

Royal Alexandra & Albert School (The)

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC013933
Inspection date	06/06/2011
Inspector	Diane Thackrah
Type of inspection	Social Care Inspection

Setting address	Royal Alexandra & Albert School, Gatton Park, REIGATE, Surrey, RH2 0TD
Telephone number	01737 649000
Email	headmaster@gatton-park.org.uk
Registered person	The Royal Alexandra & Albert School Foundation
Head/ Principal	Paul D Spencer Ellis
Nominated person	Paul D Spencer Ellis
Date of last inspection	12/11/2007

© Crown copyright 2011

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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 Royal Alexandra and Albert School is set in a rural area of Redhill within a large estate. The school is a maintained school which is primarily a boarding school for over 420 young people. The school also has places for day pupils. The school provides residential care for pupils from seven to 18 years old in a range of boarding accommodation across nine boarding houses. Education for the most senior boarding pupils is provided in conjunction with a local college. There is a wide range of facilities provided including a gym, riding school and swimming pool.

Summary

The overall quality rating is inadequate - notice of action to improve.

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

At this announced inspection, all key national minimum standards were assessed. This is an inadequate school, with many good features.

There are shortfalls in the child protection practices in this school that place the well-being of young people at risk. Staff are not clear about their responsibilities for reporting their concerns about young people's welfare to the relevant authorities. This means that some concerns have not been addressed effectively. Shortfalls in the organisation of the school have resulted in a failure to address these safeguarding concerns in a timely way. This does not promote young people's safety.

Some shortfalls in the training, development and recruitment of staff, and in the written policies and procedures, do not promote young people's welfare. A failure to fully address recommendations set at the last Ofsted welfare inspection also impacts on the promotion of young people's well-being.

There are also shortfalls in ensuring parental consents for the administration of first aid are obtained and boarders are not provided with a choice about seeing a male or female doctor when they feel unwell; these issues may impact on young people's health needs being met effectively. Young people and their parents are not informed about how to make a complaint to Ofsted and therefore cannot use this route should they so wish. Some of the living arrangements do not provide boarders with an appropriate level of comfort and privacy. For example, there are shortfalls in: the arrangements for the use of bunk beds; the use of CCTV in some areas of the school; the quality, in some houses, of access to facilities and the standards of welfare.

In other areas this is a good school that young people enjoy attending. Young people overwhelmingly say that they feel safe and happy at the school. Overall, Young people's health needs are well promoted and many young people speak very highly of the medical centre staff. Young people also benefit from sound relationships with

many of the staff and generally there is a strong ethos of mutual respect between staff and young people. Young people's views are respected and young people feel that they are treated fairly. The accommodation ranges from adequate to that of a very high standard. There is a rolling programme of rebuild, refurbishment and redecoration which contributes to the improvement of the environment. The activities and opportunities available to young people attending the school are wide and varied.

A high number of young people report that they do not enjoy some of the meals served in the school. However, it is clear that the school has gone to great lengths to address these concerns. As a result, healthy, varied and nutritious meals are available.

Improvements since the last inspection

As a result of the last inspection there were 15 recommendations made. Twelve have been addressed and for the remaining 3 shortfalls remain.

The recommendations met in relation to boarders being healthy which have been addressed relate to: implementing a system to monitor the food portion size provided to boarders, ensuring catering staff are aware of the specific dietary needs of all students, including those relating to allergies; making improvements in the crockery and cutlery washing processes; ensuring medication cabinets are secure at all times.

The improvements made in these areas mean there is an improvement in the promotion of boarders' health needs. This is achieved because staff monitor what boarders are eating and catering staff are aware of, and can cater for, any specific needs. The improved arrangements for washing up ensure that cutlery and crockery is clean and hygienic to use. The security of medicines means that there is no risk of unauthorised access to them.

The recommendations met in relation to boarders' safety which have been addressed relate to: ensuring that high windows are made safe; ensuring that warning signs are fixed to hot pipes; replacing heavily stained bedroom carpets; ensuring that all drinking fountains are functioning correctly.

The improvements made in these areas mean that boarders' safety is better promoted through: high risk windows being made secure; boarders' raised awareness of the risk from hot pipes; the provision of clean and hygienic carpets; improved access to drinking water when boarders are thirsty.

The recommendations met in relation to enjoying and achieving which have been met relate to: additional hours for the independent counsellors and ensuring they receive regular supervision; ensuring boarders have easier access to people independent from the school.

The improvements made in these areas mean that boarders access to independent

people, should they wish to discuss any issues or concerns, has been increased. Improvements to the supervision of the counsellors mean that they are appropriately supervised and supported in carrying out their role.

The recommendations met in relation to positive contribution relate to the better promotion of the school and food councils. This has been achieved and means that all boarders are aware of the functions of these councils and how to access them; this means their views can be obtained and considered.

Recommendations that remain outstanding relate to: consents, from parents and guardians, in relation to the administration of first aid; improvements in the staff recruitment process; training for staff that is appropriate to their role.

These remaining shortfalls mean that boarders' welfare and safety is not assured. This is because: not all boarders' parents or guardians have agreed to the administration of first aid and therefore first aid may not be provided; it cannot be assured that all people working with the boarders are suitable people to work with children; not all staff have received training to ensure they are competent in their respective roles.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

There is good quality catering provision which ensures the young people have access to varied, enjoyable and healthy diets. This said, a significant number of young people say that they do not enjoy some of the food available. One young person said 'it has its good days and bad days, it depends what's on'. Others say that portion sizes are not big enough. The school is sensitive to these issues and has taken steps to address them such as monitoring the catering provision and setting up an email system for young people to raise any concerns or compliments about food. There is a choice at every meal time and good provision for young people who are vegetarian or have a specialist diet. This means that there is always a healthy choice of meals available. Many young people say they like the food in the houses and enjoy 'special suppers' when they may have treats such as chips or biscuits and watch films. Young people like the theme nights like 'South Africa night' and during the world cup enjoyed the national meals for the teams playing each day. There are well equipped kitchens in each of the houses and young people may use these to prepare snacks and drinks. Water is available from many points throughout the school, including bathrooms. Young people are not always aware that the water from bathrooms is drinking water as there is no signage indicating this. This results in some young people feeling concerned that the only water available to them is not drinking water and this does not promote their well-being.

The school has a strong personal, social and health education programme. This helps young people to develop the skills and knowledge to keep themselves healthy and happy and to develop into responsible adults. Young people clearly enjoy and benefit

from this programme. The school's positive response to countering major risks to health, including substance abuse, promotes young people's health.

Young people's health and welfare is well promoted through the provision of good medical and health care. There are effective arrangements to secure medical, dental and optical attention for boarders as necessary. However, not all young people are currently aware that they have a right to see a General Practitioner of either gender and this does not fully promote their well-being. A number of staff throughout the school are trained in first aid and there is a medical centre that is staffed, day and night, by qualified nursing staff. Young people say that they receive an excellent service from staff in the medication centre and feel certain that they will be well cared for when they visit the centre. This helps to promote their health and well-being. A parent said that the medical centre staff had been 'wonderful in their support for their child'. Good systems are in place for collecting information from parents about young people's health needs in order to ensure that these are met. However, although the medical information form that is sent to parents has been recently improved, it has not been re-sent to all parents for completion. This means that the school has not obtained the permission of some parents to administer emergency first aid and this practice does not fully promote young people's welfare.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is inadequate.

Child protection practices in this school are not robust. The written policies and procedures regarding child protection in the school have not been followed in some circumstances and this does not adequately protect young people. Staff have been trained in child protection, but are not confident in reporting any concerns to the relevant authorities. In other cases staff, who have reported concerns about young people's welfare, have not had these concerns addressed in line with good child protection practices. This school has however, demonstrated a robust response to these concerns following this inspection. Record keeping in relation to child protection records is poor, in some cases, as records have not been dated and information is not detailed chronologically. The child protection policy in the school is generally clear. However, it does not state that there should be a referral made to the local children's safeguarding team within 24-hours of a concern arising. Also, it does not make clear that staff should not carry out their own investigation of a concern without the agreement of the local authority designated officer. These issues do not promote young people's safety and well-being. In other areas the school has demonstrated a commitment to the safety and welfare of young people by reporting child protection concerns to the relevant authorities without delay. The effectiveness of the school's whistle blowing policy has been demonstrated by some staff members and young people speaking up about concerns. The action taken in relation to these concerns has not been robust and not in the best interests of young people.

There are generally good arrangements for staff recruitment in the school that help to ensure that young people's safety is protected. This includes obtaining references and Criminal Records Bureau checks prior to staff starting work in the school. One

staff member, who has a limited role in the school, but who all young people have access to, does not have a Criminal Records Bureau check that has been obtained directly by the school. This does not fully promote young people's welfare. In general, staff are clear about the school's policy for ensuring that any regular visitors to the boarding houses are known to and checked by the school in order to protect young people's safety. Not all staff members have followed this policy. However, the school has demonstrated a commitment to taking corrective action at an early opportunity where this has been the case in order to safeguard young people.

There are strong arrangements for countering bullying in the school. Young people say of bullying 'it would get sorted out', 'it is not a problem here'. Staff are clear about their roles for challenging bullying and do so if required. The robust internet security measures that are in place help to ensure that young people do not experience cyber bullying. Any bullying of this nature is also taken seriously. A particularly strong area of practice in the school is the setting up of a peer listener scheme. This involves young people being trained to provide support to younger children and this helps to promote young people's welfare. There is, generally, good behaviour management within the school. Young people feel treated fairly and understand what is expected of them. Good communication between staff within the school helps to ensure that young people benefit from consistent and fair treatment. The school does not use physical restraint as a form of behaviour management. However, the policy on behaviour management does not make this clear. The lack of clear guidelines regarding safe behaviour management does not fully protect young people, or staff.

The school has an integrated fire detection system and young people know the emergency evacuation procedures from sleeping and living areas in each boarding house. Fire drills are carried out in boarding time at least once a term. Emergency lighting, fire alarms and fire fighting equipment are regularly tested and all of these measures help to protect young people from harm. There are no significant recommendations of the fire service outstanding.

Identifiably high risk activities provided for young people are competently supervised and accompanied by adequate and appropriate safety measures. Risk assessments are carried out in relation to identifiably high risk activities for young people. These are recorded in writing. Suitable and adequate security measures are in place to prevent unauthorised access by the public to boarding houses and other school buildings used by young people. These include key pads, security locks and restrictors on high risk windows. The North Downs Way runs through the school grounds but reasonable measures are taken to prevent or deter unauthorised public access to school buildings in order to promote young people's safety. Sleeping, living and recreational areas, indoors and in the school grounds, are free of significant hazards to young people's safety. Young people know which areas and activities are out of bounds. There is a very thorough health and safety policy, known to staff which includes an effective system of risk assessment to identify and reduce risks to young people from inherent hazards in the school buildings, activities or grounds. This promotes young people's welfare. There is use of closed circuit television in two of the boarding houses to monitor public areas. There are mixed opinions among

young people about its use. Some report that it helps them to feel safe and protects their belongings while others feel that it encroaches upon their privacy. Its use therefore promotes the well-being of some, young people but infringes on the privacy of others.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people receive, in general, a high level of support from staff and are positive about their experiences in the school. There is a strong ethos in the school of mutual respect between staff and young people. Young people are able to develop confidence and positive social development as a result of the support they receive. Young people feel confident that they have an adult to approach for support and many can easily list the staff they would approach, such as the head of boarding. There is a school counsellor available to see a limited number of young people selected by the staff team. The hours of the counsellor are soon to be increased and it is planned that young people will be able to benefit from a drop in service. There are two independent listeners who most young people are aware of, but say they would not necessarily approach for support as they already feel supported in the school. One independent listener is not clear about their role in child protection and this issue has been addressed under the outcome area staying safe. Young people are provided with information about how to contact support through ChildLine and a national drugs advisory service and this helps to promote their welfare.

Young people do not experience inappropriate discrimination. There is good integration among the school's diverse community. The school's policies regarding equality, equal opportunities and behaviour indicate that there is fair treatment in this school and this is followed in practice. Young people with special educational needs are well supported academically and emotionally.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school. They say that in most cases they are listened to and given opportunities to have a say in their day-to-day care. One young person said 'you can talk to anyone'. The positive relationships that most young people share with staff help to ensure that young people feel confident to speak up about the things that are important to them. There is a school council that young people say they are able to contribute their views to. Young people are democratically elected to the council and young people know who the representatives are in order to make their views known. Young people say that a new games console and a karaoke machine were purchased in one house as a response to their requests through the council. There is a dedicated email service to allow young people to talk directly with the catering manager. There are posters in every boarding house which encourage young people to email any thoughts about food. There is a suggestions box in some houses with paper and

pens provided and information detailing that suggestions can be anonymous. The school has further demonstrated its commitment to listening to young people and their parents by researching their views in a recent questionnaire. All these measures help young people to feel valued, safe and listened to.

There are good arrangements for ensuring that young people are able to maintain contact with their parents. Young people say that they have mobile telephones and they can use these at appropriate times to contact their parents. They also say that there are telephones throughout the school which they can use in privacy to contact their family. These measures help young people to feel secure. There are good procedures in place for helping new young people to settle in to school life. These include tours of the school, overnight stays, a buddy system and written information being provided that helps them to understand the school's rules and routines. There is a clear ethos in the school of the older young people helping newer young people to settle in and this promotes the welfare of new boarders.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

There are good arrangements for the protection of young people's belongings. Young people say that in the past there has been a problem with thefts in the school. However, this is no longer the case. Young people report that the school takes theft seriously. All young people have a suitable storage space to lock away any valuables. However, young people are advised not to bring valuables to the school if this is possible. The newer houses have particularly good arrangements for the safe storage of possessions, including a number of locked drawers for each young person. These arrangements help to ensure that young people feel confident that their possessions are safe.

Young people benefit from living in satisfactory accommodation. There are nine boarding houses which provide varying levels of quality of accommodation. Some houses have recently been extended and upgraded to a high standard and some are older and more worn. A programme of redecoration and upgrade is planned in order to offer accommodation of an equally good standard for all young people. There has been a great deal of investment in buildings since the last inspection. The dormitories in some houses are attractive, very spacious, with new furniture and ample space for movement and storage. There is very good lighting for young people in the upper and lower bunks in the houses. Further reorganisation of boarding accommodation is planned during the course of the next academic year. The school has clearly taken young people's best interests into account in relation to the facilities provided in houses. Many have large communal rooms with different areas for young people to enjoy. There are games rooms, rooms for relaxing and watching television and pleasant outside seating and BBQ areas.

The sleeping arrangements for young people are generally good and young people report, in the main, that they are very happy with them. Young people are able to personalise an area of their bedrooms and this helps them to feel at home. Many

young people say that the beds are comfortable; however, some say that they are not. Furthermore, there is some use of bunk beds for young people who are in year nine and this practice does not fully promote their well-being. Young people benefit from adequate toilet and washing facilities that provide them with privacy. This helps to promote their dignity and to ensure that their needs are met.

Organisation

The organisation is inadequate.

Serious shortfalls in relation to the safeguarding of young people have been identified during this inspection. The organisation in the school has therefore been judged as inadequate as systems for monitoring quality and addressing concerns within the school have failed to identify these safeguarding concerns at an early stage.

Another area in which the welfare of young people is not fully promoted is the lack of information available to parents and young people about their right to make a complaint to Ofsted. In many ways, the organisation of boarding is strong and contributes to young people's happiness and well-being. However, concerns have been raised about the inconsistencies that exist between some young people's experiences of boarding. Some young people say that the suppers that they receive in their house are not as varied, substantial or interesting as in other houses. Some young people from the sixth form express concern about the lack of integration in the sixth form since its reorganisation with those in Gatton Hall feeling segregated. Furthermore, there are considerable differences in the standard of accommodation between some of the houses. However, it is clear that this area is currently being addressed by the school. These issues aside, many parents and the majority of young people in the school are exceptionally happy with the school. One parent said that the school 'offers a superb environment for the pupils and the ethos of the school produces well rounded individuals who have learned to be part of a community'. Another said 'this is an excellent school; I would recommend it to anyone'.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people are treated as individuals as staff are clear about their individual needs. There are policies and procedures in place which help to ensure that all of the school community is treated fairly. There is clear information made available to stakeholders regarding the school in its prospectus and on the school website which includes a statement of the principles and practice of boarding. This helps to ensure that all stakeholders are clear about what to expect from the school. Generally, the systems for risk assessment and record keeping contribute to the promotion of young people's welfare. The monitoring of major punishments within the school does not, however, currently occur regularly in line with national minimum standards and therefore does not fully promote the welfare of young people.

Generally, staff are clear about their roles in boarding welfare and say they are well supported by the senior management team in the school. They receive information

to help them carry out their jobs effectively and are clear about boarding policies and practice. One young person said 'the matrons are brilliant'. The disciplinary procedure provides for good support and guidance for anyone on precautionary suspension. Many staff report a strong ethos of mutual respect among staff and young people. Staff levels within the boarding houses are high and this helps to ensure that young people are well supported and feel secure. Some staff say that they have benefitted from receiving a good induction and training programme and this helps to ensure that young people are cared for by competent and well trained staff. Other staff say that they have not received an induction programme or received training specific to their boarding role. This does not promote young people's safety and welfare. Furthermore, not all staff receive annual appraisal or supervision. This limited access to learning and development for staff fails to promote the well-being of young people.

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 written parental permission has been obtained in advance for the administration of first aid for all young people and that young people are aware that so far as possible the school enables them to see either a male, or a female, doctor as they choose (Breach of NMS 15)
- ensure that the school has confirmed to young people that the water supply is of drinking quality where provision is by washbasin taps (Breach of NMS 25)
- ensure that the school's child protection policy includes a requirement for a referral to be made within 24 hours (in writing or with written confirmation of a telephoned referral) of allegations or suspicions of abuse to the local social services department to carry out child protection investigations, rather than internal investigation by the school (Breach of NMS 3)
- ensure that the school's practice explicitly require staff to report to a designated senior member of staff of the school, or to the Local Authority Designated Officer, any concern or allegation about school practices or the behaviour of colleagues which are likely to put pupils at risk of abuse or other serious harm (Breach of NMS 3)
- ensure staff, at all levels, (including the matron and independent listener) have been given briefing or training on responding to suspicions or allegations of abuse and know what action they should take in response to such suspicions or allegations (Breach of NMS 3)
- ensure that the policy on discipline includes a statement of policy on use of restraint and the school's disciplinary practice is consistent with this (Breach of NMS 4)
- ensure the school's system for recruiting staff (including contract and volunteers

such as independent listeners) who will work with boarders includes a Criminal Records Bureau check which has been applied for by the school (Breach of NMS 38)

- ensure that any use of surveillance equipment (e.g. CCTV cameras) does not intrude on boarders' reasonable privacy (Breach of NMS 41)
- ensure that bunk beds are only exceptionally used for boarders beyond Year 8 and all mattresses are of reasonable depth (Breach of NMS 42)
- ensure that no individual house or houses have significantly poorer access to facilities or standards of welfare than other houses and that the school reviews the organisation of the sixth form to ensure integration of all the sixth formers (Breach of NMS 10)
- ensure that records of major punishments, complaints and accidents are regularly (at least twice a term) monitored by the Head or a designated senior member of staff (Breach of NMS 23)
- ensure that all staff with boarding duties receive induction training in boarding when newly appointed and there is an appropriate process for the regular review of the performance of each member of staff with boarding duties by a more senior or experienced member of staff (e.g. through individual supervision meetings or a staff appraisal system) (Breach of NMS 34)
- ensure that young people and their parents are informed by the school of how they can contact Ofsted regarding any complaint concerning their welfare (Breach of NMS 5)
- ensure that all boarding staff receive training appropriate for their role and are offered opportunities for continuing training in boarding. (Breach of NMS 34)