

Ashville College

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Simon Morley
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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

Ashville College was founded in 1877, is affiliated to the Board of Management for Methodist Independent Schools and promotes the ethos and values of a Christian, caring community.

The school offers both day and boarding provision for approximately 750 pupils. Of these almost 130 live in one of the four boarding houses. There is a co-educational junior house for pupils aged 8 to 12, and three senior houses one for girls and two boy's houses. Boarding houses are fully carpeted, double glazed, with cable television, modern kitchen appliances, computers and games facilities.

The school is on a 60 acre site with plenty of open space, playing fields, sports centre and swimming pool. There is a school chapel with a regular Sunday service open to all pupils.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The inspection was announced with five working days notice given to the head of the school. The inspection looked at how outcomes for the key boarding school national minimum standards are promoted within the Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall outcome judgement is good and there are several outstanding features of the school. The outcome judgements in being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, economic well-being and organisation are good and the outcome judgement in positive contribution is outstanding.

The school has a new head who has been in post since September 2010. He has strong, charismatic leadership ensuring the school is realistically ambitious and focused on continued improvement. The school's outstanding features relate to: the medical centre; safeguarding practice; promotion of a caring community; pupils behaviour; holistic support for boarders welfare and development; and support for boarders to influence the management of the school. Relationships between pupils and staff are good, characterised by a sense of trust, respect for and tolerance of others within a relaxed and open community.

As a result of this inspection four recommendations are made: to improve the quality of evening meals; have more formal structures for the development of staff specifically in relation to boarding duties; review the safety arrangements for collecting day pupils; and review the consistency of the quality of boarding provision across all four houses. These recommendations relate to national minimum standards that are not fully met.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were no required improvements to follow up from the last inspection of boarding conducted by the Commission for Social Care Inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders benefit from the way in which their health and well-being is actively promoted at the school. Some aspects of the school provision are outstanding which ensures there are good outcomes and boarders enjoy healthy lifestyles.

The well-resourced and homely medical centre is an outstanding feature of the school with qualified nurses available all week long. There is effective treatment of illness and injury and good communication with other staff in the school to provide consistent and holistic care and support. The centre has separate facilities for boarders of different gender and ample space for their friends to visit them. In addition there is good access to services from a local doctor, dentists and opticians.

Health care is further enhanced by the availability of independent counselling and the on-call nurse cover. Information about boarders' health needs is provided through the admissions process and regularly monitored. This includes thorough, good quality 'welfare plans' for boarders with significant emotional or behavioural difficulties. Communication between the medical centre and boarding house staff ensures good levels of support for boarders who value the nurses and the integral role they fulfil.

The school's values are lived out in the support, guidance and positive role models boarders experience so they benefit from a close-knit supportive community with a strong priority on healthy individual well-being. This is further promoted through the effective personal, social, health and education programme (PSHE) that is delivered through tutors, academic staff and external speakers. Additionally boarders are supported by a network of experienced staff that they trust and feel able to discuss concerns with. There is plenty of information, knowledge and support for boarders to make informed choices and develop healthy lifestyles.

Catering in the school is generally of a good standard, healthy and nutritious. Both boarders and staff say it has improved though evening meals lack consistently good quality. There is always plenty to eat and lots of choice. The 'Chips' committee is an effective mechanism for all pupils to contribute their views on the quality and range of food the school provides. Special dietary needs are catered for on request. All meals are served in the school dining room for the whole boarding community and day pupils. These are safely prepared to comply with environmental health requirements. Each boarding house also has a homely, domestic style kitchen that boarders can use to make drinks, snacks and occasional meals. There are regular meals and social events in each boarding house and for the whole boarding

community. This helps to foster the spirit of individual houses and promotes the socialisation and integration of boarders.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Overall the arrangements to promote boarders' safety and keep them free from harm are good with some outstanding features.

There are very clear and effective safeguarding procedures. All staff have regular safeguarding training, some more frequent than others in relation to their role in the school. In addition there are comprehensive policies and guidance that helps ensure there is a professional well informed staff team. Staff are clear about whom to report concerns to and senior staff with designated responsibilities have well developed support from the local authority. Any concerns about a pupil's safety and welfare are followed up thoroughly and necessary action taken to ensure pupils are safe. This is a notable strength of the school.

In keeping with the school's values and traditions staff promote a community, which is open and caring. This sensitively supports boarders to become responsible individuals. This in turn helps perpetuate the caring community as senior boarders take up positions of responsibility and continue to promote the close-knit community they have benefited from. One of the results is that pupils are well behaved, polite and friendly. This is another notable feature of the school. There are few exceptions to this but there are systems in place to manage inappropriate behaviour, address bullying and respond to complaints. Boarders confirm that such matters are dealt with fairly. The focus of staff intervention is always to educate, support those involved and develop their social and life skills. As one boarder commented, the school is more about 'praise not punishment'. This is typical of other boarders who feel that the new head is more interested in the welfare of boarders and improving the quality of their lives.

Boarders spoken to directly indicate that levels of bullying are extremely low. However survey results from boarders indicated that there may be more. The school deals effectively with any incidents of bullying and is developing policy and guidance in relation to cyber-bullying and e-safety. The school arranged a cyber-bullying awareness week with a range of guidance for pupils, their parents and staff. There is good action to involve parents as much as possible in welfare issues such as e-safety.

There is good practice in the management of health and safety and reducing potential risks to pupils. For example, there is good awareness amongst staff and pupils of the fire safety precautions. Fire drills are carried out on a regular basis, and fire safety equipment is checked regularly. Security of the school from unwanted intruders is good and boarding houses are protected from access by the public. At the end of classes the area where junior pupils wait to go to their boarding house is also busy with cars and parents picking up day pupils. There are plans to develop an

alternative route from school to the junior boarding house which will be safer. No other safety issues were seen around the school.

Recruitment procedures are rigorous and well documented ensuring only suitable people are employed to work in the school. In addition there are clearly agreed protocols and guidance for spouses and partners who visit or live in the school grounds but are not directly employed by the school. These individuals are also suitably vetted to ensure pupil welfare and safety.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Boarders receive very good support. Their spiritual and moral development is valued and promoted through a supportive, caring school community.

Pupils are encouraged to make the best of their social and educational opportunities. There are a range of extra-curricular activities, after school clubs and social events. Though a large focus is on sporting activities there are opportunities for pupils with other interests such as music and drama. There are boarding house competitions both within and between houses. There are also regular school house competitions, recent ones being in photography and cookery. There is a strong focus on praising individual, team and house achievements to boost morale and celebrate success. Boarders have the good opportunities to become active and confident members of their house and school community.

Boarders' individual needs are well met by a wide network of pastoral and academic staff. Each boarding house is led by a housemaster or housemistress and their spouse, supported by a matron and tutors some of whom also reside in the house. Senior male boarders typically commented 'there is lots to do', 'there is a strong sense of community', 'there's more independence and responsibility as you get older' and 'there is always some one to talk to'. This was reflected in good survey results about the quality of boarding. Senior female boarders are not as positive particularly in relation to: evening and weekend activities; how well boarding staff know them; feeling able to talk to boarding staff; and their overall enjoyment of boarding. Junior boarders are also positive about their experience of boarding and their boarding house is more vibrant and homely than the senior houses.

Staff work hard to create an environment where equality and diversity is valued and celebrated. There is well developed learning support for English as an additional language (EAL) which includes learning about cultural and social norms. Boarding house staff work hard to promote the integration of boarders within the school community regardless of race, gender, age and individual need. There are well developed links with other organisations to promote different cultural needs both at an individual and group level. Sunday service in the school chapel is open to all. Boarders often prepare and lead the service. Different religious affiliations are respected and there is support to attend alternative places of worship if individuals wish to.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent opportunities for boarders to contribute to the school community and the way the school is managed. This is founded in the strong relationships built up with various staff across the school.

Boarders are actively encouraged to contribute to the running of the school through various councils and committees. Boarders feel their views are listened to and are able to influence change in the school. For example the quality of food has improved; boarders have contributed to the ongoing refurbishment programme, décor, and range of activities. There is a well developed prefect system that also encourages discussion and supports boarders to feed points of view to the head and senior management team. Boarders feel the new head is better at listening to them and improving the quality of boarding provision. This results in boarders feeling listened to and a valued part of the school community. 'Awesome' said one boarder, reflecting the views of his peers.

Prefects are carefully selected by their peers and staff. Their additional responsibilities are clear and their role helps them develop leadership and social skills. This clearly enhances the community feeling of the school and provides extra support for younger boarders.

The school works proactively in partnership with families and guardians to ensure they are part of the school community and that boarders' specific needs are met. There are a wide range of opportunities for parents to participate in fund raising, support matches, watch performances and listen to guest speakers. Parents and guardians are always welcome to visit school and spend time with their children. Boarders can remain in contact with families through e-mail, telephone, letter writing and in one house use Skype. There is regular communication with parents of overseas boarders to keep them informed of their progress and welfare.

The induction of new boarders is well managed and sensitive to their needs. They receive a warm and inclusive welcome by everyone and through the additional support of peer mentors they can quickly feel part of the community. This caring approach reflects strongly the ethos of the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Ashville College provides four boarding houses. A junior co-ed house, Greenholme generally for boarders aged 8 to 13, two senior boys' houses, Briggs and Mallinson and one senior girls' house, Norfolk. Each house accommodates approximately 30 boarders, though Norfolk house accommodates approximately 40.

All houses are cleaned and maintained to a good standard by dedicated teams of ancillary and maintenance staff. Greenholme has been completely refurbished and provides an exceptionally welcoming, homely environment. Norfolk is split into two and one building is refurbished the other will be done later this year. There are long term plans to improve the quality of accommodation Briggs and Mallinson offer. As a result the quality of décor, furnishings and facilities varies across the houses from satisfactory to outstanding.

Generally, both staff and pupils are proud of their houses and their separate identities. There is some healthy inter-house rivalry mainly between Briggs and Mallinson played out in a variety of sports competitions.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Strong family values, staff dedication and commitment to Ashville's ethos help secure the colleges objectives to promote self-development, confidence and independence. Boarders develop their leadership skills as well as both their personal and community responsibilities to self and others.

The organisation and management of this school ensures there are mainly good and some outstanding outcomes for boarders. The head teacher and senior management team provide strong leadership and they are actively involved in the day-to-day operation of the school. They are suitably held to account by the governing body that are active in ensuring there is good quality boarding provision.

Staffing levels in each boarding house are adequate but are boosted by the role of senior boarders and prefects who play an integral part in the school community. As a result this helps ensure the overall quality of care is good. Staffing levels in boarding houses has increased this academic year with more teachers working in the boarding houses in the evenings. There are plans to improve this further. This is helping to raise the profile of boarding and improve the experiences of boarders within the whole school setting.

The boarding houses have staff that are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have access to relevant training. Boarding staff though, lack the benefits of formalised performance review, appraisals and supervision linked specifically to their boarding duties, needs of individual boarders and the role of boarding houses. Practice between boarding houses is different and elements of good practice are not consistently shared for the benefit of all houses. Staff are supported well by good boarding policies, procedures and an up-to-date boarding handbook. A wide range of material is available to parents and boarders both in written form and on the school website. This informs parents and boarders of what to expect from their boarding experience.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Cultural diversity and individual identity is promoted and boarders have opportunities to learn about each others'

backgrounds, traditions and beliefs. Relationships between boarders of different ages, gender and race are supported and boarding staff work hard to develop and maintain an integrated school community.

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 all meals are of good quality, nutritious and reasonably balanced (NMS 24)
- review the arrangements for the collection of day pupils and junior pupils making their way to their boarding house to ensure there are no significant hazards (NMS 47.5)
- review the management of all the boarding houses so they offer the same quality of care to all boarders regardless of age, gender or race (NMS 18)
- ensure there is an appropriate process for the regular review of the performance of each member of staff with boarding duties. The performance review must be in relation to: the needs of boarders; job descriptions; and the school's objectives. Ensure staff have relevant training and development clearly linked to performance reviews. (NMS 34)