

Holyport College

Ascot Road, Holyport, Maidenhead, Berkshire SL6 3LE

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Holyport College is an all-ability co-educational day and boarding school for students aged 11 to 19 years of age. It is a state-funded free school and Eton College is its sole educational sponsor. Entry is in Years 7 and 9 and sixth form.

Boarding accommodation is located on the upper floors of the two teaching blocks. In this academic year, there are four boarding houses, located in two separate buildings. The boys' accommodation is separate to the girls. There are separate wings for the sixth formers. At the time of this inspection, there were 205 boarders at the school and 595 students on the school roll.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 November 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The boarding school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of last inspection: 29 January 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The commitment to ensuring the safety and emotional well-being of boarders is an outstanding feature of this boarding school. The boarding staff have the skills to develop caring, trusting relationships with the boarders. Consequently, all the boarders spoken to during this inspection said they feel safe in the boarding houses and were able to quickly identify which member of staff they would speak to if they had any worries or concerns.

The senior matron works closely with the boarding house staff, the nurse and the senior leadership team to ensure that the boarders' day-to-day care needs are met. She has a good understanding of the boarders' physical health needs and monitors their healthcare plans to ensure that strategies are being followed. The senior matron also maintains oversight of the boarders' emotional well-being and makes herself available to meet with any boarder who may be struggling with the boarding environment or having difficulties away from the college.

The boarders have access to a range of specialist childcare professionals to support them in maintaining good mental health and emotional well-being. These include an art therapist, drama therapist and a speech and language therapist. Senior leaders have good links to external professionals and take a proactive approach to ensuring that boarders get the professional help they may need. For example, consultation has taken place with a specialist domestic abuse professional and various specialist workers in the local youth service.

Leaders have been effective at securing specialist services for boarders when the local child and adolescent mental health service has not been able to respond in a timely way. There are now plans in place for a pilot project which would see a mental health worker based at the college. A social worker spoken to during this inspection stated that the boarding provision had been a 'godsend' for a child she currently works with.

This approach to supporting boarders' emotional well-being is enhanced by the support and guidance offered to parents. Parents have been able to access workshops and webinars focused on keeping children and young people safe and responding to any emerging mental health difficulties.

There is a strong commitment to listening to boarders and responding to any collective and individual concerns. The boarders were consulted prior to recent changes being made to the staffing and accommodation arrangements. An established boarding leadership team, comprising the more senior boarders, provides opportunities for the senior leadership team to hear the boarders' views on how the boarding provision is organised. This approach ensures that boarders develop increasing levels of confidence and the ability to voice their opinions.

Generally, the boarders make excellent academic progress when taking their starting points into account. The academic progress of boarders compares favourably to that of their day pupil peers. The boarders have access to an excellent range of sporting and recreational activities. Boarders can also access the clubs and societies of other nearby boarding schools. This further promotes children's social networks and experiences.

The college has an exceptional approach to embracing equality and diversity and this is embedded within the ethos and values of the boarding provision. One boarder described how he had been inspired by the activities and discussions taking place at the college's African Caribbean society. Pupils were also observed engaging enthusiastically in discussion at the LGBT group. The staff and senior leadership team work collaboratively with the students to progress suggestions which emerge from these discussion groups.

The opinions of boarders and parents regarding the quality and quantity of the food is variable. Some express the view that this is improving, while others feel the standard is poor. Some boarders said that there is a lack of choice for those requiring a particular diet on religious grounds. The senior leadership team is acutely aware of these issues and is working towards improving the situation.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

The senior leadership team and staff working in the boarding provision demonstrate a strong commitment to keeping children safe and protecting them from harm. The designated safeguarding lead is knowledgeable and has significant experience in relation to the protection of vulnerable children. He ensures that research and good practice underpin the approach to keeping the boarders safe and is proactive in seeking external learning opportunities for the safeguarding team.

There is a highly effective system for staff across the school to report any concerns they may have for a pupil's welfare. This system is well used and consequently any emerging concerns are quickly identified. These range from low-level observations regarding a pupil's presentation to more significant indicators that a child could be at risk of harm. Referrals to safeguarding agencies are appropriately made and there are good audit trails of decisions made and actions taken. Strong and effective representations are made when other agencies are perceived not to have acted in a child's best interests.

The boarding staff have a heightened awareness of the specific risks associated with each boarder. Individual risk assessments are undertaken when a boarder is known to be particularly vulnerable. This ensures that the boarding staff have clear strategies to follow to keep the boarder safe. The boarding staff demonstrate good levels of professional curiosity. On one occasion, this resulted in a thorough

investigation to determine whether a boarder was at risk of criminal or sexual exploitation.

Any allegations made against staff or complaints about the quality of care being provided are thoroughly investigated. Prompt referrals are made to the designated officer when it is appropriate to do so. The advice and guidance given by the designated officer is fully implemented in practice. The quality of internal investigations into allegations made against staff is exceptionally high. All potential witnesses are interviewed and external professionals who may have relevant information are consulted. The designated officer stated that senior leaders 'respond to requests in a timely way and I have been happy with their procedures and outcomes'.

The boarders receive excellent support and guidance to assist them to keep themselves safe. They are supported to recognise any form of bullying or discrimination and they receive guidance on building healthy relationships. Consequently, there are many examples of boarders checking on each other's well-being and calling out discriminatory language if they hear this.

There is a trauma-informed approach to behaviour management. The pastoral team demonstrates an excellent knowledge and understanding of the impact of trauma on behaviour and the needs of the child. The boarders are familiar with expectations of behaviour and boundaries. They are involved in the decision-making process should there be any breach of the boundaries and any sanctions imposed are based on individual circumstances. Consequently, the boarders do not express any sense of unfairness when they are challenged about their behaviour.

The boarders learn about the risks they may become exposed to when using the internet and accessing social media sites. This strategy is enhanced by the vigilance of the boarding staff and limiting access to electronic devices to reasonable times of the day. Any misuse of electronic devices is taken seriously, and consultation takes place with the relevant safeguarding agencies to determine a proportionate response.

Safe recruitment processes are generally implemented in practice. However, the process could be further strengthened by ensuring that applicants for peripatetic posts complete an application form. In one case, an applicant was only required to provide references from one former employer, despite there being other employers who could also have been contacted.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The deputy headmaster of the college is also the head of boarding. He has been in post since January 2021. He is supported effectively by the headmaster, who plays an active role in the monitoring and development of the boarding provision. They lead a strong senior leadership team who are collectively passionate about the quality of care and support being provided to the boarders.

Since coming into post, the head of boarding has overseen significant changes to the staffing structure and allocation of rooms in the four boarding houses. These changes have ensured that the leader of each boarding house, known as house masters, have greater capacity to focus on the well-being of the boarders. There is now a mixture of year groups in each boarding house. These changes are being closely monitored and the early indications are that there have been fewer incidents of negative behaviour. The younger boarders are also benefiting from more interaction and support from boarders who can reflect on their own experience of adjusting to life as a boarder.

There are strong and effective systems for monitoring the quality of care the boarders receive and the progress they are making. Consequently, any shortfalls in practice are quickly identified and acted upon. For example, monitoring of one serious incident established that relevant information had not been shared with a child's social worker. Audits, relating to specific areas of practice, are regularly conducted. This ensures that any trends, such as the prevalence of inappropriate behaviours, can be addressed promptly. The senior leadership team has recently taken action to ensure that all such audits clearly identify the actions to be taken to address any emerging concerns.

Members of the governing body maintain a visible presence in the school. Governors undertake independent visits to the boarding accommodation and produce clear reports on their findings. There are systems in place to ensure that the governing body is kept fully informed of any safeguarding matters. This allows the governors to maintain good oversight of safeguarding practice at the college.

The senior leadership team has a thorough understanding of the needs and vulnerabilities of each boarder. They oversee the plans for individual boarders, which are comprehensive and exceed the requirements of the national minimum standards. For example, some boarders have individualised risk management and welfare plans. Boarders' healthcare plans contain well-documented summaries of the boarders' needs and the strategies that should be followed for ensuring these needs are met.

There are strong processes in place to ensure that new boarders experience a planned transition and induction into the boarding environment. A flexible approach is taken to the admission process so that the potential boarder is well prepared for moving in. The senior leadership team is committed to ensuring stability for the pupils. One child, whose care arrangements had become unstable, was given a boarding place to ensure that there was stability and consistency in their life. Another was given a bursary when it became apparent that circumstances may have resulted in the child having to leave the college.

The professional development of staff working in the boarding provision is given high priority. These staff receive regular and effective supervision. Provision has been made for the house masters to receive one-to-one coaching while they adapt to the new responsibilities resulting from the changes to the staffing structure. They are now undertaking professional qualifications relevant to their role. Arrangements have

also been made for the designated safeguarding lead to receive practice-based supervision from an external professional.

There are good training opportunities for the boarding staff. Team meetings and practice development days ensure the staff have time to reflect on their practice and keep up to date with changes to policies and procedures. These meetings are child focused and ensure that any concerns for a child's well-being are communicated across the team.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that safe recruitment processes are consistently implemented in practice.
- The registered person should ensure that the quality of the meals provided to the boarders is consistently good and that there is sufficient choice for those with special dietary, medical or religious needs.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Boarding school details

Social care unique reference number: SC483028

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Benedict McCarey

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspectors

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