

# Wymondham College

Welfare inspection report for a boarding school

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**Inspector** Deirdra Keating

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## **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.<sup>1,2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

Wymondham College is a co-educational academy. The college caters for pupils of mixed gender aged between 11 to 18 years. There are currently 1281 pupils on roll, of which there are 626 boarders.

There are six boarding houses within the college campus. These surround the school buildings and oversee the extensive grounds. Boarding is organised into six houses with a specific sixth form accommodation block. Day boarders are allocated to one of the houses. There are a range of facilities, including a sports hall and gym, sports pitches, a drama studio and indoor swimming pool.

The college is located between the small towns of Wymondham and Attleborough, within easy reach of the city of Norwich. The college has good road links to London and the Midlands and there is a local rail service.

The boarding provision was last inspected in November 2009.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools).

## Inspection judgements

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>outstanding</b>
Outcomes for boarders	outstanding
Quality of boarding provision and care	good
Boarders' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of boarding	outstanding

## Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the boarding inspection are as follows.

- The overall effectiveness of the boarding provision is outstanding. The college provides a highly valuable boarding experience impacting significantly on the lives of boarding pupils. Boarders make exceptional progress, grow in confidence, independence and are given extensive opportunities to realise their potential.
- Boarders benefit from extremely positive relationships with staff which help them make continued progress in their social, emotional and academic development.
- Boarding pupils, parents and staff are highly positive about the boarding provision and the quality of overall care.
- There are rigorous procedures for safeguarding boarders which are well established and central to the college.
- Boarders' accommodation is decorated to a varying standard, some of which requires updating.
- Leaders are ambitious and share a clear vision for the future of the provision. This drives continued improvements across the college and impacts positively on the outcomes for boarders.
- All national minimum standards are met.

## Outcomes for boarders

The outcomes for boarders are outstanding. Boarders relish being at the school and thoroughly enjoy the overall boarding experience. This is demonstrated by boarders who prefer to stay at the weekends. One pupil said, 'I love this school it's just the

best spending this amount of time with your friends.' Another said, ' it's fantastic, the prep is hard but in-between school it's like one big sleepover, I prefer to stay at weekends to be with my friends.' There is a warm family type atmosphere where the culture is to care and support one another. Boarders support younger boarders and help with evening routines and supper times. This gives boarders a sense of responsibility and supports younger boarders adjusting to being away from home.

Boarders make full use of the substantial range of stimulating activities offered. They are purposefully engaged, enthusiastic and highly motivated. Boarders make individual choices on a daily basis regarding the evening activities. This gives consideration to individual preferences and encourages boarders to take responsibility for managing their time and equipment. One boarder said, 'I am much more organised now that I board, boarding has made me so independent.' Boarders choose from activities after school known collectively as 'Wymondham Life'. These include; badminton, hockey, rugby, football, art club, running, swimming, fencing, film making and equine activities. Uptake of extra-curricular activity is high, boarders structure their time extremely well and participate with enthusiasm. This helps boarders develop many new skills and builds on their confidence, self-esteem and social skills.

Boarders lead active and healthy lifestyles. They benefit from a varied range of sports clubs and represent the school in a variety of sports fixtures. The boarders explained that they take part but do not have to have a specific skill to participate. There is no discrimination because of gender or sporting ability promoting equality of opportunity for all. Boarders benefit from freshly cooked nutritious meals from which they often make healthy choices. Boarders who are unwell can access the well-equipped medical centre where health professionals ensure they receive the care and treatment they require. New boarders report that they are cared for appropriately if they are unwell, the medical centre is comfortable and staff always contact their parents. This demonstrates that boarders feel reassured if they are ill while away from home and their physical health is given high priority.

Boarders make outstanding and innovative contributions to the boarding community. Their views are strongly valued and influential. Student council forums have a high profile and boarders relish opportunities to become council representatives. This helps boarders develop their presentation, speaking and listening skills as they debate ideas and changes to the boarding provision. Boarders' contributions and views are included in decision making at all levels. Topics are inclusive and responsive to boarders' feedback. The forums are transparent and cover sensitive and difficult subject matter. This promotes a culture of open and honest communication throughout the school.

Regular events in the academic calendar provide optimum opportunities for boarders to take on key roles and responsibilities which aids their personal growth. Younger boarders thoroughly enjoy regular Friday night entertainment provided by boarders known as the 'Ents Team'. Boarders take great pride in organising; talent shows, quiz

nights, film nights and traditional celebrations. Photographs and displays in the houses show boarders thoroughly enjoying these events. Sixth form pupils organise and manage events with autonomy and skill. These include the annual school 'Christmas Formal' celebration and the 'Mair Cup' music competition. Boarders also proactively support local charities and wider causes. Overall boarders make a significant contribution to the college and wider community. This expands boarders understanding of others while developing their leadership and organisation skills.

There is an embedded culture of mentorship and support throughout the school. Boarders are extremely keen to give back to the boarding community and help other boarding pupils with their academic work. This includes transitional support as boarders progress through the school. Responsibility given to boarders enhances the development of their subject knowledge and mentoring skills. Boarders who are in a position of responsibility enjoy the roles they play, clearly evidenced as they eagerly volunteer for them. Others say they benefit greatly from being mentored by older boarders.

## **Quality of boarding provision and care**

The quality of the boarding provision and care is good. Boarder's well-being is consistently prioritised and carefully monitored. Key to this process are the strong relationships and rapport between staff and boarders. Additionally the welfare communication systems between boarding staff and academic staff are clearly defined and effective. This team approach supports boarder's academic and personal development extremely well. New boarders are given an induction tailored to their individual needs and are welcomed into boarding houses by existing boarders. Activities such as 'Fresher's Fayre' promotes the wide range of activities on offer. This helps new boarders settle, builds new friendships and broadens their interests. Boarders' participation is monitored closely giving staff an indication of each boarder's overall wellbeing.

Feedback from boarders is consistently positive throughout all houses. Surveys demonstrate that 93% of boarders enjoy the boarding experience. Comments from boarders include, ' I love this house it's definitely the best I am not just saying that we love it here. The staff are amazing they will do anything for this house and think we are the best.' Staff encourage boarders to take responsibility in the houses, efforts from boarders are acknowledged and shared. Praise boards in each house celebrate individual achievements in boarding and school. Boarders are recognised for effort, ability and organisation building their self-belief and esteem.

The catering arrangements work well, catering staff are highly responsive to boarder's individual needs and preferences. Boarders benefit from three freshly cooked meals a day, these all encompass choices to meet specific dietary requirements. The catering department works hard to improve the whole dining experience at the school. Staff are accessible and encourage feedback from boarders who share their views openly in the knowledge that they will influence menu changes

and introduce new ideas.

Boarders are able to use a range of media to keep in touch with friends and families. Fixed line telephone facilities are provided in each house and a communications room provides a range of media for students from overseas. Boarders are able to use mobile telephones in accordance with the college policy. Overall boarders say that they are able to contact home with ease at times of their own choice.

The boarding house provides a good range of resources for boarders to ensure their needs are well catered for. Accommodation for boarders includes shared dormitories and smaller rooms. Some rooms have dividers, which gives some privacy to sleeping areas. Boarders personalise bedrooms with their own belongings helping them feel more at home. All boarders have safes in their rooms, although there is a degree of trust between boarders who share rooms. Things do not tend to go missing and when they have previously boarders say that the matter is dealt with 'really seriously' by staff. This helps boarders feel secure and know their belongings are safe. The re-development of a boarding house to provide the drama studio and extended common areas gives value to boarders who are proud of their house. However, the overall standard of décor in the houses is variable and there are some areas that require re-decoration.

## **Boarders' safety**

The arrangements for ensuring boarders' safety are outstanding. Rigorous and systematic recruitment procedures are unfailingly operated. This ensures the risk of unsuitable people being able to have access to boarders is significantly reduced. Clear written agreements for the chaperoning of all visitors and contractors further reduces the risk of inappropriate contact with boarders. Comprehensive checks are consistently undertaken with regard to adults living on the site who are not directly employed by the college. Overall these systems provide boarders with a robust degree of protection from potential harm.

All staff undertake regular child protection training appropriate to their role. This ensures there is a consistent approach to safeguarding throughout the college. The designated school safeguarding team are competent in their roles and named throughout the boarding provision. Therefore boarders know exactly who to approach with concerns. Boarders on the Principal's Council receive introductory safeguarding training. Overall staff and boarders are fully aware of safeguarding procedures and key personnel. This prioritises boarder's welfare and safety throughout the school.

Bullying is taken very seriously and boarders and parents report that instances of bullying are quickly resolved and effectively dealt with. Boarders sign an anti-bullying agreement which includes cyber-bullying. This gives boarders responsibility for managing their own actions and promotes awareness of the consequences of such behaviour. Bullying is not reported as a problem by boarders and they are very clear

that there is a range of adults to whom they would go for support if necessary. Boarders' surveys demonstrate that boarders feel safe in the college and are always able to talk to a member of staff of their choice. Boarders have access to a number of external contact numbers and counsellors within the college. Many boarders confidently highlight the independent visitor and his role to provide an independent safety net. This preventative approach helps boarders feel emotionally safe and supported at all times.

Individual care plans and risk assessments are completed and regularly reviewed. This means that risks are identified and minimised to ensure boarders can safely participate in activities, trips and events. Staff have effective and robust systems in place to ensure they know the whereabouts of boarders at all times. There have been no recorded incidents of boarders going missing. Boarders have responsibility for signing in and out of houses and staff monitor these records closely. This helps ensure boarders are safe and return to houses at agreed times.

There is a culture of exceptionally good behaviour and consistent promotion of clear boundaries. Staff use incentives to recognise and encourage effort, kindness and helpful contribution to the community. Boarders are fully aware of the behavioural expectations and of potential behavioural sanctions. Recording of sanctions is clear and monitored well by senior management. Action taken to address general behavioural issues is undertaken by staff with boarders. This is managed in an open and democratic approach. For example, boarders and staff meet to address on-going issues where staff strongly emphasise, 'The future is in your hands and 'We want to hear your views honestly and openly.' This equal approach looks at wider issues and empowers boarders while encouraging them to reflect on personal conduct and take responsibility for their behaviour.

The health and safety in the school is managed by a designated Health and Safety Manager. Health and safety checks are all up to date and fully meet requirements. Rigorous safety and appliance service checks promote a safe physical environment throughout the boarding provision. Fire drills are carried out regularly during boarding time. Boarders always respond to fire drills in accordance with instructions. This demonstrates they know what to do in the event of a fire evacuation in order to keep themselves safely accounted for.

## **Leadership and management of boarding**

The leadership and management of the boarding provision are outstanding. The aims of boarding are clearly set out and communicated well to prospective boarders and their parents. There is an excellent transition process, which prepares new boarders well, in advance of their admission. Boarding suitability interviews help to determine emotional resilience and visits to prospective boarders prior to admission supports the nurture of positive relationships. The boarding aims and ethos are well established and promoted through daily practice. As a result, boarders are highly motivated, confident and thoroughly enjoy their boarding experience.



The senior management team have used extensive self-evaluation and invited review of the boarding provision from external professionals. There is a strong commitment to on-going development, challenging practice to drive improvement. As a result, the boarding provision has new management and staffing structures, with a focus on improving outcomes for boarders. All staff have defined responsibilities and accountability. Staff receive comprehensive induction to their roles. The managers and senior management team monitor practice, identify training needs and provide performance review and management of staff. This contributes to ensuring that staff are effectively resourced to promote boarder's welfare and safety.

The deployment of highly skilled and trained staff ensures there are seamless links between boarding and the educational provision. The staff teams represent a mix of gender, age, experience, qualifications and skills. The number of staff working in the boarding provision provides extremely good levels of supervision, support and interaction with boarders. This further promotes individual's well-being, emotional, social and educational development.

Comprehensive policies and procedures underpin the routines and practices within the boarding provision. The contribution of boarders is highly valued by the staff and managers. This is evident particularly in the bullying policy, where boarders have had significant input and defined what bullying means to them. Boarders and their parents confirm that staff adhere to the policies. Parents gave examples of bullying being dealt with robustly. Boarders expressed that bullying is not an issue for them and talked knowledgeably about the underlying procedures. Complaints are addressed, following the set procedures. All parents who were asked, said they are aware of the complaints process. Lower level complaints are managed within each boarding house. Consequently, there are some minor inconsistencies between houses. The procedure for higher level complaints is very clear and there is a central record, which provides an audit trail of the responses and resolutions. Overall, the policies are managed very well and are communicated to staff, parents and boarders. This ensures systems and procedures are transparent and that all parties are aware of their rights, responsibilities and recourse.

Equality of opportunity, the promotion of individual's rights and embracing diversity are intrinsically linked with all practice and daily routines. Staff give careful consideration to all aspects of boarder's welfare. This ensures that individuals and groups are not marginalised. For example, Exeats have historically meant that boarders from overseas have needed to stay with guardians while other boarders were able to go home. This has been reviewed and part of the boarding provision is now open on Exeat weekends. Consequently, boarders who are unable to go home have a choice and can stay and enjoy specifically arranged, culturally enriching activities if they wish.

Systems within the boarding and education provision are designed to give boarders a voice and develop their mentoring and leadership skills. House Councils, School

Council and the Principal's Council are representational of all the boarders, with a mix of gender, age, nationality, boarding status and academic ability. The structure of these groups contributes to engendering a community of students and boarders who feel able to raise any issues; either themselves or on behalf of others, in the knowledge they will be listened to.

Relationships with parents are good. Feedback from surveys is positive, with 96% of parents saying their child enjoys boarding, feels safe and is well looked after. 100 % of parents said that the boarding provision is well managed and effectively organised. Parents say they are welcomed into the school and are able to make contact with staff easily. The Parent Forum offers parents the opportunity to meet with a member of the senior management team on a regular basis. This means that parents can have face-to-face contact and raise any issues they wish, holding the college to account. As a result, actions are put in place to address areas for improvement raised by parents.

Overall, the boarding experience is highly beneficial. Parents say: 'I can't fault the pastoral care; they go above and beyond what they need to do' and 'knowing our children are happy there, is the most positive aspect.' Parents, staff and other professionals say that boarders develop their skills, confidence and interests. Boarders say that they enjoy the boarding experience because of the good support they receive, the friendships they make and the opportunities they have to develop themselves.

## **National minimum standards**

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

## **What should the school do to improve further?**

- establish a system to promote clarity of issues that constitute a complaint. Develop a system of responding to all complaints in a consistent manner, with clear responsibility for the monitoring and review
- ensure that the refurbishment programme of the accommodation is continued to promote a good standard of décor throughout all the houses.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



12/11/2012

Dear Boarders,

### **Inspection of Wymondham College**

As you know Ofsted recently inspected your school. We visited the boarding accommodation and spoke with many of you. Your views about your boarding experiences helped us come to our decision about how well the college provides for you. Most of you filled in our questionnaire, as did your parents and this was extremely helpful. Following the inspection we have judged the boarding provision as outstanding.

We were impressed by your confidence and independence and how much you care for and help one other. The boarding experience helps you become increasingly independent in preparation for your adult lives. Many of you spoke about how much you enjoy boarding and how you miss your friends when you are not at school. There is a relaxed and happy atmosphere in the boarding provision.

There are good facilities for you to study and you are able to personalise your rooms and dormitories if you wish. Staff at the school are strongly committed to supporting your development and work extremely well together to ensure your overall welfare and wellbeing. There is a nurturing ethos which is embedded in the day-to-day running of the school. We found the food is very good and you are provided with a wide range of nutritious meals.

We found the standard of accommodation varied and have asked the school to continue with the planned refurbishment programme to address this. We have also asked that written policies are reviewed and made more generic to ensure more consistency in the approach to areas such as complaints.

Yours sincerely,

Deirdra Keating