

Old Buckenham Hall School

Inspection report for Boarding School

Unique reference number	SC024587
Inspection date	27/01/2010
Inspector	Clive Lucas / Helen Norry
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	28/01/2009

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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 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

Old Buckenham Hall School is an independent boarding school for children up to the age of 13 years. The school is located in a quiet and rural part of Suffolk, on the outskirts of a local village. The school stands in its own estate, extending to 75 acres. There are few local amenities.

The family homes of most pupils are in the eastern counties, although there are a small number of children from abroad. Whilst the school does accept weekly boarders the children are strongly encouraged to board fully in their last two years. There is a pre-prep department and a nursery that were not part of this full welfare inspection.

Within the grounds, to which pupils have ready access during daylight hours, there are woods, fields, sports facilities (including cricket, football, rugby and hockey pitches), an adventure playground, rope swings, clay pigeon shooting area, tennis courts and cricket nets. The children can play squash, netball and golf on the premises. There is a heated outdoor swimming pool and a floodlit hard-covered area. There are three ponds on the site. Boarders may bring small pets, which are accommodated in a pet shed known as The Ark. Riding and sailing are undertaken off the premises. Older pupils can take part in outdoor pursuits.

Boys sleep in the main house in multi-bedded dormitories on the 1st and 2nd floors. Girls are accommodated in separate premises in the west building with its own washing and toilet facilities. The dining room and library are in the main building.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This inspection took place at short notice and looked at all of the key national minimum standards. There have been significant improvements since the previous inspection and the school now provides a good level of care for its boarders. Outcome groups for being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; positive contribution; economic wellbeing and organisation are all judged as good. The promotion of equality and diversity in the school is also good. Boarders are happy in the school and make numerous positive comments about boarding. Staff provide a caring and supportive environment for boarders.

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous inspection made recommendations relating to policies; punishments; welfare plans; medication; recruitment and fire procedures.

Policies have been reviewed so that there are now an appropriate range of policies to support staff in looking after boarders. In particular the safeguarding policy now covers all of the necessary areas and provides suitable information for staff.

Punishments are recorded and monitored so that only appropriate punishments are used. There are records of individual boarders' health and welfare needs, which help to inform relevant welfare plans for those boarders with welfare needs. These help to ensure that such needs are known to the necessary staff and that they can be met. Boarders who self administer asthma medicines are assessed to make sure that they can manage this safely and keep the medicines securely.

Recruitment processes are much improved and now provide an important safeguard for children at the school. Similarly, good fire safety practices ensure that staff and children know what to do in the event of a fire, and this adds to their safety.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The school has appropriate policies in place to promote boarders' health. These include a new policy on substance misuse, of which staff have been made aware. Personal, social and health education is provided for all pupils. The content of this differs for different the ages of pupils. Overall it includes subjects such as personal identity; different customs; harmful substances and personal safety. The health needs of boarders are promoted well by the school. A registered nurse is employed in the school and a general practitioner visits the school regularly. The nurse provides advice and support to other staff, for example by providing protocols on medication for staff to use when on trips. She also assesses and monitors how capable boarders are of using asthma inhalers. This helps to make sure that boarders have the medication they need and that it is administered properly. There is an option for female boarders to see a female general practitioner if they wish. There are clear records kept in relation to individual boarders' health and welfare needs, including the action taken by the school to support the boarders. These records and the process of recording and using them help to ensure that boarders receive the support that they need when they need it.

The meals provided for boarders are nutritious and well prepared. Boarders say that they like the food, that they get enough to eat and that there is always a choice. They particularly like breakfasts. There is a choice of meals, including a vegetarian and a salad option. Fresh fruit is also available. There is a food committee for boarders to express their views on planned menus. They say that this works in practice and can give examples of meals that they did not like and which are no longer prepared. Overall catering is well managed in the school.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders are protected from bullying and abuse. There are anti bullying and safeguarding policies in place which parents are made aware of. Children know what to do if they are being bullied, or if they witness any bullying. Concerns about bullying are followed through thoroughly and recorded. Staff are very aware of issues of safeguarding and how they should respond to them. All staff have a laminated pocket guide with a summary of how they should respond to safeguarding concerns; this is a useful and easily accessible reminder for staff. The safeguarding policy and bullying policies work in practice. Boarders know how to make a complaint and how to express concerns or worries informally. There is a complaints procedures and appropriate records are kept of complaints that have been made and what action has been taken in response to them. Boarders are all well aware of the Happiness Charter, which gives them information on complaints and is appropriate for their age. They say that they can talk to staff and also that they can use the worry box. This is a box in the library where boarders can write and post any worries they have. It is monitored regularly by one of the matrons. Boarders say that they are happy at the school. The effort that is put into listening to boarders' concerns and responding to them is important in achieving this happiness.

There is appropriate use of discipline in the school and boarders are very well behaved. Boarders say that rules are fair. A previous system of using gold and blue marks to recognise good and poor behaviour has been reviewed as children felt that it did not work. Taking account of children's views and amending the behaviour management system to make it more acceptable and effective has been a positive change. It shows a commitment to listen to children and to achieve good outcomes. The head keeps appropriate records of sanctions, which are regularly monitored.

There are robust fire safety procedures in place so that all boarders are protected from the risk of fire as much as is possible. These include testing of equipment and evacuation drills. Boarders know what to do in the event of a fire, particularly the dormitory captains who take on areas of responsibility for evacuation of dormitories during the night. There is good use of risk assessments to help reduce identified risks to boarders. A pastoral care document provides guidance for staff who work in boarding. This states that while boarding teaches communal living, it should not compromise boarders' right to a good degree of privacy. Staff work in a way that is consistent with this. They balance the need for supervision with the need for privacy, especially at sensitive times such as when children are getting changed and when they are bathing or showering.

Staff who are recruited to the school undergo a rigorous selection process including checks to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are undertaken for internal appointments when the new job allows more access to children than the previous one, but on one occasion a member of staff started a new role before the outcome of the check had been returned. Overall the recruitment process provides a good level of protection for children, but

not ensuring that internal applicants' checks are returned before they take up a new post does limit this to some degree. There is good monitoring and supervision of visitors to the school, particularly when this has the potential to impact on boarding accommodation. This helps to protect boarders from unsupervised contact with adults who have not undergone a CRB check and may potentially pose a risk to children.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Boarders say that there are staff who they can approach for personal guidance or with a personal problem. There is a wide range of options for boarders who want or need to talk to an adult. They include their tutors, matrons, other boarding staff and an independent listener. The independent listener is a local vicar whose telephone number is easily available for children. Boarders know who this person is and how to contact her. In addition to this there are some year 8 pupils who are identified for other children to talk to if they have a problem. They are known as peer listeners and get training to help them know what to do. There is no evident discrimination of individual pupils or groups of pupils in the school, for example there is no discernable difference in the way boys and girls are treated. Differences in the treatment of boarders of different ages is appropriate to their needs and abilities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are comprehensive processes to allow boarders to contribute to the operation of the school. These include a school council, food committee, regular surveys for boarders and suggestion books. The views of boarders are taken seriously and both boarders and staff give examples of changes that have arisen following consultation. Boarders say that they are listened to and that 'we get our say'. This all shows a commitment to listening to boarders. Boarders keep in contact with their families by telephone, letters and emails. Parents can visit their children at the school at set times including on children's birthdays. Contact between parents and children is private. Boarders say that they can use the telephone in private and they seal and open their own letters. When children begin to board, they are introduced to the school's procedures and helped to settle in. They are given an existing boarder as a guide to help them, and staff monitor how well individuals are settling in. This support is important at what can be a stressful time for children. Boarders describe good relationships with staff. They speak of being looked after and being happy at the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders and staff are all well aware of the system for keeping possessions safe and the clear expectations of privacy that are associated with this. This system works in practice so that boarders' possessions and money are protected. There is a good standard of accommodation including sleeping, bathing and washing facilities. Boarders are encouraged to bring in possessions, such as teddy bears and photographs that will help them feel at home. They can personalise their sleeping areas if they wish to. Boarding areas are clean, tidy, well decorated and furnished. The building does have some impact on the way accommodation can be used, but this is well managed. Staff accommodation is separated from boarders' sleeping accommodation. Boarders say that toilet and washing facilities are suitably private. Overall the accommodation for boarders is good and contributes to their happiness at the school. The school does not place children in lodgings.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

There is a suitable statement of boarding principals and practice which covers the information set out in the national minimum standards. There are procedures in place to ensure that key aspects of the school's functioning are monitored by the head and by governors. Furthermore, external consultation is used to assess the operation of the school. This all provides an important quality assurance system to help ensure that children are well looked after. There are no significant discrepancies in the quality of boarding accommodation for boarders of different ages or gender. Boarding accommodation is separated for boys and girls. Dormitories are arranged by age, with an older boarder as a captain in each dormitory. The dormitory captains are given guidance and support to help them undertake their role.

There is active monitoring of risk assessments, major punishments, complaints and accidents. This helps to ensure that boarders' welfare is promoted. There are enough staff working during boarding times to provide a suitable level of supervision of children. Boarders are clear that there are sufficient staff and that they can find a member of staff when they need to. Staff who look after children during boarding times are provided with clear, up-to-date written guidance through the pastoral care document and boarding policies. Staff say that training is good and that it has improved. All staff, including GAP students, are given training in safeguarding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school identifies children's individual needs such as those relating to health, culture and identity. It is good at meeting these needs.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that recruitment of all staff who work with boarders includes checks through the Criminal Records Bureau with a satisfactory outcome. (NMS 38.1)