

Leicester Montessori Grammar School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC383040
Inspection date	3 December 2009
Inspector	Warren Clarke
Type of Inspection	Key

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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 school provides boarding for some of its pupils of secondary school age. The school provides primary and secondary education, including a sixth form college which most of the current boarders attend. The school is on split sites and close to the city centre and some of the local university facilities, such as a sports centre to which the school has access.

The boarding accommodation is provided a large single dwelling within walking distance of the school although shuttle transport is provided between the two venues. The boarding accommodation, and the grounds in which it stands, is spacious. Currently, all boarders are provided large individual study-bedrooms and have access to the school's and local community sports and leisure facilities.

All the boarders are international pupils and in addition to their formal education, the school provides opportunities for them to experience and learn about the social and cultural life of this country. During the inspection all boarders were seen and they contributed to the process.

Summary

This first key inspection of the school's boarding welfare arrangements was announced and assessed performance against the key national minimum standards. Overall, the school performs well in providing boarders a good standard of care. In particular, staff are effective in helping international boarders to settle into school life and the community.

Boarders are especially satisfied with the comfort and homeliness of the boarding house and consistently refer to staff's kindness. Although there are some outstanding features such the quality of the boarding accommodation and successful practice of equality and diversity in ways that help all boarders to thrive, there are nevertheless some deficits. Some of these are minor shortfalls, but others such as not maintaining a record of fire alarm system tests, if not addressed, could in the long run have adverse implications for boarders' welfare.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This is the first inspection of the school's boarding arrangements.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders say they are in good health and that staff look after them very well. This care is apparent in boarders' robust physical and emotional health. For example, all boarders, during the inspection, participated enthusiastically and energetically in sports such as tennis. They are all alert and acceptably exhibit the joyful effervescence characteristic of young people enjoying a sense of wellbeing.

Staff use the formal personal health and social education curriculum to bring awareness to boarders about the adverse effect on health of some lifestyle choices such as smoking, alcohol and illegal drugs. These messages are reinforced by boarding staff and by the school rules that

prohibit boarders using these substances on or off the premises. Although substance misuse does not feature as a concern, staff remain vigilant to ensure this situation is maintained.

None of the boarders have any chronic or other health condition that requires specific health regimes, but staff demonstrate that by seeking information about each boarder's health history they have a good enough system to plan to meet any precise health care as might be required. Parental authorisation to attend to any medical treatment as a boarder might need has been obtained.

More than adequate primary health care arrangements are in place. For instance, all boarders are registered with a local doctor, and have access to dentists and opticians. Boarding staff have all completed first aid training to equip them to respond to minor injuries and to recognise where emergency professional treatment may be required. They also have access to a practising medical doctor for guidance. Currently, boarders' health history is gathered using a generic questionnaire which does not elicit sufficient detail and is not readily accessible to boarding staff. The headmaster plans to introduce a discrete medical questionnaire and has arranged for boarding staff to have instant access to this information. Whilst secure storage is provided for boarders to store any medicines they are to self-administer, there is no similar general storage for medicines which staff may need to hold in safekeeping. Nor have boarding staff completed safe handling of medication training. Since none of the boarders are on any medication regimen, this does not adversely affect their care, but is contrary to good practice which requires that all medicines in establishments accommodating children and young people are securely stored. Also, that staff are trained to handle medicines safely in order to guard against error.

Boarders benefit from excellent catering arrangements. The whole process, including meticulous attention to detail in the dining facilities, is organised successfully to achieve a relaxed social occasion when boarders and staff consume meals in a relaxed and most convivial atmosphere. Menus are planned with input from boarders who say that there are always ample quantities of food and regular meals. International boarders say that there were initial difficulties adjusting to the food. However, staff have made efforts to ensure that some of their national dishes are included in the menus. In essence, the staff accomplish a situation in which healthy eating is promoted, there is reasonable choice at each mealtime, boarders' preferences are taken into account and they are provided a varied and nutritious diet.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders say they feel safe and comfortable in school and in the boarding house. This reflects a wide range of effective measures that staff have successfully introduced to protect boarders from abuse, harm and unfavourable treatment. There is a school-wide child protection strategy which is informed by the procedures of the local safeguarding children board and national guidelines such as Working Together to Safeguard Children.

The protection of children in the school is regarded as the responsibility of all who are employed there and all staff have received training and instructions to ensure that they understand the nature of abuse. All staff are also equipped to identify abuse, contribute to the school's strategy to prevent abuse and to be able to respond appropriately to any allegation or suspicion of it. There are no concerns about the safety of any of boarders or any pending safeguarding matters. However, there is no guidance or procedure for the event of a boarder being missing from

school. Such a procedure is intended to ensure that staff know how to respond to any situation where a boarder is missing or absent from school without permission.

An ethos exists in which pupils and staff regard any form of bullying or harassment as socially unacceptable and contrary to the principles on which the school is established. The school's sound countering bullying policy which is actively promoted is highly successful in that all boarders report no experience of bullying either in the boarding house or in school. Staff are particularly mindful of the adjustments that boarders have to make living away from home, and that this should not be compounded by bullying or any form of isolation. There is, therefore, adequate supervision at all times to reduce scope for bullying and excellent work by staff to ensure that all boarders are included, enjoy good peer relationships and live harmoniously together.

The behaviour expected of boarders is clearly outlined and understood by them and by staff. These expectations are reflected in the school's behaviour management policy, which provides staff with helpful guidance in how to promote and reinforce acceptable conduct. It is noted, however, that the behaviour management policy does not distinguish between control and discipline in school and the boarding house. Nevertheless, practice is established whereby sanctions imposed in school are not unreasonably carried over to boarding in ways that set boarders apart from day pupils.

In short, there are no significant discipline problems among boarders who were well behaved throughout the inspection. They are polite and considerate; they relate well to each other and to staff. Indeed, this is a feature of the whole school where, generally, the children's behaviour is characterised by co-operation, friendliness and peaceful co-existence. Although there has been no cause for staff to restrain any boarders, the discipline policy does not provide any guidance for the event of it being necessary for staff to restrain a child. Such guidance would normally set out the parameters for conducting physical restraint and for this to be done safely.

Boarders and their parents have access to the school's complaints procedure which is acceptably promoted and conforms to current good practice. There are no formal complaints from boarders and this is not surprising since staff are attentive and keen to listen and respond in a timely way to any concerns they may have. For example, great efforts have been made to ensure that, as far as possible, the food provided reflects some of the preference of the boarders from overseas. The school arranges for international boarders to meet weekly with a representative of the agency through which their boarding arrangements are made. This provides boarders the opportunity to communicate in their first language any difficulties or concerns which because of lack of fluency in English they may not be able to fully convey to staff. Boarders view this as a very good and most helpful arrangement.

A raft of effective precautions against the risk of fire and other potential hazards are taken to protect boarders. These, for instance, include regular inspection and maintenance of smoke and heat detecting devices and the fire alarm. Fire drills are carried out at acceptable intervals ensuring that staff and boarders are familiar with the emergency fire evacuation procedure. All areas of the boarding house have been risk-assessed and where potential hazards are identified sound measures are in place to remove or control them. The school recognises hazards of the boarding house being a distance from the actual school site and ensures that transport is provided for boarders between the two venues.

Health and safety is given a high priority and managers, staff and boarders are well briefed in the contributions they are expected to make to ensure their collective safety. However, there are two shortfalls in this area which, whilst not affecting the high standards of care boarders currently enjoy, could have adverse implication in the long run. First, there are no opening restrictors to windows on the upper floor thus there is a safety risk should boarders seek to exit by this route. Second, there is a failure to record the weekly test of the fire alarm system in the boarding house. This creates circumstances in which these tests, which are crucial to ensuring the fire alarm remains operationally efficient, may be missed and go unnoticed.

Robust and firmly embedded systems are in place to protect boarders from staff who are unsuitable to be involved in the education and care of children and young people. No-one is permitted to commence employment without a satisfactory criminal records bureau check and other rigorous vetting. Excellent security arrangements ensure boarders are protected against intruders and visitors cannot gain access to them without control and supervision.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Boarders currently form an homogeneous group and are provided a network of valued support from staff within the school. Boarders list a wide range of staff, particularly boarding staff and those in the language support unit, as people they turn to or would approach with any personal problems. In addition, they have weekly contact with a representative of the agency their parents have commissioned to manage guardian and travel arrangements. Boarders say they value this service, particularly as they are able to communicate with the representative in their familiar language. These arrangements though sound, assume that boarders will remain an homogeneous group. They also do not take sufficient account of instances where boarders may have personal difficulties for which they may prefer to seek guidance and support from someone independent of the school and their parents.

Boarders are thriving socially in the school's environment, which is multi cultural and has successfully embedded appropriate arrangements to respond to needs from their sex, religion, culture and linguistic background. The school is obviously multi cultural and is located in a diverse community where there is easy access to religious and cultural resources. Although boarders as a group are not as diverse as the rest of the school's population, this is not by design. Staff make productive efforts that ensure these boarders are firmly integrated into school life. However, if this trend is to continue, international boarders may benefit from having at least one member of boarding staff who is familiar with their culture and language.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The school is founded on principles that include listening to children and respecting them and their views. Boarders benefit from this empowering approach which provides them many informal opportunities to discuss with staff their views and opinion about the school. This has already led to adjustments to menus in the boarding house and the range of leisure activities. A long established school council made up of representatives elected by all the pupils is the formal mechanism boarders and other pupils use to influence the running of the school. Boarding is a new feature of the school. There are plans to build boarders' capacity to have boarding issues as a prominent feature of the school council agenda.

Boarders, all of whom are international students, are successfully settled into school life and are content with the boarding arrangements. They are integrated into all aspects of the school and exhibit an ease that belies their relatively short time in the country and the school. Given that there is no tradition of boarding on which staff were able to draw, they have performed exceptionally well in giving boarders the information and support they need to settle in school and adjust to the community.

Staff recognise the importance of boarders maintaining contact with their parents. Flexible arrangements are made for boarders to maintain such contact by e-mail, telephone and letters. The school, however, relies on boarders possessing their own mobile telephone and is also willing to permit use of the office telephone in the boarding house. This falls short of the requirement for boarders to have access to a telephone from which they may contact parents in private without informing or seeking permission from staff. That said, boarders value the arrangements made for them to meet regularly with the caseworker from an agency commissioned by their parents to manage their guardians and travel arrangements at the start and end of terms.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders present as being completely relaxed in the boarding house which provides them an exceptionally high standard of accommodation and facilities. The building and grounds are excellently maintained and, throughout, the boarding accommodation is pleasingly decorated, clean and orderly. All rooms used by boarders, including dining and sitting rooms, are equipped with furniture and fittings which not only provide a great deal of comfort, but also combine to create a warm, welcoming and homely environment.

Currently, each boarder is allocated an exclusive spacious study-bedroom, which they are able to lock when they are not present. The bedrooms, like other areas of the boarding house, are furnished and fitted to a standard with which boarders are most satisfied. For example, boarders are provided with sound beds and bedding, and ample storage, some of it secure, for their clothes and other personal possessions.

Boarders' sleeping accommodation is thoughtfully organised. The bedrooms are close to bathrooms and toilets, which are provided in a ratio that currently far exceeds the minimum standards. Bathrooms are kept in clean, hygienic condition and are arranged and equipped so that they afford boarders maximum privacy and comfort. Although resident staff accommodation is near enough to boarders' sleeping quarters in case any boarder may need their assistance during the night, this accommodation is distinctly separated thus promoting privacy and safe caring.

Staff successfully capitalise on the excellent boarding facilities to promote boarders' independence and preparation for adulthood. For instance, the laundry facilities, which are domestic in scale, are used to teach boarders to do some of their personal laundry. Boarders are also encouraged and provided facilities to look after their own possessions and to manage their personal allowances.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Boarders are provided an overall good standard of care with some outstanding features. This is facilitated by a clear and relevant statement of boarding principles and practice. This document effectively sets out, in sufficient detail, the quality of care the school expects boarders to be provided and the methods by which staff will achieve this. The statement is relevant to boarders' age and circumstances and the school's ethos and resources. This information is made available to parents and boarders. In the case of boarders, it is summarised in helpful form to enable them to orientate themselves in the school setting and to be reassured about how they will be looked after.

Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of boarders are sound. Careful attention is given to managing the boarding house environment to ensure each boarder's safety and wellbeing. For example, bathrooms and toilets are designed and equipped so that they afford boarders both comfort and maximum privacy. Systems are in place to continuously monitor the standard of boarding accommodation and care activities. This typically includes, amongst others, regular scrutiny of complaints made by boarders and records of any disciplinary measures imposed on them. Boarders are therefore properly protected from any victimisation or ill treatment.

Boarding staff are employed in sufficient number and are efficiently deployed. They form a stable team whose terms of employment enable them to provide boarders a reasonable degree of permanence and consistency in how they are looked after. There is a minimum of two staff actively on duty when boarders are in the boarding house and others available to be called on if required. Boarding staff consider that this level of staffing enables them to complete the practical and administrative tasks necessary for boarders' proper care, but also to arrange and join in leisure activities and give individual attention where needed. The impact of this is that the common thread through all the comments made by boarders about their boarding experience, is staff's kindness and ready availability to provide help when needed.

Boarding staff are themselves well supported in their tasks. They are provided written guidance to aid them in their duties, have completed an induction programme and have periodic supervision. In time they, like the rest of the school's staff will benefit from the established staff performance appraisal system. However, no arrangements are in place for boarding staff's continuous development through training. Also, the housemistress with lead responsibility for boarding is not sufficiently included in the school's management team. For example, this post holder does not participate in the management team meetings thus missing an opportunity to enhance the profile of boarding as an integral part of the school.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Driven by a clear policy, equality and diversity is reflected in all aspects of the school including the evident multi cultural population of pupils and staff. Pupils including boarders embrace the school's values of respect for others and celebration of their differences. The success of this is reflected in the peace and harmony among diverse groups who are positively integrated. In particular, the staff work hard to ensure international boarders are not isolated and that appropriate provisions are made to respond to their religious and cultural needs.

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 that arrangements are put in place for prescribed and non prescribed medicines (homely remedies), not kept by individual boarders assessed as competent to administer and control their own medicines, is kept securely (NMS 15.10)
- ensure that there is a policy known to staff and used in practice for recovering any boarder missing, or absent without permission, from school and that a record is made of any such incidents (NMS 3.9)
- ensure that the fire alarm is tested regularly, at least at the frequency recommended by the local fire service, and that this is detailed in the record which must be kept (NMS 26.4)
- ensure windows accessible to boarders above the ground floor and presenting a risk to safety are fitted with suitable opening restrictors or alternative safety measures (NMS 47.3)
- ensure the school identifies and makes possible easy access to a suitable person, independent of boarders' parents, boarding and teaching staff, whom boarders can contact directly about any personal problems or concerns at school (NMS 14.4)
- ensure that boarders have access to a telephone which they are able to use in private to contact parents without informing staff or seeking their permission (NMS 19.3)
- ensure all boarding staff are provided opportunities for ongoing training and updating of boarding practice, commensurate with roles and experience and in response to any changes or development in the boarding school. (NMS 34.7)