

Queenswood School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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| Inspector | Kristen Judd |
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| Date of last inspection | 17/03/2008 |

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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

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| 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

Queenswood School provides education to approximately 400 girls aged 11 to 18 years. At the time of this inspection Queenswood School was providing places for approximately 220 boarders. The nearby town of Potters Bar has mainline rail links and taxis can reach the school in approximately 10 minutes. The school is in a rural setting and has 120 acres of gardens and parkland.

Boarding accommodation is provided in two main buildings. There is separate 6th form accommodation. Year 7 and 8 girls join the lower school house and Years 9 to 11 are accommodated in four mixed-year middle school houses. A flexi boarding system is offered with girls going home after their last commitment either on Friday evening or on Saturday, returning in time for Monday morning.

The school has a range of sporting facilities including a swimming pool and tennis courts which are operated in partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced key inspection of the school. The purpose of the inspection was to assess the school against key national minimum standards and gauge improvements to the service since the previous inspection.

The overall outcome judgement is good; however, the school has many outstanding features. The outcome judgements being healthy, enjoying and achieving and positive contribution are outstanding. The outcome areas staying safe, economic well-being and organisation are judged as good. Equality and diversity is also judged to be outstanding.

The comprehensive provision of a welfare service and pastoral care helps boarders to maintain their good health, to develop healthy life-styles and adopt positive ways to ensure their own well-being. The school is fully committed to ensuring that boarders are kept safe and there are excellent safeguarding procedures in place. Staff relationships are friendly, respectful and supportive of the needs of boarders. The management of the boarding provision is very effective with skilled, experienced staff. There is one shortfall in relation to recruitment files which has affected the outcome judgment for staying safe.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection eight recommendations were made. One recommendation was in relation to medication records. Staff maintain clear records of medication, medication routines and the administration of medication. The school's clear procedures and protocols ensure that boarders receive appropriate medication when they need it.

Three further recommendations in relation to child protection procedures, practice and staff training have all been addressed. Staff have received safeguarding training and fully demonstrate their understanding of the procedures and protocols in place. A further recommendation was made with regard to the recruitment records containing the required documentation. Recruitment of new staff is robust. However, there is a weakness in the recruitment records transferred from the agency that have provided the catering, maintenance and domestic services.

Further recommendations were made in relation to staff appraisals and improving privacy to some of the showers. All staff have annual appraisals which ensures that staff are skilled and competent to carry out their responsibilities and duties effectively. Improvement to showers to afford boarders sufficient privacy have been made.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school is very effective in providing excellent and wide-ranging support to boarders. The comprehensive provision of a welfare service and pastoral care helps boarders to maintain their good health, to develop healthy life-styles and adopt positive ways to ensure their own well-being. Boarders receive relevant information on a wide range of subjects relating to their personal, social and health education. This helps them to be well informed and make appropriate choices relating to their health. There are very efficient systems in place to make sure that boarders have access to first aid and health care which meets their needs well. This includes comprehensive cover from appropriately qualified and trained health centre staff.

The school has clear policies and rules on drugs, alcohol and smoking. Their content is well known to boarders and their parents. The rules are robustly and consistently implemented by staff. There are effective arrangements to ensure that medication is safely administered. As a result, boarders' health needs are fully met and their welfare is safeguarded. Information regarding the health and medical histories of each boarder is gained as part of the school's admission process. The school is very effective in providing a healthy and highly nurturing environment to boarders. The pastoral care of boarders is at the heart of this school.

The catering service contributes to boarders' health and well-being by providing a very good range of nutritious and tasty food. Boarders have opportunities to contribute to the school's menus and to choose what they would like to eat. The

school provides appropriate food for boarders who have specific dietary needs such as gluten intolerance. Catering staff receive training in food handling and hygiene, so that meals are produced safely. Older boarders are able to use the kitchens in the houses in the evenings and weekends. They are also able cook for themselves, with friends or staff. This provides nice social opportunities and provides them with important skills that will help them in the future, such as at university.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The systems in place to promote the safety and welfare of boarders is excellent. Staff have access to clear information, support, guidance and advice about child protection and safeguarding requirements. Policies are updated to reflect wider guidance regarding safeguarding measures. The school's protective strategies are very strong and they act appropriately when welfare concerns are suspected. Regular internal and external training is provided for all staff ensuring that all staff who come into contact with boarders have an understanding of child protection that is appropriate to their role, and so are in a position to protect boarders. Older boarders with positions of responsibility receive guidance about their role. This includes the importance of passing on concerns to staff and not keeping secrets.

Boarders are well protected from bullying. The school has an effective policy on countering bullying which is known to parents, boarders and staff and which is implemented successfully in practice. The policy covers measures both to prevent bullying and to respond to observed or reported bullying, and also includes a definition of bullying. Boarders spoken to do not identify bullying as a problem at the school. The school has a fair and appropriate policy on behaviour, discipline and use of punishments, known to boarders, staff and parents. There is a written and appropriate policy on discipline, punishments and includes a statement of policy on use of restraint, which is available to all staff and parents and made known to boarders. Standards of boarders' behaviour are excellent, and boarders identify the school's use of punishments as fair. No unacceptable, excessive or idiosyncratic punishments are used by boarders or staff. Overall, the staff within the school are consistent and fair in managing difficult situations.

There is a clear formal complaints procedure in place that is available to boarders and their parents if they are unable to resolve the matter informally. The policy is clear about the initial receipt of a complaint from a parent or third party, in terms of who will investigate and then subsequently if it fails to be resolved. There have been no formal complaints made to the school regarding welfare issues.

The school has established systems and structures to maintain safe practices and fulfil health and safety obligations. Environmental risk assessments ensure the school is fully informed of potential hazards in order to reduce risks. Fire safety is given appropriate importance by the school. Fire drills are carried out termly in boarding time. This means that boarders know what to do in the event of an emergency. 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. Security is enhanced by having coded locks to boarding houses.

Recruitment procedures of new staff is rigorous and well documented in line with the school's recruitment and vetting procedure. Staff recruitment files contain evidence of the employment checks that have taken place as required by national minimum standards. However, the school took over the agency who have been providing the catering, maintenance and domestic staff for some years. Recruitment files were not checked to determine whether they are in line with the national minimum standards. All files contained evidence of identity and Criminal Records Bureau checks but some did not have references in place. The school took immediate action to rectify this during the inspection.

Staff have access to guidance that addresses issues of privacy and confidentiality. Boarders feel staff respect their privacy. Staff spoken to demonstrate an awareness to be discreet and respectful of the boarders' personal space.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders state that they can approach any member of staff if they have any worries or concerns. This helps to ensure that they can find someone whom they feel comfortable to speak to. Overall there is very comprehensive support for boarders. This includes boarding staff; a counsellor; teachers; access to helpline telephone numbers and a range of peer support. Boarders have formed close friendships and bonds amongst themselves. They enjoy having good times together. They are also committed to listening to and supporting each other in difficult times, such as in the time of bereavement. The questionnaires completed by boarders confirm that most of them enjoy boarding. Boarders' comments include; 'everyone gets on well and I really enjoy boarding with my friends' another said 'it's absolutely wonderful.'

Staff know boarders in their care, well. They are very much aware of each boarder's uniqueness, including their individual strengths and weaknesses. The school gives boarders extensive opportunities to engage in a wide range of educational, art and sport activities in order to develop their talents and fulfil their full potential. One parent commented 'we are very pleased with the boarding staff, facilities, food and activities (all excellent). My daughter loves boarding.'

The school appropriately supports boarders from overseas to integrate and play an active part in the life of the school. Boarders say that there is no discrimination. Boarders speak positively about the cultural mix in the school. Issues relating to equality and diversity are covered in the school's policies and staff describe good practice in this area. There is a real sense of sense of community, which is promoted by the inclusive ethos of school. Boarders are helped to develop an understanding of the needs of others. The school demonstrates a strong commitment to equal opportunities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders confirm that their views are sought through a wide range of formal and informal activities. These include the school council, the food committee, house meetings and ongoing discussions with boarding staff. There are very sound staff and boarder relationships. The general view of boarders is that staff look after them well and that communication between staff and boarders is positive.

There are effective systems to allow boarders to keep in contact with their families. Most have mobile telephones, and there is access to a telephone to contact parents in private at reasonable times without having to seek permission from, or inform, staff. Boarders are able to write and receive letters and emails from home. None of the boarders expressed concerns regarding contacting their parents.

The induction of new boarders is a key strength of the school. They receive a warm and inclusive welcome by everyone and they quickly feel part of the community. Boarders are also linked up with a student in the upper 6th known as 'big sisters' who visit them when they first board at the school. They also have a link to a boarder in year eight who they can go to for advice. The year seven boarders are very complimentary about the support that they receive and feel that it is beneficial to have someone who has recently been through similar experiences. This sensitive and caring approach is indicative of the ethos of the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The standard of boarding accommodation is good, providing a comfortable and safe environment for boarders. A good standard of single room and shared dormitory accommodation is provided. Boarders move dormitories each term. The overview of boarders throughout the school was that they are generally very happy living in their respective houses. Staff work hard to provide a clean and welcoming environment for boarders and encourage the personalisation of sleeping areas.

Bathing facilities vary between boarding houses. Some facilities are of a good standard. There are problems at times with the water pressures, maintenance staff endeavour to rectify problems as soon as possible. The school continues to follow its development plan to make further improvements to the boarding house. A new boarding house is due to open in September 2011. This work demonstrates the commitment of the school in working towards improving boarding facilities for all boarders.

Boarders' possessions and money are protected. Valuable possessions such as money and mobile telephones are kept securely on the behalf of boarders as appropriate.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Principal provides clear and effective leadership of the school's boarding provision. Staff understand the importance and the value attributed to areas related to the academic and boarding parts of school life. Senior staff take responsibilities for their areas of work including the effective monitoring of records. The Deputy Principal Pastoral has the overall responsibility for boarding at the school and is working to improve consistency and best practice across the boarding houses. Clear management structures, a good team ethos and effective systems of communication contribute effectively to boarders' welfare.

Staff are provided with detailed policies and procedures on meeting the individual needs of boarders. Regular senior staff meetings take place to discuss any concerns regarding boarders that may arise. Boarders are supervised well by experienced staff who understand their needs and help them to progress and achieve. All boarding staff have job descriptions that clearly set out their role in boarding and lines of accountability. Staffing ratios are good and enable staff to have an appropriate knowledge of individual needs and circumstances at all times. Boarders know who is on duty and how to contact them during the evenings as well as during the night. The school gives appropriate priority to staff training and staff receive annual appraisals. This ensures that staff are skilled and competent to carry out their responsibilities and duties effectively in relation to the promotion of the welfare of boarders.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school recognises the uniqueness of each boarder and their individual needs. The school successfully encourages all boarders from different social and cultural backgrounds to work and live together. A clear statement of how the school operates is available for parents and others needing this information. The school website is also easily accessed and provides a very good level of information and is kept up to date. Suitable information regarding the boarding principles and practices is available to parents, boarders and staff. Comments received from parents are very positive. Comments include: 'I think the Boarding at Queenswood is of a very high standard. We'd be happy for our daughter to live at home but she loves weekly boarding'. Like in any large community there were some negative comments but overall the positive feedback from parents and boarders alike outweighed the negative comments.

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 all pre employment checks can be verified from recruitment records.
(Breach of national minimum standard 38.1)