

Maidwell Hall School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Warren Clarke
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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

This independent preparatory boarding school is set in large grounds in the village of Maidwell. It is easily accessible to the motorway and rail networks. Children attend the school range from seven to 13 years. Currently the school provides for boys only, but plans to admit girls during the next academic year.

There are 95 boarders and two day pupils currently accommodated. A substantial number of boarders contributed to the inspection either via the pre-inspection survey or formal and informal contact during the inspection.

Summary

This announced key inspection assessed performance against all the key National Minimum Standards (NMS) as currently determined by Ofsted and within the Every Child Matters national outcome framework.

Boarding arrangements at the school are well-established. The Headmaster has been in post for over eight years and staff turnover remains exceptionally low. The school promotes inclusion and has established an ethos in which boarders show respect, kindness and consideration for feelings and comfort of others. Apart from its academic reputation, the school provides boarders with a wide range of sports and leisure activities.

The school provides excellent care to which boarders and their parents testify and upon which they place great value. Some deficits have been identified which do not have any immediate impact on boarders' welfare, but nevertheless should be addressed before they become serious issues in terms of boarders' safety and comfort. They include ensuring that the absent window restrictors on upper floors are replaced and the attention needed to address an area of unsound flooring.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations were made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school has excellent arrangements which promote and support boarders' good health. Boarders are taught formally, via the personal health and social education curriculum, the adverse effects of lifestyle choices, such as smoking and substance misuse on health. This is balanced against provision of an extensive range of sports facilities, active free play and facilitation of hobbies and other constructive leisure interests that promote good physical health and overall wellbeing.

The excellent health care resources in place and the sound, well-established practices adopted ensure that any existing health problems with which boarders enter the school are effectively managed. Staff are diligent in the care they take to assemble and update information about

each boarder's health. This information is used successfully in the planning of precise care and treatment for those with conditions such as eczema, asthma and diabetes. This is underpinned by the necessary written authorisation from parents for staff to provide such care and treatment, and clear and efficient arrangements for boarders' access to primary health services such as doctors, dentists and optical care.

Acceptable arrangements are instituted for care of boarders who develop minor illnesses or sustain injuries. All boarding staff, for example, have completed first aid training, and matrons who administer medicines have undergone training to equip them to do so safely. The sound medication policy and procedures are implemented successfully ensuring medicines are safely stored and administered efficiently without error. Should boarders become ill and need to be cared for outside their dormitory, sufficient sick bay provisions are made and there is a clear understanding between the school and parents about a boarder's care should one become seriously ill. It is observed that where medication is given to boarders, this is recorded but in the same place as other routine notes about their health. This constitutes a weakness because to ensure efficient monitoring, audit and safeguard against errors, it is necessary to maintain a dedicated medication administration record.

Boarders are almost unanimous in their satisfaction with the outstanding catering arrangements that the school makes to assure the best quality of food and a varied and nutritious diet. Boarders are able to give comments daily via a comments book in the dining hall, on the quality of the food and whether they are satisfied. These comments together with the contributions of the food committee, on which boarders are represented, ensure that they are actively involved in the weekly menu planning. Such is the care that is taken, all menus have to be approved by a designated house parent and provisions such as meat, vegetables and bread are sourced from reputable suppliers. For example, the supply of bread is commissioned on an exclusive basis in order to comply with the exacting quality standards of the catering department. Boarders appreciate the efforts that the catering staff make and approve of the school's healthy eating initiative. The healthy eating initiative, which attracted a local Golden Heart Award, complements the school's overall strategy for promoting and maintaining boarders' good health.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders feel they are safe in the school; they are keenly aware of what staff do to keep them safe and know how to act to keep themselves and others safe. In implementing the anti-bullying strategy staff have successfully established an ethos in school and among boarders of respect, kindness and due regard for the feelings, comfort and safety of others. Boarders reported no bullying and total confidence that any incidents of this would be effectively addressed. Of significance, many boarders cite the good relationships with, and support of, other boarders as being among the factors that contribute to their high level of satisfaction with the school.

Staff at all levels in the school give safeguarding boarders from abuse and other forms of unfavourable treatment a high priority. The comprehensive safeguarding policy in place, which is informed by national and local good practice guidelines, together with relevant training, sufficiently equip staff with an understanding of the nature and impact of abuse. They are confident in how they are expected to act to prevent abuse and how they are required to respond to any suspicion or allegation in this regard. The effectiveness of the measures taken to prevent abuse is reflected in there being no current issues of abuse or any since the last

inspection. Boarders' comments such as: school never takes any unnecessary risks and protection is perfect, characterised their feelings of safety in school and trust in staff.

The Headmaster and other senior staff who have completed training in safe staff recruitment are aware of the vetting and barring arrangements for adults who are employed or are being considered for employment in the care and education of children. A rigorous system is in place which is used to good effect to ensure that only those, including gap students, ascertained as suitable, after appropriate vetting, are employed in the school. For instance, all staff are subjected to enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks and do not commence work in the school until there is a satisfactory outcome of the checks.

Included in the wide ranging measures that staff take to protect boarders, are security arrangements that effectively deter intruders. These measures do not curtail boarders' freedom but contribute to ensuring visitors' access to the school and to boarders is controlled and supervised. No visitor, for example, can access the buildings without reporting to reception, where their identity and the purpose of their visit are established.

Boarders benefit from the school's clear rationale for promoting good conduct, order and comfort for all in its community. The behaviour management policy, the essence of which is to create circumstances in which there are potent social rewards and reinforcement of desirable behaviour, is successfully practised by staff and yields excellent outcomes in the form of boarders' conduct. For example, throughout the inspection boarders behaved impeccably even in situations in which they were unaware of being observed by staff. Although rewards in the form of merits, and sanctions of demerits are in place, these seem almost superfluous as boarders exhibit a highly developed level of regulation of their own behaviour and conduct themselves well because they believe it right to do so. Staff treat boarders with respect and sensitivity and this is reciprocated in great measure. Gestures like boarders thanking staff for delivering a good lesson and particularly interesting leisure activities were noted. Performance in this area is so accomplished that boarders' behaviour problems are confined to minor misdemeanours dealt with mostly by way of a 'telling off'.

In the event of boarders or parents having concerns about the school, they have access to a clear complaints procedure which conforms to current good practice and is properly promoted. Beyond this, the school has an exemplary quality assurance system in which staff regularly and actively seek boarders' views about the boarding arrangements and involve them appropriately in how the school is run. These measures successfully ensure that where any concern or dissatisfaction emerges it is addressed at an early stage and may account for there being no formal complaints.

A comprehensive range of health and safety measures is a well established feature in the school's excellent strategy to protect boarders from harm. All areas of the school and activities involved in care and education of boarders have been risk-assessed, and where hazards are identified effective measures are taken to remove or control them. All necessary fire precautions are taken and senior staff conduct regular monitoring and reporting of health and safety matters. Staff and boarders alike express confidence in the school's safety and security arrangements which are successful in minimising accidents and ensuring good food safety and general hygiene. It is observed, however, that some of the windows on the upper floors of the boarding accommodation do not have restrictors fitted thus presenting a potential risk of accidents

should a boarder seek exit by this means. Also a wooden floor on the ground floor of one of the buildings is in an unsound state and presents a trip hazard.

Bathrooms and toilets are arranged and equipped to provide boarders privacy appropriate for their age. For example, toilet doors are fitted with appropriate locks as are bath and showers which are adequately screened. It is evident that staff supervise the boarders, which boarders say is reassuring. This supervision whilst evident is nonetheless performed discreetly. Some boarders offering a view say that living in a boarding school community means that you do not always get as much privacy as at home, but their privacy is not compromised in any way that causes discomfort or embarrassment. Although they are accommodated in dormitories, they are satisfied with the personal space allocated and the storage to keep their belongings private and safe.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Staff demonstrate that they take great care to gather sufficient information about boarders' needs and make excellent arrangements to meet them individually. Well-established structures are in place to provide any support boarders may need with any welfare or educational difficulties they may encounter. For example, in addition to the day to day support provided by boarding staff, boarders are assigned a tutor who assists them with any academic or other difficulties they may have. Should boarders prefer to approach someone independent of boarding and academic staff with personal worries or concerns about the school, they have access to a counsellor, whose services are properly promoted. Boarders express a high level of satisfaction with boarding life and attribute this, in large part, to what they regard as the totally supportive school community.

Currently the school provides exclusively for boys, but has recently secured approval to extend provisions to girls. Where required, the school is equipped to respond to boarders' needs as may arise from their health problems, religion, race and age. Boarders of various nationalities and race are wholly integrated. The school's established culture of respect for all, inclusion and successful counter-bullying initiative benefit all boarders and they are thriving in the school community

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders express a strong sense of belonging, cohesion and commitment to the school. They align themselves with its values and this is born out of the exemplary efforts that staff make to enable them to influence the boarding arrangements and school life generally. Apart from staff's strong commitment to listening to boarders and thus making it possible for them to express views and opinions about boarding issues informally, there are a number of established formal structures. These include, amongst others, the School Council and Food Committee to which boarders nominate peers to represent them most effectively. This valuing of boarders' contribution not only leads to their expressed high level of satisfaction with the school, but seems to create in them confidence, a balanced perspective and, in some instances, reasonableness beyond their years.

Staff recognise the importance of good communication with parents and for boarders to maintain contact directly with them. Time is set aside for boarders to maintain such contact by letters,

e-mail or telephone. Some boarders naturally miss their parents, but regard the school community as a second home. Boarders are satisfied that outside lesson times they are always free to make contact with their families.

As part of the strategy to foster a caring, harmonious community in which boarders experience a sense of belonging, staff ensure that boarders become quickly acquainted with the school. Helpful arrangements are made for boarders to understand what is expected of them and what they will receive in terms of education and care. Boarders are introduced to the school before joining and in most instances are able to 'test drive' the boarding facility. A range of guides is provided that explains where everything is located, daily routines, rules and all that will help a new boarder. Boarders value these excellent arrangements and, in particular, the system of established boarders being assigned to help them in the first weeks. Not only does this quickly familiarise them with the routine, it helps them to establish friendships.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school provides boarders with living facilities which are homely and meet their needs. Acceptable arrangements are made for storage of boarders' possessions including clothing and valuables such as Ipods. Apart from a weekly tuck allowance, boarders are not permitted cash in school thus any necessary expenses incurred or money sent by family to boarders are accounted and handed over to parents.

Boarding accommodation provides shared but sufficient bedroom space. Beds and bedding are maintained in sound and clean condition and, throughout the accommodation, there is enough natural and artificial light, sufficient heating and ventilation. This together with the pleasing outlook from all dormitories, provides boarders a peaceful and comfortable living environment. However, whilst the general standard of decoration throughout the boarding accommodation is good, in one area earmarked for imminent refurbishment, the décor is worn and dull. The floor covering in one of the dormitories is stained and thus detracts from the room's otherwise pleasing ambience.

Sound arrangements are made to enable boarders to wash in reasonable comfort and in private. Wash rooms with showers, wash basins and toilets are located close to boarders' sleeping accommodation and are provided in sufficient ratio. These facilities are in cubicles which are fitted with modesty locks and designed to provide privacy when used. Boarders have access to changing and shower facilities, of similar standards, close to the gymnasium and swimming pool. They are able to use these when pursuing sports either as a recreational activity or during formal school lessons. Boarders and parents are content with the standard of the boarding accommodation.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Boarders are provided outstanding care underpinned by a clear, thoughtfully considered and effectively applied rationale for the boarding arrangements. This is expressed in the school's current statement of boarding principles and practice which accurately reflects how boarders are looked after day to day. The statement of boarding principles and practice makes explicit the tenets that inform the school's purpose and the methods employed in the care and the education of the children. This has been summarised and presented in helpful form for boarders

and parents who are clear about what the school expects of them and what they can reasonably expect of it. Boarders and parents alike express a high level of satisfaction with the translation of the boarding rationale into practice. This is exemplified in comments such as: The staff have done 'an outstanding job reassuring and nurturing him', and 'I really like the staff and all the surroundings and lots of nice people'.

The effective management arrangements ensure that the school's principles and practices are uniformly applied and all the children benefit from a consistently good quality of accommodation and exceptionally high standard of overall care. Boarders' and parents' own assessment is that this applies equally to educational provisions and outcomes.

Strong leadership and management ensures that the welfare of all boarders is safeguarded and promoted. For example, health and safety matters, control and discipline and other factors that impact on boarders' wellbeing, are rigorously monitored. Management also ensure staff are effectively deployed to provide a safe level of supervision of boarders which meets boarders care and support needs.

Staff are more than adequately facilitated to discharge their boarding duties effectively. Contracts and job descriptions clarify their roles, duties and responsibilities and line accountability is also made evident. This has created circumstances in which staff at all levels express feelings of inclusion, being well informed and a commitment to ensure that their individual contributions have a positive impact on boarders. Boarders recognise and value this, regarding the school as a community to which they are pleased to belong.

In compliance with the required standards, all boarding staff complete a basic induction programme, including child protection. They are also provided with the policies, procedures and guidance necessary to discharge their duties safely. However, whilst there is a system of appraisal, there is no clear ongoing development programme that identifies the knowledge and skills needed for each post and ongoing in-service training to respond to this and the continuous development in boarding arrangements. This is currently being developed and is likely to enhance the good practice in this area.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school has a sound equality and diversity policy which influences its culture and, as reflected in its range of other policies, procedures and practices, impacts on boarders and staff. In practice, the school's boarding provision is open to all who wish to use it. The school's values of inclusion, respect for all and social approbation of prejudice, bullying and harassment means that all boarders, regardless of their background or other personal characteristics, thrive unencumbered in its community.

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
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Recommendations

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

- ensure a separate written record is kept for each boarder setting out prescribed or non-prescribed medication given, the date and if appropriate the time it was given, and signed by the person who administered it (NMS 15.12)
- ensure that indoor areas used by, and accessible to boarders, are free from reasonably avoidable hazards unsound flooring and absence of restrictors to windows on the upper floors of the building (NMS 47.1)
- ensure that furnishing of the boarding accommodation, with particular reference to floor covering, is maintained in satisfactory condition. (NMS 40.5)