

Ardingly College

Inspection report for Boarding School

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Inspector	Gaynor Moorey / Paul Taylor
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Date of last inspection	11/02/2008

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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 school is a part of the Woodard Corporation and as such has a long history of providing educational opportunities for young people. The aim of the school, as outlined in the prospectus and handbooks, is to enable all students to develop 'their love of learning, academic potential and individual talents in a caring community which fosters sensitivity, confidence, a sense of service and enthusiasm for life'.

The school accommodates approximately 260 students, both boys and girls, and additionally provides for over 500 day students. Students originate from the local area as well as from further a field including overseas. Those students who board are accommodated in six separate houses, the majority of which are newly built on the school site.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The announced inspection took place over three days. The inspection covered and reviewed all of the key national minimum standards for boarding schools.

The school provides an outstanding level of care for the students who board there. Each student's individuality is valued and respected and the ethos of the school ensures that those who board there are nurtured and developed both academically and socially. The strong leadership of the school and systems operated therein ensure that all the students have their welfare promoted and protected. The school ensure that members of staff are correctly checked to work at the school. A formal programme of training and supervision is provided for all staff working in the boarding provision and across the school. The students are monitored and supported closely and there is 'always someone to talk to'.

Boarders live in excellent, comfortable accommodation and benefit from a wide range of activities. The boarding ethos of the school is relaxed, open and homely and there is an emphasis placed on respecting each other and showing courtesy and manners to everyone.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection carried out in February 2008, 12 recommendations for improvement were made. These have all been addressed.

The school has made significant changes to the way it monitors its regulatory obligations and now has experienced, qualified staff with expertise in key areas such

as recruitment and health and safety. This has led to rigorous monitoring systems being implemented and governors being actively involved in ensuring that the systems are being used and followed.

Any boarder with additional welfare needs has this identified in a written plan in their boarding house. This information is shared on a 'need to know' basis with other members of staff who may work closely with the boarder, for example, tutors and subject teachers.

The recruitment process is now overseen by a specific team who ensure that all necessary checks have been carried out on members of staff, including domestic staff, teachers, counsellors or medical staff.

The whole site has been the subject to a risk assessment process organised by the member of staff responsible for this area. This identifies risks posed by access via public footpaths and what actions are needed to minimise and manage the risk. The security policy is reviewed on at least an annual basis to ensure that site security is considered and assessed.

Senior members of staff are very aware of the need to ensure effective monitoring of boarding welfare and all key records are reviewed on a regular basis. Risk assessments are checked by the members of staff responsible and any complaints are monitored by the head teacher as well as a governor.

The governing body is actively involved in the monitoring of key records in the whole school and one governor has specific responsibility to ensure that the regulatory obligations of the school are being monitored and met.

The boarding policy of the school is a clear document which outlines how the welfare of the boarders is to be promoted.

All members of staff with boarding duties have received training in health and safety issues as well as fire warden training. They also have an appraisal process which includes assessment of their performance with regards to boarding duties.

All staff, including matrons, domestic and ancillary personnel have access to the staff handbook in hard copy form in the staff room as well as the intranet.

The complaints procedure outlines very clearly for the complainant what the process is if they are not satisfied with the decision of the deputy head.

The monitoring and review of policies, safety and practice is now thorough and professional. This ensures that issues, when identified, are addressed promptly and robustly.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school offers outstanding guidance to the students on the promotion of healthy living and lifestyles. Health and welfare issues are discussed in Learning for Life within the school day and the students can approach members of staff to discuss any personal issues or problems. Appropriate information is provided to the students on issues, such as illegal substances, sexual health, and other social issues. This information is shared sensitively and is commensurate with the students' development and understanding. Students identified that they felt supported and listened to within the school.

Thorough health records are developed for the students. These contain information such as health histories, allergies and specific health needs, vaccination records as well as any issues which may affect a student's emotional wellbeing such as bereavement or divorce. Specific health plans are kept for students who have identified health needs such as anaphylaxis or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The students' medical records are kept confidentially in the medical centre. Sensitive information is shared with members of staff on a 'need to know' basis and all records are kept securely stored.

There are clear policies and guidance with regards to the monitoring and promoting of the students' health. Examples of policies include medication, what to do if the nurses are unavailable, injury during games, asthma and anaphylaxis. Staff within the boarding house are trained in first aid. The policies are reviewed and overseen by the registered school nurse and her team. The administration and storage of medication is closely and robustly audited and monitored. Records are thorough and up to date. Clear records are kept of medication coming to the school and a stock take is maintained to ensure that all the records tally. Medication is kept securely stored. The school does have consent on file for each student but the form did not contain all forms of medical treatment. A new format has been designed to cover this issue but has not yet been sent out to the parents.

The students have access to a doctor who comes to the school three times a week. One of the doctor's surgery sessions is run by a female doctor to ensure choice for the students. Other health appointments are also in place if they are needed, these include opticians, dentists or other specialist input. The school has a counsellor who runs a drop in session twice a week.

The nurse provide caring and sensitive attention to students who present themselves at the centre. The centre offers 24 hour care, seven days a week. She is very aware that some students may at times require reassurance and a kind word rather than medical attention. The medical centre has a quiet room when the students need space and time. Support offered to the students is nurturing and attentive. The school nurse notifies parents or guardians of any illnesses or injuries and clear records are kept of any accidents. The centre has three sick bays with separate toilet and bathing facilities.

The standard of catering in the school is outstanding. The catering for the school is managed by a team of professional people employed by the school. The kitchen is well managed and the catering manager and head chef ensure that all the staff are trained appropriately to their roles. The kitchen is regularly cleaned and a visit by the environmental health officer graded the premises as 'good'. Meals are sourced as much as possible with local produce and the food is home made. The menu is prepared on a six weekly basis and offers four choices and a salad bar on each main meal including a vegetarian option. The kitchen also arranges theme days in order to celebrate students' culture and religion. The students have a food committee that meets with catering staff once a term. Students identified that where possible their ideas and changes to food have been acted upon by the catering department. A majority of feedback from the students, members of staff and parents stated that the food is of a very good to outstanding standard. The catering staff are very aware of specific dietary needs for any particular student whether cultural or medical and ensure that these are met.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There is a clearly embedded culture within the school that bullying is not tolerated. Boarders share a community responsibility to look out for each other and to report any incidents of bullying to members of staff or prefects. The school has an active policy in place with regards to managing the issue of cyber bullying. All boarders are aware that it is not acceptable and the process is underpinned by having 'Cyber Prefects' who are senior pupils who give advice and support to others. The school's approach to bullying is rigorous and ensures that it is not an issue for those boarding there.

The school has a member of staff who is responsible for the monitoring of child protection and who disseminates information about child protection to all members of staff. There is a clear child protection policy in place for the staff to follow and this contains clear guidance with regards to reporting issues of concern and how to respond to disclosures by children. All members of staff have child protection training as part of their induction and the child protection co-ordinator ensures that all members of staff receive refresher training and reminders about their role and obligations. This training includes all adults who work in the school, including maintenance staff, catering staff, domestic staff, teachers and matrons. All members of staff have access to the local child protection and safeguarding procedures. The level of awareness about child protection issues and the adults responsibility to keep the boarders safe, ensures that there is an excellent commitment to ensuring that the boarders are kept safe from abuse. The child protection log does not consistently reflect how each issue has been resolved, although these details are contained in relevant files elsewhere.

Boarders are very clear as to what behaviour is expected from them. Sanctions used at the school are outlined in the behaviour management policy. All sanctions are

recorded and checked by senior members of staff. Serious punishments are recorded by the head teacher and checked by a governor. Boarders report that they are treated fairly and the rules are clearly explained to them. Behaviour is observed to be very good, with pupils showing civility and respect for each other as well as to visitors and members of staff. It is clear that the good behaviour of boarders is based on the culture of respecting each other in the school's community rather than behaviour needing to be enforced through punishment.

There is a clear complaints policy which outlines the avenues and choices open to a complainant should they be unhappy with the way their complaint has been addressed. Pupils have numerous opportunities to voice their opinions and complaints. It is clear that most of them are confident to express their views both in writing and verbally. This means that any complaints or issues can be passed on to various members of staff, including the housemasters and the head teacher. Complaints and comments are responded to and feedback from pupils confirms that their views are taken seriously and acknowledged. Complaints from parents are seen to be dealt with appropriately.

Boarders and staff alike are protected from risks to their safety and well-being. A robust and comprehensive programme of risk assessment identifies and addresses any known or perceived dangers. Such risk assessments are regularly reviewed and when necessary, amended. The boarders know which areas of the school are out of bounds. Security is maintained by having external closed circuit cameras and coded locks to boarding houses. Members of staff are also aware of their responsibilities to be aware of security issues such as ensuring doors are kept closed and to be aware of who is visiting each boarding house. Boarders report that they feel safe in their boarding houses and that they do not have concerns about the security of the premises.

Trips away from the school site are the subject of robust and individualised risk assessments. These risk assessments are not only completed by the member of staff responsible for the trip or activity but are checked and endorsed by the member of staff for educational visits.

The organisation of health and safety is rigorous and robust ensuring that everyone's safety is promoted to an extremely high standard.

Records confirm that frequent testing of fire equipment and alarms is carried out and that fire drills occur regularly in both daylight and at night. Any recommendations made by the fire brigade during monitoring visits are addressed promptly.

Boarders living in the school have their privacy respected. They are able to shower, wash and change privately.

The school operates a rigorous and robust recruitment process which ensures that all adults working in the school in whatever role, are subject to references and Criminal Records Bureau checks. The human resources team oversees the compilation of

detailed and thorough staff records and telephones referees to ensure their veracity. Additionally, recruitment records are also subject to an audit process by a governor to ensure that they are in order and meet regulatory requirements.

There are clear guidelines and expectations for visitors to follow. All visitors must wear a visitor's badge when on the premises and sign the visitors' book. Additionally, they are supervised and escorted when on the premises.

Systems in place to protect boarders are detailed, rigorous and subject to regular scrutiny and review.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Students in the school are offered a wide and varied range of activities. There is a strong belief in the school that there is something at which each student can enjoy and excel, whether this is academically, in sport, drama, music or hobbies. The school provides the students with both a wide range of activities in the evening and boarders confirm that the weekends are busy and there are activities at the weekends. On Sundays there are trips out where the students are taken out to different activities, such as to paint balling, cinema and shopping. On the day of the inspection there were lots of organised activities, such as a singing concert in one house, football, IT and others. Each boarding house has a large and well equipped common room. The students also have the opportunity to socialise with each other during their free time.

The students have a wide choice of adults to whom they can approach and this includes an independent visitor who not only visits the school but is available by telephone. The students can also access independent telephone help lines such as ChildLine. The students are very aware that they may approach their form tutor, housemaster/mistress, nurse, matrons, head teacher or any other teaching staff in the school. The wide range of adults available, means that advice, guidance and reassurance are readily and easily accessible. The school has a counsellor who offers twice a weekly sessions and the school chaplain is always available to talk to and offer guidance. All the students feel that they are listened to and feel that there is 'always someone you can talk to.'

The school has students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Difference is celebrated and seen as an opportunity to learn about different cultures and religions. Cultural and religious issues are taught to the students and opportunities are given to students from different backgrounds to value and enjoy their culture whilst being integrated into the school community, which is Christian based. Students from different religious backgrounds are given the opportunity to attend religious ceremonies and the school facilitates this. The students' diversity is respected and this is met by dietary needs being respected, religious needs and cultural needs. The school undertakes special meal days and celebrates cultures by holding such days as St George's day or French day and others. The school also allowed the students to

take part in world eating for charity and students have been having soup a roll and fruit for lunch with the money saved going to world poverty. This was undertaken with permission from parents and guardians. The school does not have chapel on a Sunday for all students, those who attend do so because they choose to. Chapel services are held in the week.

Within the boarding houses and across the school, ensures that those students who for various reasons are struggling to 'fit in' are supported and monitored so that they do not become isolated. The school works hard to ensure that all pupils are treated as equals with out any imbalance of power. The school looks to promote all of the pupils' skills and talents.

Clear guidance is in place for members of staff to follow with regards to appreciating and acknowledging different cultural and religious backgrounds and this ethos is spread throughout the school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The students have numerous opportunities to share their views on how they feel they are being cared for and what they would like to improve. Formal forums include the school council, boarding council and the food council. Both consist of students chosen by their peers to represent their views to key senior members of staff such as the head teacher and the chef. Thorough minutes are kept of the meetings which contain full agendas. The students said they were able to make decisions about what happens at the school and where possible ideas have been acted upon.

Students boarding in the school are able to contact parents through various facilities. Students and parents did say that at times mobile phone contact could be difficult due to telephone reception. Students whose families live abroad and in different time zones are allowed to telephone their parents at times that are convenient to the students and their families. It is clear that the school values the students need to be in contact with their families. Emails and telephone conversations are carried out in private and the right for students to have privacy during these times is acknowledged and protected.

The process of inducting new boarders is sensitive and supportive. All new boarders are given a handbook before they arrive at the school. The handbook describes what they are to expect at the school, the routines and rules as well as what support is available to them if they need it. The students said that the senior boarders helped them when they arrived to settle down. To underpin this process, members of staff regularly contact the parents of new boarders to update them on their students progress and how they are settling in. The boarding houses also have a blog page so that parents can read updates as to what activities and news there is from the school.

The ethos of the school is for every member of the community to look out for each

other. This is underpinned by the students having adults to whom they can speak to and relax with, especially in the evenings. The students speak highly of the housemasters/mistresses, boarding staff as well as the matron and nurses. The atmosphere and interaction is relaxed and respectful.

It is clear that the views of the students are valued and listened to and that the relationships between the staff and students ensure that respect and tolerance are key values in the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Students are able to keep personal possessions secure in lockable spaces provided by in the boarding houses. Lockable drawers and wardrobes are in each room. For the upper years they can also have keys to their rooms. Students had reported some minor theft in the houses but this is being clearly dealt with by boarding house staff.

The school provides a pocket money system which is run by the house staff. The students are encouraged to hand all valuables in for safe keeping.

The boarding houses are of excellent quality, spacious and comfortable. There are shared bedrooms and single rooms for the older students. The students are able to personalise their personal space with posters and pictures. The boarding houses are kept tidy by the students and are kept clean by the domestic staff. The common rooms are large with excellent facilities for entertaining the students. Upper years within the boarding houses do have their own common rooms in the bedroom corridors.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a very well-presented and attractive prospectus which clearly outlines the ethos and what pupils and parents can expect. All the pupils have a handbook which is also very clear as to what living at the school entails, including the routines, rules and systems. Additionally, there is an accessible website which describes what the school provides as well as giving information on the very significant history attached to the school, its traditions and values.

There is a clear management structure operated in the school. The head teacher provides strong, well-organised leadership and is in turn supported by senior members of staff who deputise for him when required. The deputy head in charge of boarding provides a high level of leadership and advice to the committed team who work in the boarding houses. The governing body meets regularly and minutes of these meetings suggest that the school constantly evaluates the practice and direction of the school. The governing body offers high levels of expertise in all fields

and is actively involved in supporting and auditing the quality assurance systems operated in the school.

Boys and girls have clearly demarcated separate boarding facilities. The standard of accommodation is very similar. Boarding staff meet regularly and this ensures consistency of approach as well as excellent communication between the houses.

Staffing levels in boarding areas ensure that boarders have access and support if they need it. Supervision of boarders is set at a level commensurate with their abilities and maturity. Younger boarders receiving a higher level of supervision in comparison to older and more independent boarders.

The safety of the boarders is maintained by having a robust risk assessment process which is checked by those responsible for the boarding area, the members of staff responsible for health and safety issues and the head teacher. All members of staff liaise with each other on an informal and formal basis. Communication is achieved quickly and efficiently by the use of the school's intranet and by having regular meetings involving all key members of staff.

Senior members of staff and governors regularly check key records such as risk assessments, incident and accident records, major punishments, staff recruitment, health records and records kept on pupil's achievement and progress. The school also has a system which highlights any pupils who may need additional monitoring and support.

There is a comprehensive staff handbook which outlines policies and guidance with regards to boarding and the welfare of pupils in the school. New members of staff have a clear induction process and this involves training in child protection and the emphasis on duties of care and supervision for boarders. The school policies outline who is responsible for reviewing staff performance and training and this is also outlined in each member of staff's job description.

The level of communication between all members of staff in the school is excellent. Each pupil's needs and concerns are known to the relevant staff. The staff team is managed and supported by a senior management team who are experienced and knowledgeable, and who provide excellent oversight of the running of the school.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The different backgrounds of the pupils who attend the school are celebrated and enjoyed and seen as an opportunity to learn about each other. Each pupil's individuality is acknowledged and valued, whether this be a cultural or religious difference or an individual ability to excel in a specific area. The ethos of tolerance and understanding operated in the school is reflected in the boarders' excellent behaviour and respect afforded them by both their peers and members of staff.

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 updated medical consent forms are sent out to parents and guardians (NMS 15.14)
- ensure information within the child protection file is consistent and contains all relevant documentation. (NMS 3.3)