

Marathon Science School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI
Social care inspectors	Angela Hunt HMI and Seka Graovac

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000³ 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.

Information about the school

This is the first inspection of Marathon Science School since its opening in September 2009, in Lewisham, in south-east London. The school's registration in September 2009 allows for 144 pupils and 74 boarders between the ages of 10 and 16 years. There are currently 40 boys on roll and all are in Years 7 and 8. The school intends to grow towards capacity by admitting a new Year 7 cohort each year. The school's admission criteria require that all boys are boarders. The usual pattern is that the boys go home on alternate weekends. Most come from London boroughs, although some come from much further afield. The boarding provision is a 20-minute drive from the school site. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. The proprietors are a body of four trustees comprising the Seven Hills Educational Trust, a registered charitable trust. They established the school in response to the wishes of the Turkish community with the aim of providing a 24-hour curriculum inspired by Islamic values that will lead to high academic standards. Almost all pupils are from Turkish heritage and all are Muslim. Most of the school staff, including the headteacher, work part-time.

Evaluation of the school

Over the past year, the staff have successfully established a satisfactory standard of education and boarding provision. The curriculum, teaching and assessment are all satisfactory and reflect the fact that these are early days in the school's development. There is as yet not enough rigour and consistency in the application of key policies for pupils' welfare, health and safety, and this aspect of the school's work is inadequate because the regulations for safeguarding pupils are not fully met. There are five regulations for education that are not met and five recommendations made to meet the national minimum standards for boarding schools. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

Quality of education

The overall quality of education is satisfactory. The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory. Outline curriculum plans and schemes exist for the full age range, with detailed plans already in place for Years 7, 8 and 9. A programme for careers education is to be developed as the age range increases but is not yet in place. The curriculum, particularly personal, social and health education (PSHE), together with the religious teaching, has successfully established a lively learning culture with the result that the boys have made satisfactory progress in their learning and some have made good progress in mathematics and science.

There is an appropriate balance between the religious teaching and subjects of the National Curriculum, which meets the school's aims well. Greatest emphasis is given to English, mathematics, science, languages and religious education. The latter includes a range of Islamic studies as well as aspects of Buddhism, Sikhism and Christianity. These programmes are planned effectively to give the boys a good understanding of their own faith alongside that of others different to their own. Islamic studies include daily Qur'an studies, either in school or in boarding time. In school, the content of these lessons is structured well to provide meaningful opportunities to hear and practise recitation and to discuss and understand the content of the script. The boys study Arabic, Spanish and Turkish and this emphasis on languages gives good opportunities for the boys to improve their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills, in languages traditional to their heritage as well as in English. As a result of gaps identified in pupils' functional English skills, the curriculum was carefully adapted after the first term to include a weekly lesson for communication studies. The boys say that they enjoy these lessons and that it is helping them to improve their skills. In addition, more opportunities for reading were introduced in boarding time and the boys enjoy this too, although they say that they need a wider variety of reading material.

The way that the curriculum extends into boarding time has its strengths and weaknesses. There are set times each evening for homework, reading, physical activity and a range of clubs. There is a particularly high emphasis on homework. It is routinely given after each lesson and teachers expect it to be done for the next lesson. The boys have mixed feelings about this. They acknowledge that homework helps them to practise skills and they like making posters, researching subjects and reading, but inspectors agree that they are not always given sufficient support to complete homework. This is because teachers do not sufficiently coordinate the demands for the amount of work for each evening, computers are not readily available to support their studies and boys are given insufficient opportunities to collaborate with one another during the homework periods. In addition, care staff are not always able to give sufficient support or time to help with homework.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall. In lessons, the extent to which ideas are exchanged and thoughts extended depends on teachers' skills in encouraging the boys to explore the learning for themselves. Characteristically

teachers focus on imparting knowledge through instruction and miss opportunities to capitalise on boys' keenness to show and discuss their learning, find out what they know already and then build upon it. Good examples of teachers' questioning enhancing the learning were observed in lessons for science and Arabic, where the boys made good progress in their understanding and skills. There are some good resources to support learning, particularly in science and information and communication technology (ICT). However, support staff are not always deployed effectively enough to support learning activities or assessment in lessons.

The work in boys' books over the past year does not match well with their enthusiasm and oral participation in lessons, being generally a poor presentation of what they have learned, not well set out and often untidy. It also shows reluctance to complete written tasks and poor handwriting skills. Occasionally homework is completed with care, for example PSHE posters. Teachers' marking of the boys' work does not always reflect the school's policy. Not all work is marked regularly enough and comments are not always sufficiently helpful to know what could be improved. Teachers assess pupils' attainment at the end of each unit of work and two sets of formal assessment have taken place to judge attainment against National Curriculum levels. This is beginning to show how much progress the boys have made this year and a more detailed tracking system is being established.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory. Most boys did not know each other before this academic year and, for many, this is their first experience of education and boarding within an Islamic ethos. The way that they have settled in their new school and the boarding provision, particularly their relationships with one another and with staff, is particularly impressive. Their attendance is good and the boys are confident learners, taking their studies very seriously and knowing that it is important to do well in school, although their written work is not of a high enough standard. They are keen to learn and to participate in the life of the school but opportunities for the boys to show responsibility and independence are currently limited. They have jobs to do in the boarding house but few opportunities in school or in boarding to take initiative, organise their own time or to develop their individual talents or character. For this reason, their behaviour is satisfactory rather than good, although they do show maturity, politeness and consideration to others.

Through their religious studies, the boys have developed a clear understanding of right and wrong, and respect for their own cultural values in tandem with those of others. Similarly, PSHE equips them with an understanding of how to stay safe, how to be good citizens and how British public services and institutions work. But opportunities to explore these, to learn from others within the wider community and to make their contribution to a cohesive community are not well developed.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

This aspect of the school's work is inadequate because some of the required training and employment checks for safeguarding pupils have not been undertaken. The designated persons for child protection have not undertaken the required advanced level of training. Not all regular visitors to the school have the required check from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and there are not sufficient or suitably detailed written references for all staff. In addition, there are some national minimum standards for boarding that are not met in relation to making suitably robust arrangements to address pupils' health care needs. In general, although the school has the range of required policies for education and care, staff do not apply agreed procedures consistently, and systems to ensure the effectiveness of procedures are not robust or consistent enough, for example, the record of behaviour incidents and the administration of medication. Policies and documents for both education and boarding tend to be statements of future intent rather than an accurate account of what happens in current practice. A suitable plan meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

In their pre-inspection questionnaires and in discussions with inspectors, the boys indicate that there are a range of staff that they can go to with any concerns. In general they are positive about their school. They are not always happy that enough is done about their concerns or that their views are taken seriously. Inspectors agree that staff and pupils do not spend sufficient time exploring these. As a result, their respective points of view are not sufficiently shared or understood, for example in relation to the purpose of homework and whether promises made regarding free time, the range of evening activities and the availability of resources have been honoured quickly enough. With regard to the concerns raised by pupils, inspectors agree that the way that the boys help to keep the boarding house clean and tidy, how they can feel more comfortable when unwell and improvements to the quality of meals are not given sufficient consideration. Arrangements for serving food transported from the boarding house for lunch are not robust enough to ensure that it remains at a suitable temperature. Boys are otherwise encouraged to eat healthily and take regular exercise.

The boys are supervised effectively and the strict behaviour code encourages good order and discipline. Opportunities for self-discipline and independence are limited. Complaints from the boys about the games, programmes and websites that are barred on computers are unfounded, as good systems exist to ensure a high level of internet safety in relation to the boys' ages and the school's responsibilities in the absence of their families.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school checks the suitability of the proprietor, staff and volunteers to work with children, except that references are not suitably detailed or verified in every case. A

single central register of the checks made on staff is in place but there is no evidence that a regular visitor to the school has a CRB check.

School's premises and accommodation

The school accommodation comprises four floors of a modern building, previously an office block, on a busy main road. The classrooms and administrative areas are well maintained and of a good size to support learning effectively. There are specialist, well-equipped rooms for teaching science and ICT. Space for the boys to play outside is limited to a small paved area but this is suitably supplemented by two large rooms for play and relaxation indoors at breaktimes. All physical education takes place at a local leisure centre. The boarding accommodation is within the Turkish Islamic Cultural Centre and further details can be found below in the section for boarding. After the boys have gone to the boarding accommodation, the school is used by a supplementary school that helps pupils with their school work as well as delivering cultural and religious studies.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The prospectus, together with information on the website, provides prospective pupils and their families with all of the required information. The parents' and boarders' handbooks give additional information, although some of this refers to future plans rather than opportunities and resources available at the current time. There have been two reports to the boys' families this year and another is planned for the end of this term. Comments in the reports are brief but cover all subjects and details of attainment and attendance.

Procedures for handling complaints

A suitable policy for complaints is in place and no complaints have been received by the school since its opening.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The quality of boarding is satisfactory. Boarding is a new undertaking for the leadership and management team, who are keen to take the next step to advance the quality of the boarding provision. The school meets the majority of the key national minimum standards. There are some areas, however, where the standards are not met, reflecting a shortfall in effective management oversight and monitoring. The school is, however, accepting of the deficiencies and of the improvements needed.

All pupils attending the school are boarders. There is one boarding house accommodating a maximum of 74 pupils. The boarding house is decorated and furnished to an acceptable standard. The level of cleanliness is good. Adequate storage for clothing and other personal belongings is available for pupils'

possessions. The boys sleep in dormitories of between 6 and 18 beds. This provides satisfactory sleeping accommodation, although this inevitably reduces their level of privacy.

There is an appropriate policy on safeguarding to protect pupils, and care staff have completed the required training in child protection. However, as indicated earlier in this report, the designated persons have still to undertake appropriate training. Care staff know what to do in the event of an allegation or suspicion of abuse, and links with local authorities make sure staff know who to contact and help to protect pupils. However, the recruitment system is not robust; not all staff have the required references.

The maintenance of adequate discipline helps to promote pupils' welfare and development, and their respect for one another. Bullying is rare. There are, however, inconsistencies in the recording of sanctions. Sometimes details are limited and sometimes comments are written in Turkish but in English on other occasions. Not all sanctions are appropriate, as, for example, when delaying a pupil going home at the end of the week and pupils' perception of using writing a report to accompany an incident form as a means of control. As a result, pupils expressed justifiable concerns that there is some unfairness.

Suitable health and safety policies and practice help to safeguard pupils but there are some weaknesses. The PSHE programme increases pupils' knowledge and understanding of important issues related to their general well-being, such as drug awareness. Links between care staff and education staff assist the sharing of information about welfare issues to promote pupils' general well-being. However, the clarity and detail of recorded information about pupils' medication, health care and welfare are inconsistent. Incident, accident and medication forms are not completed in a uniform manner. There are no written individual welfare plans for those pupils who need them. In addition, there are variations as to where notes of welfare information and communication with parents and carers are recorded, for example in individual dairies, desk calendars, in varying forms and in different languages. The inconsistency in the practice of recording means that it is difficult to gain an overview of the extent to which a pupil's needs are being met. It also prevents leaders from monitoring practice in the boarding house effectively. While some staff lack previous boarding experience and speak English as an additional language the boys' needs are adequately met.

A pupils' committee and ease of contact with a range of people encourage pupils to express their views although such views are not sufficiently taken into account by staff. In the pupils' survey, some indicated justifiable concerns that they do not always feel listened to; for example, in relation to the quality of food or aspects of the daily routine. Access to an independent person and a counsellor provides a further means of listening to pupils and safeguarding their welfare.

Food is at least satisfactory in quality.

A range of enjoyable evening and weekend activities provides boys with choice as to how they spend their leisure time. A variety of common areas allow for quiet activities as well as more active pursuits, such as table football and power hockey.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Boys are integrated well into the boarding provision as well as the broader school community. Inclusive practice supports the care provided. Daily routines and activities demonstrate the importance of pupils' culture and lifestyles. It creates their self-worth and confidence and generally meets their needs. However, links to the wider community outside school and opportunities to make a contribution to a cohesive community are not well developed.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.⁴

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- provide careers guidance (paragraph 1(2)(g)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- provide an enhanced level of training for the designated persons for child protection (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, ensure that each person has two references that are suitably detailed and verified (paragraph 4(2)(a))
- ensure that the single central register confirms that regular visitors to the school have had an enhanced check from the CRB (paragraphs 4C(4 and 5)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- make appropriate and regular checks to ensure that food is served at the correct temperatures (paragraph 5(m)).

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

In order to meet the national minimum standards for boarding schools and associated regulations, the school must:

- ensure there is appropriate safeguarding training for all staff (breach of national minimum standard 3.5)
- make sure that there are robust systems in place to address the health and care needs of pupils (breach of national minimum standard 17.2)
- eliminate the inconsistencies in practice by ensuring that risk assessments, major punishments, complaints and sanctions are regularly monitored by leadership (breach of national minimum standard 23.2)
- ensure that action is taken in relation to any concentration or trend in recorded punishments, offences, complaints or accidents (breach of national minimum standard 23.4)
- ensure that the school's system for recruiting staff includes all the required checks and references (breach of national minimum standard 38.2).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Revise policies and procedures for education and care to ensure that they reflect current practice.
- Establish a monitoring system for education and care within the senior team to assess the effectiveness of policies and procedures.
- Enlist the support of external professionals to help moderate judgements about the quality of the provision.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education			✓	
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils			✓	
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs			✓	
How well pupils make progress in their learning			✓	

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development			✓	
The behaviour of pupils			✓	

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils				✓
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The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision			✓	
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School details

Name of school	Marathon Science School		
DCSF number	209/6409		
Unique reference number (URN)	135901		
Type of school	Secondary boys boarding school within an Islamic tradition		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	7 September 2009		
Age range of pupils	10–16 years		
Gender of pupils	Male		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 40	Girls: 0	Total: 40
Number of boarders	Boys: 40	Girls: 0	Total: 40
Annual fees (boarders)	£8,500		
Address of school	Marathon House 1–9 Evelyn Street Surrey Quays Lewisham London SE8 5RQ		
Telephone number	020 7231 3232		
Fax number	020 7252 3680		
Email address	info@marathonschool.com		
Headteacher	Mr Uzeyir Onur		
Proprietor	Seven Hills Educational Trust		
Reporting inspector	Heather Yaxley HMI		
Dates of inspection	15–16 June 2010		