to discuss meals served to identify the food they enjoy and their preferred meals. Nevertheless, 50% of boarders surveyed disagreed that the food was good and 50% said that they did not get enough to eat. The inspection identified that towards the end of mealtimes, both in school and in the boarding house, on some occasions not all food options are still available. Furthermore, there have been some shortfalls in the standard of food preparation and meals served in the boarding house.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school does not tolerate bullying and pupils are educated and made aware of the unacceptability of bullying, including cyber-bullying issues. Boarders report that any form of bullying behaviour is extremely rare in the boarding house and the girls are confident that any such action would be effectively dealt with by the housemistresses. The comprehensive anti-bullying school policies guide staff in how to deal with bullying incidents and protect pupils' welfare.

All of the boarders say they feel safe living in boarding provision and there is a strong commitment within the school to keeping children safe. All staff receive regular safeguarding training and know how to appropriately report any child protection concern and keep pupils safe. The senior school has two designated child protection coordinators, the headteacher and the deputy headteacher, who are knowledgeable about local safeguarding policies and practices. The safeguarding coordinators robustly liaise with local safeguarding networks to ensure every pupil's well-being. The school's safeguarding policy was amended by the senior management team during the inspection to rectify three identified shortfalls; however, the policy still does not adequately include procedures for staff who receive allegations of abuse or suspect abuse may be occurring, to consider measures that may be necessary to protect individual boarders. The school has a missing pupil's policy which provides clear guidance to staff about how to take measures to

safeguard that young person, should a boarder's whereabouts become unknown.

Boarders are accommodated in either single or double rooms, or dormitories. Staff are respectful of every girl's privacy and always knock to seek permission to enter their rooms. Showers, bathrooms and toilets have suitable locks or curtaining which affords privacy whilst using these facilities. The boarding house has a payphone room where boarders can make telephone calls in private. Nevertheless, a third of the girls surveyed in boarding said they did not have sufficient privacy when living in boarding.

Parents and pupils receive information about how to raise any concern they may have; however, the Local Authority Designated Officer's contact details are not included in the literature. Boarders say they speak to the housemistresses about their day-to-day worries and they are satisfied that in doing so, each matter is either considered or resolved to their satisfaction. No formal complaints about boarding practice have been made to the school since the last Ofsted inspection.

Boarders understand the school's disciplinary system and consider that punishments and sanctions are fairly given in boarding accommodation. Usually this means that in response to a misdemeanour, boarders are asked to do extra washing-up after the evening meal or sometimes to go to bed earlier. Generally, the standard of boarders' behaviour is excellent and few sanctions are required to help girls make positive changes in their behaviour. Staff are trained in the use of positive handling techniques; there have been no incidents of restraint used within the school.

Effective security measures are in place to prevent unauthorised access to boarding accommodation and protect boarders. Every entry door is protected by a keypad lock and there are restrictors fitted to windows. The school's health and safety officer is responsible for undertaking risk assessments and monitoring the safety of the school campus. The risk assessments in place do not provide sufficient guidance to staff on how to effectively reduce likely risks to boarders, although in practice, the boarding staff are vigilant in the measures they take to make sure boarders are kept safe. Nevertheless, the inspection identified an overloaded socket in one boarder's room and also a fire door that had been wedged open. Furthermore, questions raised during the inspection led the school to assess the suitability of the second floor external fire escape and to ask the Fire Service to carry out their assessment in regard to this matter. Fire precaution measures are in place and the requisite checks and drills are carried out on a regular basis, ensuring that boarders and staff know how to safely evacuate the buildings in an emergency. The school makes appropriate checks on electrical equipment, including undertaking portable appliance testing for boarders' personal electrical items.

The school operates a recruitment and selection system that meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools and it is in accordance with safer recruitment guidelines. The school ensures that every member of staff is checked by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and a single central register of staff details is kept. Currently, three overseas gap students work within the boarding house; good

conduct certificates from their country of origin have only been provided by two of these students and the school has not sought a certificate for the third student.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Boarders receive a very good level of personal support from staff and most boarders can identify a member of staff they feel confident in approaching for any help or advice they may need. Staff are sensitive to the individual needs of boarders and demonstrate kindness and good care to those boarders experiencing personal distress. When boarders are unwell and return to rest in the boarding house, housemistresses are willing to work through their designated time off during the day to make sure ill boarders are well looked after.

Pastoral care for boarders is underpinned by a range of policies and procedures, the form tutor system, the boarding staff team, the school nurse and structured senior management oversight; all of these contribute to providing individual support to boarders. Additional help is also available from the English as an additional language teacher and the special educational needs coordinator. Should a boarder wish to talk to someone external to the school, they can contact a number of help lines, local agencies and the school's independent listener from the contact numbers displayed prominently within St Mary's boarding house.

Approximately half of the boarders are from overseas. Staff recognise the importance of different cultural and religious beliefs and celebrations and make suitable arrangements to enable boarders to follow their chosen religion and to meet any special dietary requirements. Staff implement the school's anti-discriminatory practice policies and all boarders are treated equally.

Several boarders attend the tennis academy and regularly train at the tennis club. Staff closely monitor these boarders' welfare and ensure that these boarders are not over-committed and their well-being is not compromised by onerous schedules and conflicting demands on their time. These boarders share rooms, ensuring that involvement in training schedules does not adversely impact on other boarder's well-being.

The school database system holds relevant information about each pupil's progress to provide staff with sufficient information about individual pupils' progress. At the time of inspection, boarding staff could only access this information in the boarding house from the computers sited in the prep-room; consequently, staff chose not to do this to avoid confidentiality being breached. Plans are reported to be in place for the boarding house staff to have confidential access to the database within boarding accommodation in the future.

Some of the parents and boarders noted in their survey responses that there was not enough for boarders to do during the evenings and at weekends. The gap students offer activities during these periods; however, staff report that many boarders

choose to study in their rooms or make their own leisure arrangements, particularly over the weekend period. At the time of the inspection, only one housemistress was on duty in the boarding house at anytime and this staffing level prohibited the provision of organised boarding house trips out into the local area. The gap students accompany the younger boarders into the local town at weekends; older boarders, dependent upon their age, are permitted to go into town in groups of three or alone. Within the school curriculum, boarders can take part in many extra-curricular activities, including Young Enterprise and the Duke of Edinburgh award schemes.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders have opportunities to contribute their views and have their say about the running of boarding provision. There are both formal and informal mechanisms for participation, consultation and expressing personal opinion. Many boarders choose to make their views known by just talking with the housemistresses who they feel are approachable; boarders are confident that they will be listened to. Talking to staff is the boarders' preferred method of contribution which tends to bring about a timely response to any matter raised. At a more formal level, only a small number of boarders choose to attend the regular food meetings chaired by the domestic bursar, to discuss menu options and review meals served; this has led to the boarders' preferences being included in meal planning. All boarders are invited to attend boarding house meetings where they can have their say about any aspect of boarding life; however, the minutes show a limited discussion of issues.

When a new boarder comes into boarding, a 'buddy' is nominated to help the new girl to settle in. This arrangement provides a peer perspective to admission processes and helps new boarders form their friendships. Prior to their admission, new boarders and their parents receive the school's boarding house handbook which contains detailed information about house rules, procedures and expectations of behaviour. The alternative, informal boarding house handbook, written by the older boarders, provides a more lively perspective on life in the boarding house and valuable peer opinion.

Boarders are able to maintain contact with their families and friends. There is a payphone in St Mary's which boarders can use or they can make calls using their own mobile phones or the housemistress's phone in emergencies. Many boarders use the internet to contact their family and friends by email and some girls use Skype. Access to social networking sites is not allowed. Parents are also welcome to call the school or visit the boarding houses. Boarders have sufficient free time to meet with their friends in boarding, or to meet up with day pupils at weekends. Several girls are supported in their choice to engage in casual employment opportunities at weekends.

Strong relationships exist between staff and boarders which demonstrate warmth, good humour, openness and trust. Boarders are at ease in their interactions with the committed boarding staff team and the girls are well looked after and treated fairly.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The school has satisfactory systems in place to ensure that boarders' possessions and money are protected. Most boarders use their own bank accounts and do not deposit money with the school; nevertheless the school will hold boarders' finances when this is the preferred arrangement. Every boarder is provided with a large storage locker which can be secured to keep their valuables safe within the boarding house. Boarders do not have keys to lock their rooms and some boarders have suggested that it would be more convenient to have alternative lockable storage in their rooms for the safekeeping of mobile phones, money and laptops.

Boarding accommodation is generally of a satisfactory standard; however, not all bathroom and toilet facilities meet the requirements of the national minimum standards for boarding schools. For example, not all washbasins are provided with soap, and not all toilets have adjacent hand-washing and drying facilities, which potentially could cause cross-contamination.

The boarding house is decorated and maintained to a good enough standard although much of the furniture is dated and well-used. The narrow, iron frame beds are particularly disliked by some boarders who complain that they are uncomfortable to sleep in. Several girls do not have sufficient storage provided in their rooms to house all of their personal belongings. However, space is restricted in dormitories and in some single rooms, particularly within the eight cubicle bedrooms. The sixth form common room/library provides a pleasant room which all the girls can use; similarly, the housemistress's sitting room provides a comfortable room that girls like to relax in and watch their favourite television programmes together.

The school has a rolling programme of investment and refurbishment in place to upgrade the boarding accommodation. Two new showers have been recently installed and some bathrooms upgraded. Furthermore, new heaters have been installed in the cubicle bedrooms.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school demonstrates a commitment to equal opportunities and the avoidance of discrimination in any form. Staff demonstrate a positive regard for diversity, with individual differences being accepted and each pupil treated with respect. The overseas boarders are encouraged to integrate into the boarding community.

Parents and boarders are provided with a variety of information about the operation of the school and boarding provision. The school website, prospectus and various handbooks contain detailed information about boarding life and being a pupil in the

school. Information is regularly reviewed and updated.

The organisation of St Mary's boarding house provides appropriate separation of boarders by age. Three sixth form boarders and two of the gap students have their bedrooms and bathrooms in the adjacent St Katharine's building, which is primarily used by the school for educational purposes. This is an unsatisfactory arrangement as the boarders can only gain internal access to St Mary's boarding house by walking through the kitchen. The kitchen provides daily school lunches for the junior school and weekend lunches and evening meals for the boarders; thus it is in operation and therefore out of bounds for a substantial part of every day. During these periods, the boarders and gap students are required to walk outside across the school grounds to gain access to St Mary's boarding house's communal facilities. The inspector's view is that these three boarders are isolated from the rest of the boarding community and its resources.

The school has designated lines of accountability and responsibility which contribute to the school's clear leadership and management arrangements of boarding provision. Furthermore, two nominated link governors monitor boarding practices by visiting the boarding house at least twice per term, during which time they inspect the premises and speak with the boarders and staff to gather information to feedback to the governing body. The weekly boarding meeting between the headteacher and the senior housemistress and the 'hands on' approach of the recently appointed headteacher, contribute to effective communication about the operation of the boarding provision which helps to promote and safeguard boarders' welfare. Furthermore, girls giving cause for concern are identified and their needs are discussed at the weekly staff meeting. Senior members of staff regularly monitor the school's records of risk assessments, punishments, complaints and accidents and take appropriate action to deal with identified issues.

Staff adhere to the school's clear boarding policies and principles of boarding practice and complete training in core areas; for example, first aid, child protection and fire awareness. Boarding staff are competent in looking after boarders well and practice ensures that boarders' safety and welfare is not compromised. For example, housemistress's give up their midday breaks to remain on duty looking after ill boarders who have returned to the house. However, boarding staff have not benefited from training and career development opportunities in boarding practice. For example, by attending the Boarding School Association courses which guide staff in current boarding practice and provide opportunities for staff to establish professional networks and share best practice. Appraisal and supervision arrangements for boarding staff are in place.

The boarding house is staffed by two housemistresses who are assisted by the three gap students. Recent staff illness highlighted thin current staffing levels; for example, one housemistress was asked to work additional days in the week to cover the other housemistress's absence. However, the school reports that they have a bank of relief staff to cover for periods of illness; a relief housemistress has been appointed and several other staff are identified as suitable to work in boarding to cover any future absences. Nevertheless, the current scheduled staffing levels restrict the

amount and type of supervised leisure activities that boarders can be offered, particularly over week-ends.

The school does not place boarders in lodgings.

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...

- ensure that written parental permission for the administration of medication, first aid and medical treatment is available to boarding staff at all times (NMS 15.14)
- ensure boarding house written records of the administration of medication are regularly monitored by an appropriate designated member of staff (NMS 15.15)
- make suitable arrangements to ensure that boarders are able to summon staff assistance readily and rapidly when ill, by day and night (NMS 16.3)
- prepare and work to written and agreed individual welfare plans, agreed with parents, for any boarder with special welfare needs, and/or significant emotional or behavioural difficulties (NMS 17.2)
- review meals provided to boarders to ensure they are adequate in quantity and quality and choice (NMS 24.1)
- provide boarding staff involved in serving food to boarders with appropriate training in food handling and hygiene (NMS 24.7)
- amend the school's safeguarding policy to include the consideration of measures that may be necessary to protect individual boarders, following the allegation or suspicion that abuse may be occurring at the school or elsewhere (NMS 3.3)
- ensure boarders and their parents are informed by the school in their complaint's information how they can contact the Local Authority Designated Officer regarding any complaint concerning their welfare (NMS 5.4)
- comply with the recommendations of the Fire service following their inspection of the second floor fire escape and ensure that fire doors are not wedged open (NMS 26.1)
- make arrangements to obtain a certificate of good conduct for appointees who have been living outside of the UK where obtaining a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure is not sufficient to establish suitability to work with children (NMS 38.1)
- review the school's system of risk assessment to ensure that risk assessment processes effectively reduce the risk to boarders from inherent hazards in the school's buildings, activities or grounds (NMS 47.9)
- ensure boarding houses are suitably furnished (NMS 40.1)
- provide soap at all washbasins and provide washbasins, soap, hot water and hand drying facilities adjacent to all toilets (NMS 44.4)
- review the organisation of boarding accommodation to ensure boarding arrangements contribute to boarder's welfare and provide appropriate protection; in particular, accommodation provided within St Katharine's (NMS 10.1)

- review staffing arrangements within the boarding house to ensure there are sufficient staff in number and deployment for the age, number and needs of the boarders and the locations and activities involved (NMS 31.1)
- provide opportunities for training and updating in boarding practice for all staff commensurate with their roles and experience (NMS 34.7)