

Bearwood College

Inspection report for boarding school

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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

Bearwood College is an independent co-educational boarding and day school for children aged 11 - 18. There are 374 pupils, of whom 85 are boarders. There are two boarding houses, one for boys' which is situated within the main college building, and a girls' house which has been purpose built and is a short distance from the main school building.

All pupils at the college are called 'scholars' and are referred to as such in the report.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

This was an announced inspection carried out by one inspector and a boarding school additional inspector over three days, which covered all the key standards. The judgements in this report have been made using new benchmarking guidance which was implemented on 1 April 2008. Information about this guidance can be found on the Ofsted website. The new basis for making judgements is not directly comparable with that used previously.

The care of boarders at the college is satisfactory. **Boarders feel safe and the vast majority enjoy their experience of boarding. There are a number of staff working at the school whom they feel able to talk to if they have concerns or worries. There are robust staff recruitment systems in place and boarders receive good health care whilst at the college.**

There are areas of the boarding accommodation in need of urgent attention and routine maintenance issues are not quickly addressed. Boarders generally feel that their views are not always listened to and that they would like more activities.

Improvements since the last inspection

The college was last inspected in October 2006. Five recommendations were made and all have been met. Medication is securely stored and all the required details are included on the parental permission form. The rest of the recommendations concerned maintenance and fire issues in the boys' house. All that are still relevant have been met, although two of the recommendations relate to areas which have changed use.

Bearwood College Response

Bearwood College was pleased to have had the opportunity to cooperate with the Ofsted Boarding Inspection. We would like to record our appreciation of the work of the Inspectors.

We recognise that the Inspectors identified many of our substantial achievements, including:

- our good health care
- our comprehensive PSHE programme
- our top five star 'Scores on the Doors' award for food hygiene
- we take bullying seriously and respond effectively to incidents that take place
- our up to date child protection procedures
- the behaviour of the boarders is generally good
- complaints are taken seriously
- our robust procedures regarding staff recruitment
- fire safety is taken seriously
- good levels of support are provided to boarders from overseas
- the opportunities for boarders to put forward their views
- our staffing levels
- our monitoring of key records
- our good promotion of equality and diversity

We accept that the Report is generally accurate. It appears that some individual judgements of the Inspectors were based on comments from either one boarder or a small number of boarders. For example we observe that, although the Inspectors appeared to focus on one boarder's comments about activities, during the last academic year 37 trips were provided over the 23 available weekends in addition to a wide range of 'established' regular items such as CCF events, and Duke of Edinburgh Award and hovercrafting activities.

We acknowledge that on-going expansion in external inspection requirements now necessitate further substantial increases in the frequency and extent of record-keeping and other administrative activities. These changes unavoidably imply increased costs for the College, and may risk diverting some degree of staff time from direct care for and management of the scholars, but we understand that this is a growing externally required onus that we must handle effectively.

In the four years since the last boarding inspection, we have

maintained an ongoing programme of refurbishment. In Blake House, new shower rooms have been built / upgraded, and new sets of furniture installed. Blake has partly relocated from some less suitable large rooms into an area of smaller, more comfortable rooms. Half of the new House area has an independent heating system, in response to previous recommendations. We are currently refurbishing the Sixth Form rooms. In Drake House, being recently purpose-built, there has been less need of substantial renovation; nevertheless, we are in the middle of refurbishing it. The Governors are committed to the plan for rolling this programme out.

In response to the Inspectors' various recommendations, at the date of this document:

- we have reviewed policy and practice concerning the administration of non-prescribed medication
- we have reviewed communication systems within the College
- we have updated the Ofsted telephone number in College documentation
- we have updated the College security arrangements
- we are currently writing risk assessments for portable electric heaters
- we have reviewed the boarders' activity programme
- we are currently reviewing the documentation of personal support to boarders
- we have reviewed the records of the Mess Committee and their format is adjusted for the future as suggested
- we are currently reviewing the prioritisation of routine maintenance issues and the refurbishment of the boarding boys' kitchen
- we have overcome short-term problems with the heating system
- we are currently reviewing the boarders' shower provision using an external consultancy
- we are currently reviewing the documented recording of new staff induction and other training
- we have reviewed weekend staffing levels and remain satisfied that they are sufficient

December 2009

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders receive good health care whilst at the school. The full time school nurse is actively involved with boarding life and contributes to the teaching of PSHE (personal, social and health education). There are effective links with a local medical centre and a doctor visits when required. Boarders can request to see a doctor of either gender if they choose and in private. Clear records are maintained of all visits to the medical centre, the reason for the visit and any treatment administered. The medical centre maintains lists of scholars with specific medical conditions such as severe allergies and ensures that the teaching staff are aware on a confidential basis. Parental permission is routinely obtained for the administration of first aid and appropriate non-prescribed medication to boarders and to seek medical, dental or optical treatment when required.

All medication in the medical centre is securely stored in a locked cabinet. There are low levels of medication administered, both prescribed and non-prescribed, and appropriate administration records are maintained. It is college policy that the boarding staff only administer paracetamol to boarders after consultation with the nurse on duty. This policy was not always found to be followed in practice. In addition, a non-prescribed medication was being administered which had been bought abroad and the contents could not be verified.

The college has a comprehensive PSHE programme which is taught by tutors. The topics are varied and some outside speakers are used. There are well known policies in place concerning the response to alcohol, smoking and illegal substance abuse by boarders and this policy is followed in practice, if required.

There is a good choice of food provided at breakfast and lunch with a reduced choice at the evening meal. The choice at lunch is particularly varied with soup, a main choice and vegetarian option, a 'snack choice' as well as a full salad bar and often a pasta option. There is a pudding as well as a variety of fresh fruit available. Special diets are catered for and some 'themed' nights such as a recent Halloween supper. The kitchen has obtained the top five star 'Scores on the Doors' award from the local authority relating to food hygiene. A significant number of boarders commented that they don't like the food. Comments mainly concerned the lack of choice at the evening meal. There are some opportunities for boarders to put forward their view about the food at 'mess meetings' but these meetings take place infrequently and there is no feedback about any changes made.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The college takes bullying seriously and responds effectively to incidents that take place. Most boarders feel that there has been a reduction in the amount of bullying and one commented that 'bullying is dealt with well.' The survey completed before the inspection showed a small number of male boarders' feel that they are being bullied sometimes but boarders spoken to during the inspection do not identify bullying as a problem at the college. Bullying is included in PSHE and there are

appropriate anti-bullying policies in place.

There are up to date child protection procedures in place which contain all the required information. The headmaster is the designated person regarding these issues and has attended an appropriate level of training in this area. Records are maintained of child protecting issues and show that liaison with the local authority routinely takes place. Universal training in child protection has been provided to all staff including non-academic members of staff. A small number of staff have attended external training in safeguarding.

The behaviour of the boarders is generally good and there is clear written guidance provided regarding what sanctions should be imposed for specific misdemeanors. The administration of major punishments is recorded and monitored and the boarding houses maintain a record of minor sanctions imposed. The headmaster monitors the records of serious punishments. These show that the number of incidents are reducing and that few of the major punishments are imposed on boarders. Boarders feel that although the punishments imposed are generally fair, that they would like more rewards in boarding. For example, more flexibility around bedtimes at weekends. Incidents, when known about are dealt with well, but clearer communication would ensure that all incidents are dealt with without delay.

Complaints are taken seriously and a written record is maintained of serious complaints and their outcome by the headmaster. The documentation provided to boarders and parents about complaints has not yet been updated to include information about how to contact Ofsted.

There are robust procedures in place regarding staff recruitment. The staff responsible for undertaking the checks have attended training in this area and there is a thorough understanding of what is required. All staff working at the school have to undergo the same recruitment process which includes an enhanced CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check, two written references and telephone verification from the referees. There is an effective checklist maintained on the front of staff files which outlines the checks required and the date they are obtained. There are some adults not employed by the school who live in the same building as boarding accommodation. Not all have written agreements in place outlining the terms of their accommodation, contact with boarders and other specified areas.

Fire safety is taken seriously. There are regular fire drills and servicing of the equipment. Boarders confirm that they are aware of the evacuation procedures and fire drills take place in boarding time as well as during the school day. There has been some testing of the portable electrical appliances in the boarding houses but this has yet to be fully completed. Problems with the heating system has meant that there has been use of portable electrical heaters but there are no risk assessments in place to ensure that they are used safely. There are also a number of window restrictors that are broken in the girls' boarding house. There are sound security measures in place in some areas but this is not universal throughout the college. There are security cameras and code locks on doors as well as an intruder alarm in one of the boarding houses. The general public use the college facilities on a regular basis and there is no written assessment of risk

or the measures taken to ensure the safety of boarders.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is satisfactory.

There are some organised activities arranged such as ice skating and trips to the cinema but boarders would like to have more. This is the case across all age groups and they would like the opportunity to do more both in the evenings after prep and at weekends. One said 'we need more activities in the evenings, for all age groups.' The boarders have access to the internet and appropriate safeguards are in place.

Boarders are able to name a members of staff working at the school whom they feel able to talk to if they have concerns or worries. All scholars have a tutor and these tutor groups meet at least weekly. A small minority of boarders commented that they do not feel that there is a nurturing or caring atmosphere in the boarding houses and that they don't always feel cared about by the staff on duty. The records maintained by the staff on duty do not currently provide details of support provided.

The college has boarders from a wide range of cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Good levels of support are provided to boarders from overseas and they feel well supported. One boarder from overseas said that 'it was easy to make friends and we were made to feel comfortable.' The ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) department supports 20-25 scholars and teaches individually and in small groups. The department also mediates on boarders behalf if necessary. Other cultures are celebrated for example, the ESOL department holds a party at Chinese New Year and boarders of faiths other than Christianity are supported. The kitchen ensures that dietary requirements are facilitated. Scholars with medical needs are known about and there is a strong commitment to ensuring that the medical and religious needs of scholars are met.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is satisfactory.

There are some opportunities for boarders to put forward their views at house meetings, food committee meetings and at school council. However most of these meetings do not take place on a regular basis and any minutes produced do not clearly show that issues are being followed up at subsequent meetings. There are some examples where boarders' views have been listened to, such as the installation of satellite television in the boys' boarding house and a sixth form common room in the girls', but boarders do not feel that their views are generally listened to and that they are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the college.

Boarders are able to maintain private contact with their parents and families. They use mobile phones but both boarding houses have a payphone and the office phone can be used if necessary. There are helpline numbers near the payphones but they include the old CSCI telephone number and not that of Ofsted. The boarders have access to computers, although there are fewer computers available in the girls' boarding house.

All new scholars receive a written booklet outlining key information about the college which includes information about boarding. New boarders arrive at the school the day before everyone else and they feel that the induction process is sufficient. They are given a house prefect to look after them and to go to for guidance and support.

The most junior boy boarders have a tutor on duty in the weekday evening whose whole role it is specifically to support them.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The college has two boarding houses: one for boys in the main house and another purpose built, more modern boarding house for girls. Both boarding houses have suffered as a result of delays in attending to maintenance issues. There are some new items of furniture in the communal areas of the girls' house, but the bathrooms are uninviting, and a lack of effective ventilation has meant that mould is a problem. There are no locks on some bathroom doors and on others there are bolts, which cannot be opened quickly in an emergency. The boy's house is old and in need of extensive refurbishment. The kitchen area used by boarders is in urgent need of replacement and a number of carpets are heavily stained. There are a number of broken doors to storage areas under beds and some broken bed frames. In both boarding houses, a small number of rooms have been refurbished to a good standard but there is no plan to roll this programme out. During the inspection there were problems with the heating and both houses were cold. This is a regular occurrence in the boys' boarding house. The college is looking into providing a long term solution to the problem regarding heating but in the meantime the boarding houses must be adequately heated. The showers in the boarding houses are an issue for boarders. They say that the pressure is not sufficient in the majority of the showers and that there is only hot water for 20 minutes a day in the boys' house.

All boarders have lockable facilities in bedrooms where they can safely store personal possessions and valuables. They are also able to give items in to the house staff for safe keeping.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The boarding houses are overseen by a housemaster in the boys' house and by a housemistress in the girls'. Each weekday evening, assistant housemasters / housemistresses and house tutors are on duty in the boarding houses. Staffing levels are sufficient during the week and there is an additional member of staff on duty in the boys house to support the youngest boys. Staffing levels are lower at weekends with only one or two staff on duty in the boys' house. One member of staff on duty appears insufficient given the layout of the boy's house but would depend on the number of boarders who are resident.

There is an induction for new members of boarding staff but is minimal in content. There are weekly meetings for house masters/housemistresses where boarding

issues are discussed as well as informal meetings. Some training in welfare issues has taken place, for example, one member of staff has completed a BSA (Boarding School's Association) training course and some staff have recently undertaken lifesaving qualifications. However, there are no expectations regarding training and the school has recognised that some staff need to update their first aid training. There are no clear records maintained outlining what welfare training staff have undertaken, including house tutors.

The senior management team have substantial experience of boarding and the second master is the head of boarding. Monitoring of key records takes place and visits to the boarding houses.

The college has a range of policies and procedures, all of which are on the new intranet system. The parental information booklet contains detailed information about the school including a statement of boarding principles and practice. There is a staff handbook and one specifically for staff working in the boys' house.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Scholars from overseas are integrated well into the boarding community and individual medical needs are known about and met.

What must be done to secure future improvement?
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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):

- review the policy and practice concerning the administration of non-prescribed medication (NMS 15)
- review the communication systems within the college to ensure that all issues are quickly dealt with (NMS 4)
- update the college documentation to ensure that information such as the complaints procedure, refers to Ofsted and not CSCI (NMS 5)
- ensure that there is a written review of the security of the site including the use of college facilities by members of the public (NMS 41)
- ensure that written risk assessments are undertaken regarding the use of portable electric heaters in the boarding houses (NMS 47)
- review the activities provided for boarders in the evenings and at weekends (NMS 11)
- review the personal support provided to boarders in the boarding houses and how it is documented (NMS 14)
- ensure that there are regular opportunities for boarders to express their views on relevant aspects of boarding provision, including the food, and that these meetings are minuted and include any changes made as a result (NMS 12)
- ensure that routine maintenance issues within the boarding houses are prioritised and quickly attended to. Areas in urgent need of attention are: the replacement of the shower curtains in the girls' showers, the locks on the bathroom doors in the girls' house, the removal of broken furniture in the boys' house and the replacement of broken beds. (NMS 40)

- ensure that the kitchen area within the boy's boarding house is refurbished without delay (NMS 40)
 - ensure that the boarding houses are adequately heated (NMS 40)
 - review the showers in both boarding houses to ensure that they are working efficiently and that there is sufficient hot water (NMS 44)
 - review the induction programme for new boarding staff (NMS 34)
 - review the training provided to boarding staff and ensure that written training records are maintained that show all the welfare training undertaken (NMS 34)
 - review staffing levels at weekends to ensure that they are sufficient (NMS 34).
-