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Bruern Abbey School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Michael Williams
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Date of last inspection	14 May 2003

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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 school was founded by its Principal in 1989 and moved to its present site in 1999. The current headteacher took up post in 2002. The school's current handbook for parents and pupils introduces the school as 'an independent day and boarding school for boys aged 7-13 who experience dyslexia, or other form of specific learning difficulties. It is the only preparatory school in the country to have as its main purpose the preparation of boys with specific learning difficulties for Common Entrance and other entrance examinations to mainstream independent senior schools.' From a school roll of 32 in 2002, the numbers on roll at the time of this inspection were 79 pupils between the ages of eight and 13, putting the school at full capacity. Of these 79 pupils, 63 were weekly boarders and four were flexi boarders.

Summary

While the school's overall quality rating is good, aspects of the school are outstanding. This was an announced, full inspection of all the key national minimum standards (NMS) for boarding schools, conducted by a social care and boarding school inspector. The key findings from this inspection are that in relation to the five Every Child Matters outcomes for children, three are good and the other two are outstanding and satisfactory. In addition, the organisation outcome is good and within it the promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The 29 boarders' parents comments received for this inspection overwhelmingly focused on what they consider the school does well when looking after pupils who board, rather than what they think the school needs to improve when looking after them. The following is a representative sample of their comments: 'The school has an incredibly warm and compassionate approach to all the boys'; 'A success from the beginning, the environment is nurturing, secure, safe and above all fun'; and 'Pastoral care is exceptional - very understanding and caring staff.'

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last full inspection of boarding at the school was carried out by the National Care Standards Commission in May 2003. It inspected all 52 NMS for boarding schools and reported 33 recommendations. A follow up visit took place in October 2003, which found that not all the recommendations had been acted upon. In response to this, the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) conducted a further follow up visit in March 2005, where improvements to the recruitment systems were noted and no arrangement for further follow up was required.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders' health is promoted through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) they receive through the school's curriculum. The 2005 Independent Schools Council inspection of the school reported that, 'Through PSHE and tutorial sessions, boys are encouraged to discuss their feelings about issues which concern them. Sex education is included in the syllabus for the senior school.'

Boarders receive first aid and health care as necessary. The majority of the 59 boarders surveyed for this inspection said that someone 'Always' helps them if they are unwell. This help primarily

comes from the school's long-standing resident matron and relatively new assistant matron. A number of parents commented very positively about the matron: that she is a 'tower of strength', 'the lynch pin for my son', and about her 'caring touch when [boarders are] upset or ill'. The matrons and a number of the school's staff have up-to-date emergency aid and other relevant training. The school has effective arrangements to address boarders' physical and mental health needs. However, the inspectors fed-back that a few aspects of the school's handling of medicines are not in line with the latest guidance on this from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society.

Boarders receive excellent quality catering provision. 'Usually', followed by 'Sometimes' and 'Always', were the top answers from boarders to their survey question about whether the meals at the school provide them with a balanced diet. One parent commented: 'I am sure you will get many rave reports about the food - excellent', and another that: 'The food at the school is so fantastic that the parents are eager to join the boys on 'formal' [dinner] nights' during the week. The school last had a local council food hygiene inspection in February 2009. However, most of the kitchen staff have not refreshed their food hygiene training at the frequency recommended.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders are protected from bullying. The majority of the boarders answered 'No' to their survey question 'Are you being bullied?' No one answered 'Yes - a lot', and out of those who answered 'Yes - sometimes', who the inspectors could identify, only two wanted the matter to be brought to the headteacher's attention. Student council meetings are one of the forums where pupil related issues, including bullying, are discussed.

Boarders are protected from abuse. The school's deputy headteacher is the designated person responsible for child protection. He has recently completed Local Safeguarding Children Board refresher training, and cascaded this to all staff at the school. Following this training, he is now revising the school's child protection policy.

Use of discipline with boarders is fair and appropriate. One boarder's parent commented that the school has 'a consistent policy of discipline which is well balanced and fair.' The housemaster manages behaviour via an effective system of rewards and punishments. Academic and social rewards, or stars, are of equal value and the pupils' different house groups keenly compete to win the prize for the most stars.

Boarders are protected from the risk of fire. A county council fire risk manager carried out an audit of the school's fire safety arrangements in September 2009. He concluded that while the general standards of the school 'were found to be satisfactory… a couple of issues could be improved.' The school is now carrying out work to address these issues. The school immediately took action following the untimely response of some boarders to their most recent fire drill.

Boarders' personal privacy is respected, but would be further respected by the school acting on accommodation and medicine handling recommendations reported that relate to boarders' privacy: for example, the provision of more opaque shower cubicles and increasing the privacy of medicine administration.

There is good vetting of most staff working with boarders since CSCI wrote to the school in 2005 that 'All aspects of the recruitment process were evidenced' with two minor exceptions.

Safer Recruitment in Education came into force in 2007. Further requirements that will apply to the recruitment of staff in boarding schools are imminent. Inspection of the recruitment records of a number of different staff working with boarders showed that the school needs to keep abreast of all of these developments, and implement them, to make their vetting of all staff working with boarders rigorous.

Boarders have their own accommodation that is secure from public intrusion, and they are protected from unsupervised contact with adults, such as external contractors, who have not been subject to the school's recruitment checks. The resident housemaster is in charge of security and the school follows a safe procedure for visitors.

Boarders are protected from safety hazards. The school has contracted a health and safety consultancy to identify any fire and health and safety issues and to carry out risk assessments relating to them. The school is now carrying out work to address the issues this consultancy identified during their September 2009 site visit.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders receive excellent personal support from staff. In their surveys, the majority of the boarders replied that if they had a problem at the school they would go to 'A teacher' for help, who would usually be their personal tutor or a teacher doing boarding duties. The personal support the boarders receive inter-links with the additional support the school provides for boys with special educational and social skills needs, which sometimes leads to them receiving support from external professionals.

Boarders do not experience discrimination. The school is primarily focused on giving boys who have previously not had their specific learning difficulties or special educational needs acknowledged or addressed, the individualised teaching and care that they need to develop their self-esteem and to help them recognise their potential. One parent commented that 'There is a good natured atmosphere of tolerance and inclusion.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school. For example, boarders' views are secured through formal opportunities such as personal tutorials and the student council. The former are individually documented and monitored, and the latter is made up of democratically elected members. Boarders' views have led to changes in boarding practice.

Boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families. As a weekly boarding school, four nights is the maximum length of time that boarders are away from home. However, during this time they maintain contact with their parents, for example through them joining formal dinners and coming to take them out, and through telephone contact at permitted times. Staff contact parents about any significant welfare concerns relating to their child, and the Principal commended the extent to which the headteacher makes himself available by telephone to parents.

There is a good process of induction and guidance for new boarders. New boarders spoke well of the experienced boarders allocated to 'shadow' them, and at the time of this inspection,

boarding dormitories were arranged so that each had a senior boarder as a 'captain' helping new boys to settle in. Resident boarding staff are very aware of homesickness, which is recorded and addressed.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders' possessions and money are protected, although some parents commented that boarders' organisation of their personal possessions, including clothing, could be better.

Boarders are provided with satisfactory boarding and sleeping accommodation and toilet and washing provision. At the time of this inspection, the school was in the process of making improvements to this accommodation and provision, as a result of issues previously identified by the school and their health and safety consultants. However, the inspectors identified some additional issues that they fed-back to the school, in order to further improve the standard of boarding accommodation and provision.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A suitable statement of the school's boarding principles and practice is available to parents, boarders and staff. The school has a current parent/pupil handbook and staff handbook, both of which refer to the school's mission statement. The school does not have separate statements for its boarding and teaching practice because the two are inter-linked, or operate 'organically' as the deputy head described, rather than being clearly delineated. One parent commented that this 'style' currently works for the school, and that more 'formalisation of the procedures would make sense and be correct' only if the school were to grow in size.

The school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare. At the time of this inspection, boarding was generally organised so that a number of new boarders could be helped by a senior boarder in their dormitory. This changes later in the academic year, when the former have settled in and the latter need to concentrate on their studies.

School record keeping contributes to boarders' welfare. Records of risk assessments and accidents are maintained and are monitored by the headteacher. Recently the school has not had any complaints or major punishments to record and monitor.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding, because of what has previously been reported about the school's focus on equal opportunities for boys who experience forms of specific learning difficulties.

Boarders are well supervised by staff. Every Monday to Thursday evening a staff duty rota operates, made up of the five members of the boarding house staff team and teachers doing an evening duty. When necessary, this is supplemented further by staff living on site.

Boarders are looked after by staff with specific boarding duties, good induction and continued training. The different members of the boarding house staff team have current job descriptions. The assistant matron is the newest member of the team and shadowed the matron when newly appointed. All members of this team have recently received training in child protection, fire awareness and emergency aid.

Boarders are looked after by staff following clear boarding policies and practice. However, given the organic nature of this small school, staff guidance on boarding practice is in the overall staff handbook, that includes 'day to day instructions for [all] staff' and 'whole-school policy documents'.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- review the school's handling of medicines in social care against the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's latest guidance on this (NMS 15)
- refresh the food hygiene training of the kitchen staff (NMS 24)
- implement the most recent guidance on staff recruitment checks and records for all staff working with boarders (NMS 38)
- review the list of accommodation maintenance issues identified by the inspectors and act on them if practicable to do so. (NMS 40)