

Abberley Hall School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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Inspector	Martha Nethaway
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Date of last inspection	31/01/2008

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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

Abberley Hall (the School) is a preparatory school for both boys and girls from the age of seven years to 13 years. The School is predominantly a boarding school, but offers day education as well. It is set within its own extensive grounds in a wooded, hilly area of northwest Worcestershire.

The junior girls and all of the boys are accommodated in the main house. The older girl boarders are accommodated in the adapted Coach House.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection undertaken by one Ofsted inspector and one Boarding School Additional Inspector (BSAI). This inspection looked at the boarding school national minimum standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall quality of boarding is good. Boarders benefit from the vibrant boarding community which caters successfully for girls and boys. The school provides an informal and friendly approach to school life, underpinned by good structures and boarding routines which enables boarders to fulfil their potential. Staff commitment to the needs of each boarder encourages achievement both in and out of the classroom.

As a result of this inspection visit, there are four recommendations being set. The school has been recommended to improve the opportunities for private contact with parents and also review the letter writing arrangements. Similarly, to provide a secure and accessible place to keep personal possessions. Finally, to provide boarding staff with training opportunities to continue to update their boarding practice.

Improvements since the last inspection

The school has addressed the recommendations from the previous Ofsted inspection visit in January 2008. The school was recommended to develop a risk assessment for all boarders keeping and administering their own medication. This has now been addressed and it is the doctor who assesses the capability of boarders to manage their own medication safely. All decisions are fully documented. The school was recommended to improve its auditing practices between the health surgery and the girls' boarding house. This has been addressed. The school reviewed its behaviour management policy. The school has made a number of improvements to the staff appointment system which is now robust and staff consistently follows the school's

stated policy.

The school was also visited in May 2008 by Ofsted and this monitoring visit set three recommendations. The school was recommended to improve its medication records related to visits away from the school including a clear risk assessment. The school now records on individual cards all medications that have been administered while on school trips which now forms part of the child's record at the school. The same practice is also taking place for any medications that are non-prescribed such as medication that is bought over the counter with parental consent clearly being sought.

The school has demonstrated its commitment to improving the policies and practices that promote and protect the welfare of boarders at all times.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders' health is promoted well. Staff are well informed about health needs. The school curriculum addresses personal, social and health education through a planned programme which is covered at lesson time. The topics are all age related and as boarders move through the school issues related to alcohol, drugs and sexual health are addressed. This means that boarders can ask questions about a wide range of topics. Outside of class, boarders are able to raise matters in their form and at pastoral groups.

Boarders health needs are met and their welfare is safeguarded by the school's policies and procedures for administering medicines and providing treatment. Medications are handled safely. Clear records are maintained in relation to the administration, storage and disposal of medication. The school provides a small team of nurses who run a health surgery. Boarders also benefit because there is a visiting doctor who holds weekly consultations. All boarders have in place the correct consent forms so that any medical emergency can be dealt with in a timely manner. Part of the school admission process includes parents providing key information about their child health by completing a medical questionnaire. As a consequence, the nursing team are up to date about relevant health matters.

Boarders receive good quality and choice in the catering provision. The school has its own catering team who are responsible for the preparation and organisation of the meals times. The school has two separate dining areas in order to cater for the different age groups of boarders. Staff sit with boarders at meal times and boarders experience meals as a sociable event. Boarders have a choice of meals at breakfast, lunch and tea with second helpings if they choose. For lunch there is a choice of a meat dish or non-meat dish. Older boarders are also offered salad as an optional choice. All meals are carefully prepared and the school encourages healthy eating. There is always fresh fruit available and special diets are catered for successfully. Boarders can also prepare late suppers in their boarding area which includes foods such as, bread, fresh fruit and a range of hot drinks.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The system in place to promote the safety and welfare of boarders is good. Staff are provided with a good range of policies that specifically address staff recruitment, counteracting bullying, complaints, behaviour management and health and safety.

Boarders are encouraged to recognise that bullying is unacceptable. The school meets its aim in which boarders grow up happily, free to pursue their own interests but with consideration for others, and free from fear. Staff take seriously any form of bullying because they understand the severe emotional distress that bullying can cause. Boarders learn through education and through all aspects of school life how to recognise and understand bullying behaviours in order to prevent it, and for personal and social and moral development.

Boarders are protected from abuse. Boarders' protection is promoted through the school's policy and procedures which inform staff on what actions to take regarding concerns about harm or abuse. Policies are updated to reflect wider guidance regarding safeguarding measures. Both senior designated individuals responsible for child protection have attended advanced training for this role and responsibility. All staff have attended an in-house school programme of child protection and safeguarding. The school is an effective partner within the multi-agency working.

Boarders state that the use of discipline within the school is fair and appropriate. One boarder commented, 'Rules are kept to minimum.' Boarders are assisted to develop socially acceptable behaviour through encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff response to inappropriate behaviour. Commending boarders positive behaviours takes place through the school assembly, chapel and in weekly school meetings. Boarders are rewarded for being helpful, kind and understanding. The appointment of prefects is based on boarders positive attitude and approach to school life and how helpful they have been to staff and adults and helping their fellow peers.

Boarders are protected from the risk of fire. Boarders learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they have regular opportunities to practice the evacuation of the building. Staff are diligent with ensuring that all fire safety checks are completed at the required intervals.

Boarders live in an environment that provides good physical safety. Boarders have their own accommodation, secure from public intrusion. Boarders are protected from safety hazards. This is demonstrated through the good use of risk management assessments which are reviewed as circumstances change. All domestic installations are regularly checked and serviced. Good systems are in place for on-site and off-site activities and organised holiday excursions. In addition, boarders know and understand how to use the recreational areas safely both indoors and outdoors.

Boarders are protected from unsupervised contact at school with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures and there is supervision of all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises.

The school pays good attention to the recruitment procedures for recruiting and appointing staff. Staff appointments follow clear procedures and staff are only employed at the school who are suitable to work with children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Boarders love their life at school. There is an array of activities in which boarders can be involved in taking place under staff supervision. These activities cater for a number of different skills and interests, which enable the self-esteem of each boarder to be boosted. Weekends are appropriately busy and staff give up a good deal of time to ensure that all activities have appropriate adult supervision.

Furthermore, it is a real strength of the school that so many staff have a pastoral concern for the boarders, both formal and informal. The boarders themselves commented favourably on the availability of different staff to help them if they have problems. There are enough staff dedicated to boarding who deal with issues very successfully. Each boarder has a form tutor, whose role is partly pastoral and their specific aim is to discuss all aspects of school life. Each boarder is a member of a pastoral tutor group and this encourages discussion amongst the group, especially focusing on any problems or difficulties. One boarder commented, 'It easier to raise concerns during informal 'chats' and the group acts as support to boarders.'

Boarders who need extra educational help come under the remit of the learning support department. The department has close professional links with educational psychologists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and behavioural optometrists. Boarders are given help for a variety of reasons, in some cases because they are potential scholars who need advice on spelling, handwriting, maths, languages and good work habits such as, improving study skills. There is no evidence of any feelings of exclusion or lack of self-esteem from any of these boarders. The head of learning support has provided regular training for all staff in recent years and this demonstrates very good practice. Boarders who come from abroad are well settled and well integrated, with a member of staff who acts as their guardian and ensures their well-being both in and out of term. There are opportunities for boarders from abroad to join in organising themed days for the school. Every Thursday there is a Spanish lunch, following a request from the boarders who come from that country.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are a number of different ways by which boarders' views are sought. Boarders are in a form group with a form tutor, and although this is in many ways an administrative role, their form tutors are able to listen to boarders' views and act on them. There are also pastoral tutor groups, formed from different form groups, where issues of common concern can be raised and discussed; these groups meet once a week or sometimes regularly but less often. In addition, all boarders are part of a 'patrol group' and issues can be raised by way of a weekly meeting of patrol group leaders run by the deputy head, as well as in the other mentioned groups. There is also an active form representative system, whereby members of each class twice a term can meet together and raise concerns. School food is a regular topic at these meetings and this is seen as good practice.

The school is well aware of the desire, and sometimes need, of boarders to communicate with home. Thus it is routine for boarders to have a mobile phone which they can use in the early evening, and with which they can have a private conversation. In an emergency the school will make a landline available. The boarding areas have payphones, though these are not all conducive to privacy, and obtaining money to use them is not an easy process. Letter writing is also a feature of life; on a Sunday boarders write home; however, occasionally letters are checked by staff before being sent. These areas related to lack of privacy have the consequence of partially comprising boarders' right to privacy.

Boarders said they had been on a 'Taster Day' in which they had been introduced to the routine of the school and to some of their future classmates. New boarders are given a guide who shows them where to go in the first few days and who makes sure they know what to do on the first weekend; boarders report that this is a feature they appreciate.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

It is school policy that boarders do not keep money. Any that they have is handed in and can be used on a credit system with boarding staff or with those taking trips. However, they do have private possessions and the school does not provide them with anywhere for these to be locked away; it is up to boarders to bring their own tuck boxes which is not always consistently taking place. As a result, boarders' rights to have a suitable secure place to keep possessions is being compromised.

Boarders live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a good standard, providing adequate facilities for their use. Since the last inspection, the school has continued its programme of redecoration and re-carpeting. All the boys' dormitory rooms have had new curtains. Bedrooms are well lit, in good decorative order, and many have beautiful views of the surrounding

countryside. Boarders are provided with their own space and are encouraged to decorate it with photographs and posters to make their area feel more homely. There is enough physical space for each boarder so that their needs are being met. It is all kept clean as well as properly heated and ventilated. Toilet facilities are adequate both in number and in condition; there are enough washbasins and showers. All these were seen to be clean and in good working order. There is enough privacy for boarders given the size of the dormitories.

The school is currently completing new building works and the girls' boarding should benefit first because the next major building plan will release extra space for their use. The school is at the moment considering different possibilities and a reconfiguration with the boarding facilities.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The organisation and management of the school is good. The school is well organised and the management team are ably led by the headteacher. Leadership and management is effective because of the strong commitment of staff to their roles and areas of responsibility. The headteacher has a hands-on management approach and has a very visible presence in the boarding school. One parent summed this up, 'We salute the headmaster and his team for their commitment and care.'

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school creates the right conditions for each boarder so that they prosper both intellectually and socially, building self-esteem and self-confidence. This is through participating in as wide a range of activities and opportunities as possible. One member of staff commented, 'Above all, we offer boarders the chance to be treated as individuals and find their particular strengths while still having time to enjoy their childhood and make lifelong friendships.' There are international community links such as sports tours to South Africa and boarders visiting the French Alps. Boarders are regularly involved in local fundraising events in their community.

A suitable statement of the school's boarding principles and practice are available to parents, boarders and staff. The school provides a range of helpful material to parents and new boarders. Parents and boarders also have access to the school's website. Regular newsletters are circulated so that parents are being informed about boarders achievements and special events happening at the school.

Risk assessments and school record keeping contribute effectively to boarders' welfare. Staff take responsibility to ensure that records are being monitored related to complaints, punishments, accidents and risk assessments. Corrective action is taken to address any trends or patterns and this ensures that the boarders' welfare remains a key priority for the school.

Boarders are looked after by staff with specific boarding duties, with adequate

induction and continued training. There is a good focus given to mandatory training related to first aid, minibus training and child protection and safeguarding. In addition, there are a number of internally lead courses related to school based teaching. However, opportunities for staff to complete training related to boarding practices is more limited.

The school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare. Boarders are looked after by staff following clear boarding policies and practice. The boarders are provided with a safe, relaxed and fun environment where they can develop into confident teenagers, ready to take on the challenges of senior school. Pastoral care has been further enhanced by the appointment of a boarding co-ordinator and improvements to the pastoral tutor system. The school has also recently introduced individual pastoral plans which is a school based and co-ordinated intervention plan that supports the holistic needs of the child. Boarders benefit from the experienced, committed staff with very good staff to pupil ratios. Boarders further benefit from the excellent programme of evening and weekend activities.

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 boarders are enabled to contact their parents and families in private (NMS 19.1)
- ensure that letters written by pupils are not read by staff (NMS 19.4)
- ensure that each boarder has a suitably secure, accessible place to keep personal possessions and valuables (NMS 20.3)
- ensure opportunities are provided for training and updating in boarding practice. (NMS 34.7)