

Duke Of York's Royal Military School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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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

The Duke of York's Royal Military School, is an Academy with Military Traditions. It is situated within 150 acres of parkland, approximately two miles north of Dover.

The school can be traced back to 1801 when it was governed by a Board of Commissioners, appointed by Her Majesty The Queen. Today the Governors come from a wide variety of backgrounds in accordance with Department for Education (DfE) guidelines to help fulfil the vision of the Academy.

The school was formally funded by the Ministry of Defence, offering full boarding facilities to boys and girls aged between 11 and 18 years whose parents had or were serving in the Armed Forces. The age range and co-educational aspects remain unchanged.

In September 2010 the school became an Academy, and as such it is now open to all prospective pupils who fulfil the boarding suitability requirement and who wish to attend a full boarding school with military traditions. Prospective pupils need not come from a military background.

According to its prospectus, the school aims to, "encourage pupils to develop as confident, accomplished individuals as well as thoughtful and caring members of a wider community".

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This announced key inspection examined all of the key standards for boarding schools and also explored the thirteen recommendations made from the previous visit.

Good progress was found and a number of areas, including the prefect system, behaviour management and the teaching of personal, health and social education were found to be outstanding.

Pupils enjoy being at their school. All returned written surveys and a number of groups, representative of each Year, were interviewed. A very high number of parental surveys expressed similar positive views.

Pupils enjoy very positive relationships with a strong, committed boarding team. Their safety and welfare is of paramount importance, endorsed by solid, safe practice.

A total of nine recommendations have been made from this inspection; the majority of which have already been identified by the school itself.

Improvements since the last inspection

Thirteen recommendations were made from the previous inspection of 6 February 2008 and all have been found to be fully or partially met. Outcomes for pupils across

a range of areas have improved.

The nursing team receives additional pertinent training and pupil feedback about the quality of care they receive at the medical centre is much more positive. The content of written welfare plans is more detailed and thorough; however, not all key staff members are fully aware of these documents at present.

The overall quality of the meals provided has considerably improved. Pupils enjoy a much wider variety and confirm they are never hungry.

Policy guidance with regards to bullying has been updated. Incidents have reduced and staff are vigilant in looking for patterns and trends, thus pupils are better protected. Suitable protection is further ensured through the provision of child protection training for all externally contracted staff, as was recommended.

The recruitment policy and procedure has been updated to include greater safeguards. The school is currently auditing all personnel files to ensure appropriate remedial action is taken in the event of omissions being found.

Household generic risk assessments have been updated following the recommendation; however, the quality of a number of these documents is variable.

Pupils provide very positive feedback with regards to activity provision. The choice of events on offer has greatly improved. Pupils are very happy about this. All pupils have a school email address in order to maintain contact with their families; however, problems with the internet remain and the school continues to try to address these.

A new boarding house for the Upper Sixth is now fully operational. Superb accommodation is highly valued by this group, who further confirm they now enjoy more free time. All pupils are pleased to report that extended days have been reduced and the recording of lesson attendance has ceased.

Pupils speak more positively with regards to improved consultation forums and they confirm improved practice with regards to the handling of confidential matters.

A clear plan was received from the Ministry of Defence (MoD) with regards to continuing to improve the boarding accommodation. Although the school is now an Academy, the work implemented by the MoD continues to bring significant improvements for the pupils. New bath houses are in place within every boarding house, a new Upper Sixth building is now fully operational and the finance committee continues to make and implement realistic plans with regards to ongoing refurbishment projects.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Pupils benefit from the implementation of clear health promotion policies. Staff across all disciplines take their responsibilities seriously and want the very best outcomes for the pupils. Personal, social and health education is effectively delivered,

using age appropriate materials across all year groups. Pupils fully understand the school rules with regards to smoking and the use of illegal substances and alcohol. These are effectively communicated and any sanctions are carefully delivered alongside an educative attempt to discourage such behaviour.

Health and medical records are held securely. The contents provide staff members with the information they need to know about individual pupils. Pertinent information, including health and medical histories, emergency contact details and consent for treatment is explicitly clear. Appropriate safeguards are assured. Individual welfare plans contain good, detailed information. However, not all relevant staff members demonstrate a clear understanding of such plans in every case. This omission presents the potential risk of pertinent information being unclear to all relevant staff members.

Effective nursing cover is provided 24 hours a day by qualified nurses. The medical centre is clean and appropriately equipped; however, the number of beds available could not cope with a major epidemic. Many pupils say they prefer to stay in their boarding house when unwell and this is largely due to the condition of the medical centre and its location. This deficit is already recognised by the school and clear plans are in place to refurbish a separate building within much closer proximity to the boarding houses and the dining hall.

Pupils speak very positively about the care and support they receive from matrons. This group is further commended by parents. Quotes include, 'they really look after me', 'I can always talk to her' and 'we cannot praise our child's matron enough'. Matrons have a very clear responsibility to promote health and welfare and they take this very seriously. Effective liaison with the nursing team ensures that health concerns are promptly reported and there is good internal communication when pupils move house.

The school ensures an adequate number and range of boarding staff remain up to date with regards to first aid and medicine administration training. Medicines and records within boarding houses are closely monitored by the nursing sister. Safe practice is assured. Pupils are happy with GP arrangements; they can access a male or female doctor and older pupils can choose whether to have a chaperone to attend appointments. Parents report positively with regards to the ongoing support and management of individual medical conditions, but a small number have concerns with regards to dentistry provision. Although the school is clear within its own policy that only emergency dental treatment will be sought, this contradicts the national minimum standards (NMS) guidance for boarding schools.

A newly appointed counsellor is already having a very positive impact. Pupils know who she is and her role is widely advertised and clearly understood. Effective liaison between the school and external agencies, including mental health services also provides pupils with access to the professionals they need to ensure their emotional well being is being effectively supported.

The school has worked extremely hard to positively address historic issues about the

quality of the meals provided. Pupil surveys and direct interviews now routinely commend this provision, albeit an element of dissatisfaction is expressed. The messing committee is having a strong and tangible impact. Special dietary requirements are well known, including those pupils who are vegetarian. A wide range of options are available at each meal and pupils say there is always something on the menu that they like. The school is fully aware of the current areas of dissatisfaction and demonstrates a very clear commitment and plan to address these.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Explicitly clear procedures with regards to countering bullying are being effectively implemented by all staff members. Pupils are being protected. Comments from pupils include, 'when it happens, it is quickly dealt with' and 'there is no way that bullying is tolerated here'. Written records demonstrate a very clear and direct approach when such incidents do occur. Although perpetrators receive an understanding and educative input in an attempt to change such behaviour, it is the victim who receives the immediate and appropriate intervention.

Safeguarding policies and procedures are clear and they are widely advertised to all staff members. Ongoing training ensures that staff across all disciplines are suitably equipped to report all safeguarding concerns swiftly, thus effectively protecting the pupils. The school enjoys very positive links with the local authority, including the police and local community. Such relationships place the continued welfare of the pupils at the very heart of the school. Their welfare and safety is of paramount importance.

In the main, pupils report sanctions and punishments to be proportionate and fair. School rules are clearly advertised and pupils know what to expect should they deviate from the school's own code of conduct. An equally clear reward system for positive conduct is also clearly advertised, encouraged and rewarded. Throughout this inspection, pupils are observed to be polite, extremely well-mannered and a credit to the school in terms of their conduct and behaviour. Prefects are closely monitored in terms of any punishments they may distribute and oversee, thus minimising any potential negative impact or abuse of power that this could present. All punishment records are closely scrutinised by senior staff members to ensure an even and proportionate approach is being delivered throughout the school.

Pupils know how to complain, both formally and through informal resolution methods. The latter is obviously working, supported by pupil feedback. Comments include, 'you just tell a member of staff and it gets sorted' and 'if you say something is bothering you, it gets sorted out really quickly'. This view is further endorsed through good quality records and monitoring processes. Although the majority of parental surveys further support this view, feedback from a smaller group of parents and pupils expresses a degree of dissatisfaction and a lack of clarity with regards to complaints processes. It is further noted that not all forms of complaints literature clearly features external agencies, including Ofsted. Such omissions present the risk

of a minority of stakeholders being dissatisfied with the school's complaints processes and procedures.

The quality of the prefect system within the school is commended. Senior pupils receive this position subject to the close scrutiny of their appointment, sound induction processes and ongoing close supervision. Those interviewed demonstrate an excellent understanding of the importance of this role. They view it as an enabling position, whereby their key objective is to support younger pupils and to act as exemplary role models. Younger pupils describe prefects as 'supportive' and 'like a good big brother or sister'. Prefects receive sound safeguarding training and their role in terms of overseeing behaviour management is closely monitored on a weekly basis.

The school does not take responsibility for the appointment or monitoring of educational guardians. Such arrangements are clearly communicated as being the responsibility of the parents. In terms of good safeguarding, the school does offer clear guidance and advice as to the criteria which parents should apply in an effort to ensure the guardians appointed are of a suitable age and moral standing to suitably fulfil this role.

Good procedures protect pupils against the risk of fire. Boarding houses receive weekly safety checks and there are no outstanding recommendations from the local fire office. Pupils know the evacuation procedures and these are practised at different times of the day and night.

Pupils who engage in high risk activities such as shooting and assault course training receive good protection. The staff involved are qualified and suitably experienced. The swimming pool is only used under the supervision of a qualified life guard. Risk assessments are in place for all such activities; however, those produced by an external company are not as robust as those completed by the school.

The health and safety committee routinely scrutinises security, fire, accidents and risk assessments. Pupils receive good protection and confirm that they feel safe in school. All visitors are appropriately challenged and supervised. The grounds are very secure and potentially hazardous areas are tightly controlled. Pupils know which areas are out of bounds. Risk assessments are in place for every area, including boarding houses but the variable quality of these renders a number as being out of date.

Safe recruitment practice protects pupils from possible harm. Staff involved in boarding duties do not commence with their posts until all checks, including Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are satisfactorily returned. Visiting contractors and taxi drivers are also required to produce evidence of CRB's and these are also completed for the spouses of employees living on the site. Recruitment records are held in a number of areas and there is no clear system in place to monitor these. Some gaps are apparent with regards to the recruitment records of ancillary staff, who do not have unsupervised access to pupils. This shortfall has not

been identified due to the lack of robust monitoring; however, the school is addressing this as a matter of priority.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Pupils enjoy a wide range of activity provision. Sound consultation with pupils ensures the clubs and activities on offer reflect their preferences and interests. Over eighty different clubs are available for the forthcoming summer term. This provision is under constant review and the school recognises that some activities are more popular than others. There is a very clear drive to ensure there is something for everyone and the school has particularly responded to those pupils who previously complained there was too much sport on offer.

Pupils enjoy sound relationships with staff across all disciplines. Matrons are routinely described by boys and girls as 'caring', 'lovely' and 'like a mum'. Those responsible for the management of the boarding houses demonstrate a real warmth and understanding of the age group they are responsible for, in line with good parenting. Pupils say, 'our House Master is brilliant, he treats us like adults' and 'my House Mistress really looks after me'. Additional staff, including the nursing team and counsellor receive equally positive praise, particularly from older pupils, who frequently seek out these individuals for appropriate support and guidance.

Written information for pupils clearly describes the support mechanisms available to them. External provision, including Ofsted is described. However, the independent listener roles are not made clear and many pupils do not know who these individuals are. Pupils do not view this negatively. They believe they have many meaningful contacts throughout the school and also describe older pupils and prefects as a valued means of support.

The school works hard to integrate all of its pupils. Although it is recognised that many commonalities are present, for example, having parents from military backgrounds, minority groups are sensitively provided for. Parent information is currently being translated into Nepalese and pupils from overseas share boarding cubicles with their English peers in order to encourage integration. New buildings are furnished with disabled access and sound provision is in place to support pupils who are talented, as well as those with additional needs.

Pupils are very positive about recent timetable changes, which have reduced their working days and week. Prefects confirm their additional duties are manageable; they describe excellent staff support and are assured that concerns about their workload would be quickly identified and remedied.

Additional study times are clearly set and pupils complete this in a timely and orderly way. Bedrooms and dormitories are equipped with the necessary items and younger pupils receive appropriate guidance and support. Senior pupils commend the facilities in their boarding house by saying, 'we have everything we need' and 'you can just

get on with your work without interruption'.

Pupils enjoy the freedom of movement within the grounds during their free time. Boarding houses are equipped with the equipment chosen by pupils, including televisions, pool tables, table tennis, music systems, books and board games. One house has a cinema room. Outside areas are safe due to improved lighting, good security and appropriate supervision.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

A number of consultation forums enable pupils to express their views and opinions. Mixed feedback includes, 'you don't always know why something is or isn't done' and 'a lot of changes have happened because we are listened to'. Various groups include a school council, chapel and food committees, and each boarding house holds weekly meetings. Pupils confirm the quality of food has significantly improved, additional flood lighting has been placed in the square where they socialise and their ideas for activities have been implemented.

The school is working hard to address current difficulties with regards to internet connections. Contact with parents and families is being compromised. The Upper Sixth pupils also experience problems with mobile telephone signals when inside their house. Private telephone contact is further restricted in this particular house, because unlike all of the others, the two payphones do not ensure good privacy. Pupils are encouraged to write letters and junior pupils have access to the house telephone, which they do not have to pay for, to make and receive calls to their parents and families. The school is preparing to trial the 'Keep Kids Safe' project, which promotes the positive use of mobile telephone and internet messaging between the school, parents and pupils.

Pupils report very positively about their introduction to the school. Prefects assume a key role in this area and prospective pupils receive very useful information before they join. Pupils are sensitively paired within the boarding houses and a 'buddy system' ensures they have a named older pupil made known to them before they arrive at the start of their first term.

Pupils enjoy good access to the media and their local community. Newspapers are available in each house and the library, televisions are situated in all common rooms and pupils have increasing freedom to leave the school site as they get older.

The positive relationships between the pupils and boarding house teams is a particular strength of the school. House staff know their pupils very well and they communicate very effectively with each other. They engage in affectionate, though appropriate relationships which are highly valued by the pupils. Parents provide overwhelmingly positive feedback; the majority are very happy with the care and support their children receive from this dedicated team.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

All pupils are enabled to keep their valuables safe through the provision of personal lockable storage. Although some thefts are reported, boarding house staff take appropriate remedial action and pupils are discouraged from bringing significantly valuable items into school.

The continued and ongoing refurbishment works in respect of the boarding accommodation continues to ensure improved outcomes for pupils. Bathrooms throughout all of the houses now provide good privacy and the accommodation for the Upper Sixth pupils is of an excellent standard. Following the relocation of the Upper Sixth pupils, the remaining houses now have more room to accommodate a smaller number of pupils. This is having a positive impact in terms of physical space, albeit privacy issues remain apparent in these houses.

Boarding staff work incredibly hard to create warm and homely environments within the houses; however, they are restricted due to the design and age of these buildings. Hence, a real disparity is apparent within the boarding provision. The school remains acutely aware of this issue and clear refurbishment plans are being implemented, set against realistic timescales.

Pupils are able to access their boarding houses during breaks and lunchtimes; the Upper Sixth, throughout the school day. Separate changing facilities for sports activities provide appropriate privacy. Pupils can access the school shop at various times and older pupils enjoy going into the local town during their free time. Hence, all pupils can readily access and obtain the personal requisites they need.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Parents and pupils are assured that the school provides them with current and updated information about its ethos and services. Written literature is clear and the website is currently being updated. Staff with boarding duties are provided with clear policies and procedures which enable them to effectively look after the pupils.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The staff implement clear policies and procedures, which serve to raise awareness and celebrate differences. Pupils with specific individual needs are treated with sensitivity and respect. Appropriate additional resources are provided where necessary.

Effective lines of accountability and responsibility assist with the smooth running of the boarding provision. Boarding teams are cohesive and there is a clear management structure. The school is adapting to its changing status, to that of an Academy. Recent months have been extremely busy in terms of preparing new policies, procedures and business plans. At present, much information is being

cascaded down from the senior leadership team, as opposed to being shared horizontally. Some staff members are frustrated by the current lack of shared involvement and would like greater opportunities to actively participate in shaping the school's new status.

General school records are being maintained in good overall order. Information about pupils is secure, although appropriately shared with those who need to know. Records pertaining to punishments, accidents, risk assessments and complaints are being monitored, albeit the quality of such monitoring is variable. Such records are not always being signed off and the role of the governing body in respect of such monitoring is not yet explicitly clear. This is a newly appointed governing body. Potential patterns and trends risk being missed as a result of such omissions.

Throughout the school day and evening, pupils receive the supervision they need to remain safe. Alongside the immediate boarding teams, tutors, gap students and prefects provide additional supervisory support and adequate staffing levels are in place within each boarding house overnight. Pupils know how to summon immediate assistance when they need it. The boarding team is commended for the effort and hours worked to ensure the continued well-being of the pupils. The school recognises that historic induction, supervision and appraisal processes have not been as robust for those with boarding responsibilities, when compared against similar processes for teaching colleagues. Informal and unrecorded processes present potential risks of staff members being unclear with regards to the school's policies and procedures. This shortfall has the potential to impact negatively upon welfare provision. The school recognises such omissions and is currently implementing a revised and improved appraisal process for all staff with boarding duties.

Good training opportunities enable boarding staff members to obtain the skills and knowledge they need to provide a good service to the pupils in their care. The number of boarding staff team members attending accredited Boarding School's Association training is exemplary. Although the nursing team is also provided with relevant appropriate ongoing training, clinical supervision and appraisal systems are less apparent for this particular group.

Although in its infancy, the new governing body presents as a dynamic group, comprised of individuals from a range of relevant and useful backgrounds. A significant number of visits have already been conducted since December 2010 and the subsequent reports feature an abundance of consultation with pupils and staff. Two prospective members are currently awaiting membership and this active group is bringing a refreshing prospective to the school, and boarding provision as a whole.

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...

- review current dentistry arrangements to ensure the school's provision fully meets this standard (NMS 15)
- ensure that all staff involved in the implementation of welfare plans are fully aware of their contents (NMS 17)
- ensure that all parties are fully aware of the school's complaints procedures (NMS 5)
- complete the current recruitment audit and ensure remedial action is taken where necessary (NMS 38)
- review current risk assessments to improve upon the variable quality found (NMS 47).
- address the current difficulties with regards to internet access and improve upon the privacy aspects of the payphones in Centenary House (NMS 19)
- continue to implement the school's refurbishment plans so as to provide suitable accommodation for all (NMS 40)
- ensure staff with boarding duties receive clear written induction processes, which lead into effective supervision meetings (this includes the nurses). Fully implement the new appraisal system to ensure ongoing individual training needs are identified and provided for (NMS 34)
- ensure that all of the systems and processes requiring monitoring receive the same close scrutiny (NMS 23).