

The logo for Wycliffe Preparatory School consists of two horizontal bars, one above the other, with a small gap between them.

Wycliffe Preparatory School

Inspection report for Boarding School

Unique reference number	SC034377
Inspection date	08/03/2010
Inspector	Barbara Davies
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	10/08/2006

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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

This is a co-educational, day and boarding preparatory school catering for children aged eight to 13 years. Boarding provision is available for about 70 pupils on a full, weekly and flexi basis. There are two boarding houses, one offering accommodation for boys and the other for girls. A programme of out-of-school activities is planned during the evenings and some week-ends. In boarding houses, boarders have access to recreational facilities including internet access, television and DVD players. School facilities provide other resources for boarders to use, such as a swimming pool and tennis courts.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This inspection was conducted jointly with the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and the school was given advance notice that the inspection was going to happen. Leadership and management of boarding is outstanding in some areas. There is a strong ethos of continuous improvement within boarding and the whole school environment. There is good identification of matters requiring attention, for example, the necessity to improve the standard of boarding accommodation. Robust development plans are implemented to address these. Views of boarders and of parents are canvassed and used as basis for further development of boarding. An excellent service is provided to attend to boarders' health needs and meals are of a high standard. A good range of activities are provided, with boarders also having the opportunity for free time. Boarders are protected from most risks whilst at school, but the school's new recruitment procedures need to be consolidated and consistently applied.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the previous inspection a refurbishment programme has commenced to improve the standard of accommodation and furnishings in both boarding houses. Further work is planned with the aim of improving and extending facilities for boarders. The telephone in the girls' boarding house has been moved to a more private location, but the position of phones in both houses is still not ideal or sufficiently private. Action has been taken to make the showers in the boys' boarding house private but still do not provide boarders with sufficient privacy. There have been changes in the way that responsibility for conducting recruitment checks on staff is delegated. New systems have been introduced for ensuring all the required checks are completed. The implementation of these processes have yet to be fully consolidated. New documentation has been introduced to inform children about the way the school is run. Children find this helpful but there is no information included

to advise them how they can make complaints. Additional staffing resources have been provided to boarding houses and additional activities introduced at evenings and week-ends. An action was made at the previous inspection for staff to receive training in physical restraint in case it is ever necessary. This has not been provided due to difficulty in locating a trainer.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There is excellent provision to attend to boarders health needs. The school devotes dedicated time each week to delivering it's Personal Social and Health Education (PHSE) programme. The programme covers topical issues and raises children's awareness to issues such as alcohol and drug misuse and anti-bullying. Children are helped to develop an awareness of other cultures by fund-raising and supporting overseas charities as well as those in the local area. Smoking, alcohol and substance abuse are not an issue in the school but the school has a planned response should incidents occur and a serious view, including disciplinary action, would be taken.

The school has a medical centre and employs qualified nurses who hold current nursing registration.

Information obtained from parents as boarders are admitted to the school informs the planning of health services and makes sure that the position is clear regarding medical consent. The school nurses compile welfare plans for children who have health issues and these inform staff how to care for them. A similar document, known as a SHORT, is compiled for children who require educational support. These documents are shared with boarding staff who are able to adapt the identified strategies for use in the boarding house. The use of regular electronic communication between boarding houses, nurses and teaching staff makes sure everyone is kept informed about children's ongoing health needs. Procedures for the administering and recording of medication are robust and again ensures that, on a need to know basis, people have access to up to date information.

Boarders are well-looked after when they are ill but interpret staff hesitance to give homely remedies on request, such as paracetamol, as a sign of not caring. This practice is however consistent with the school's written policy to avoid giving unnecessary medication. Homely remedies are given after should the problem persist and after consultation with the school nurses.

With the exception of catering staff, who are employed by an external catering company, most of the school's staff receive training in first aid. This ensures that children have prompt access to first aid in an emergency. First aids boxes are located in communal areas in the boys' boarding house. While this gives prompt access to children and staff, items may be used without being noticed.

Meals served to children are of a high standard, offer good variety and are nutritionally well-balanced. However, the majority of boarders only rate the meals as

satisfactory and some parents raise some concerns about the quantity for older children. The school has responded to the latter point by introducing a system for older pupils to have access to additional portions. The cook has expressed the intention to establish a food committee to discuss menu options with children. Mealtimes are well-organised and take place in a modern dining hall which is spacious, light and airy. There are kitchen facilities in both boarding houses and these give boarders the ability to make their own snacks and drinks.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school's practice excels in many aspects of this outcome area. There are comprehensive policies and procedures aimed at keeping boarders safe. These are widely publicised in school documentation given to parents and boarders. The inclusion of key policies such as complaints, child protection and anti-bullying on the school's intranet site makes the information readily accessible to staff. Some policies are also available to parents on the school's web-site.

A small percentage of pupils said they are bullied or do not know if they are bullied. The PHSE programme informs children about the actions that would constitute bullying and of the strategies for dealing with incidents that occur. Boarders are encouraged to approach staff for help if concerned about bullying. Staff are well-informed about anti-bullying techniques and good communication between staff enables effective management of concerns raised. Decisive action is taken should children persistently bully others. The school is responsive to new trends such as cyber-bullying and ensure that staff know how to protect against such matters.

The school's safeguarding procedures have recently been updated and are consistent with the procedures of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Child protection receives high priority in the school and the school's practice in this area is a particular strength. Key members of the school staff attend external multi-agency training to make sure their practice is up to date. All other school staff, including gap students, receive regular briefings in the school's safeguarding procedures. This informs them of the reporting procedures to follow in the event of being concerned about the safety and welfare of a child. All staff know who the school's designated safeguarding officer is and are aware of the whistle-blowing procedure.

Separate reward and sanctions systems operate in the school and the boarding house. Boarders have a clear understanding of how the systems operate in both situations. In the boarding house sanctions are only given after boarders have been given several warnings and the opportunity to correct their behaviour. There is a system for recording sanctions administered so that it is possible to monitor the behaviour of individual children. Relatively few sanctions are given and all are relevant to the misdemeanour concerned. An action was made at the previous inspection for staff to receive training in physical restraint in case it is ever necessary. This has not been provided due to difficulty in locating a trainer.

The school has a robust system for managing most matters of risk. A comprehensive and thorough risk assessment process is in place in relation to the school grounds, fire and all activities in which boarders participate. Fire alarms are tested regularly to make sure they are in good working order and fire drills take place regularly to make sure children know what to do in the event of a fire. It was noted that dormitory doors in the boys' house are kept open at night. The doors are linked to the fire alarm system and close automatically in the event of a fire. However, it is not evident within the premises risk assessment whether this arrangement has the approval of the local fire officer. It is also practice for dormitory doors to be left open for staff to easily supervise children. This could compromise their privacy when getting changed.

Staff personnel records inspected contained the majority of the information required. Since the last inspection one member of staff was found to commence work prior to completion of the checks with the Criminal Records Bureau but a new system has subsequently been introduced to ensure that staff do not commence employment prior to all checks being completed. Minor shortfalls exist for the most recent staff recruited. Some of the curriculum vitae submitted in support of applications do not always specify the precise dates of employment and only refer to years, and files held on gap students do not contain the same range of information as is held on permanent staff, such as the record of interview.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

A programme of planned activities is in place during the week and younger boarders enjoy the additional activities that have recently been provided for them. Trips away are planned during some week-ends and these are popular. Views amongst children and parents differ about the number and range of activities offered. Some parents and children would like there to be an activity each week-end while some boarders report it is sometimes nice to do nothing. Including some free activities, such as a walk, is another suggestion made by parents. The current programme provides an effective balance between organised and free time.

There are extensive support networks for all boarders within the school. Boarders all report having someone they can turn to if worried or upset. The school nurses are central to this role and are often used for advice, guidance and support. There is excellent identification of boarders with educational needs and individualised support provided to meet their needs. Any boarders who are struggling, including overseas students, are quickly identified and supported.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent systems in place for consulting with boarders and their parents about boarding provision. An 'open door policy' gives boarders direct access to discuss matters directly with the headmaster. The school council, which meets each

term, offers all pupils the opportunity to influence the school's practice. The catering manager attends some meetings to receive pupil's feedback on meals. The first meeting of a food committee took place during the inspection but this is not established practice. Boarders have their own meeting each term with the headmaster during which they can raise issues specifically to do with boarding. It is up to boarders to determine the frequency of meetings and make a request to the headmaster for a meeting to take place. Some boarders said they would like meetings to take place more regularly and for adults to take more of a lead in arranging them as some house representatives are not proactive in doing so.

Parent representatives meet with the head teacher each term. An open agenda allows items for discussion to be presented by all parties. Parents value the opportunity to contribute to the school's development and say their requests are given careful consideration and sometimes implemented, for example, the provision of computers in boarding houses. Housemistresses of boarding houses do not currently attend the meetings and parents say this may facilitate a valuable exchange of information and further improve practice.

The provision of telephones in boarding houses allows boarders to maintain regular contact with their parents, family and friends. The facilities in each boarding house are not ideal. The location of the phone in the boys' boarding house does not provide sufficient privacy. The school is aware of this issue and plans to address it with the planned development programme. Children can take their own mobile phones to school and have access to electronic communication in the boarding houses. This enables them to independently maintain contact with family and friends.

Children are helped to settle into the school. They are given information to help familiarise them with the school's routines and expectations and a buddy system is sometimes used to help children find their way around school. Routines and expectations are displayed in boarding houses for children to refer to and this is helpful.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Overall the standard of boarding provision is good. There are however some differences between the age and quality of provision between the boys' and the girls' boarding houses. Overall the boys' boarding house offers more communal areas for boarders to use. Recent refurbishment of the ground floor area of the boys' boarding house to provide kitchen facilities has improved the standard of accommodation in this house. However the showers in the basement do not afford sufficient privacy and windows in dormitories are reported to be a constant source of nuisance to boarders and staff. Efforts have been made to provide the same high quality standard of furnishings in both the boys' and girls' houses. However dormitories in the girls' house are small and lack space for storage such as wardrobes. The school aims to address all these matters during a planned refurbishment of boarding provision during the summer of 2010.

Although boarders have been provided with secure provision in which to store their possessions, the lockable drawers have been transferred to other units as children move dormitories. Consequently it is no longer possible for children to lock their possessions away if they want to.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Equality and diversity at the school is outstanding. The school is proactive and ensures overseas pupils are integrated into the school community. Particular attention is paid to ensuring that boarders with particular health, behaviour and educational needs receive the support they need.

The school publishes information on their boarding principles and practice and makes sure that parents and children receive copies of these.

The school has clear leadership and a management structure and staff with designated responsibility for boarding are clearly identified. The boarding team are experienced and qualified for their posts. Boarding houses are well-organised with sufficient numbers of staff on duty both day and night. Boarders confirm that they are able to contact staff at night if needed and always know who is on duty. Duty rosters are displayed in boarding houses for boarders to refer to. The boarding houses have clear rotas and there is an on-call system in place. Supervision of pupils leaving the school site is in line with Department of Children, Schools and Families guidance. Gap students are not left in sole supervision of pupils.

The practice of boarding is closely monitored. Regular meetings between boarding and senior school staff ensures good communication and tracking of issues. It is not however practice for all records, such as those of sanctions, to be monitored and signed by the head or a delegated member of staff. Although there is evidence of concerns raised by parents being responded to in e-mails, a central record is not kept of complaints or concerns raised. It is therefore not possible to identify emerging issues.

All staff members with boarding duties have accurate job descriptions which clearly explain their role and responsibilities. Staff receive annual appraisals which are linked to their training needs and programmes for the coming year. Staff said they are enabled and supported in accessing training. The gap students have attended the 'Boarding Schools Association' training. All of the catering staff at the school are qualified with the National Vocational Qualification at level 3.

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 advice is taken on whether catering staff should receive first aid training, that a complete first aid box is kept securely in boarding houses for access by staff as well as those currently kept in communal areas (national minimum standard 15.1)
- ensure that strategies used in the boarding house for managing children's needs are included in the written documentation compiled by the school (SHORTS) (national minimum standard 17.3)
- ensure that staff recruitment procedures and files for gap students contain every element of checks that are applied to the recruitment of permanent staff and that information, including records of interview. Also ensure that information submitted in curriculum vitae includes precise dates of employment (national minimum standard 38.4)
- ensure that the information is published advising boarders how they can make complaints and ensure that boarders receive a copy of this (breach of national minimum standard 5.2)
- ensure that dormitory doors are closed when boarders are getting changed and ensure that consultation takes place with the local fire officer to discuss whether it safe for dormitory doors to be kept open during the night (breach of national minimum standards 26.1)
- ensure boarders have access to a telephone to contact parents in private at reasonable times (national minimum standard 19.1)
- ensure that the showers for boarders are sufficiently private (national minimum standard 44.1)
- ensure that boarders are provided with lockable storage provision in their dormitories within which they can keep their possessions safe (breach of national minimum standard 20.3)
- ensure a central record of complaints is maintained and monitored by the head teacher or a senior member of the school staff (breach of national minimum standard 5.5).