

Kings School Rochester

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

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| 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

Founded in 604 AD, the King's school is a co-educational day and boarding school, situated in the historic Cathedral City of Rochester. The school campus is situated across three main sites, the pre-preparatory, preparatory and senior schools, each of which have their own head teachers. An executive head master is in overall charge, reporting to a board of governors.

At the time of this inspection the school had 304 pupils on the senior school roll, 57 of whom are boarders. A total of 19 girls and 38 boys are accommodated in separate boarding houses, six are in the preparatory school and the majority of the boarding pupils are from overseas.

A team of resident and non - resident boarding staff are line managed by the head of boarding; qualified nursing cover is provided during the school day, and is "on call" in the evenings and at weekends.

Summary

This inspection was primarily conducted to follow up on the 20 recommendations made from last year's inspection. These covered all six outcome groups, encompassing the majority of the key standards for boarding schools. Hence, this particular visit was conducted over two days by two inspectors and all of the key standards were again inspected.

Over the last year, the school has made steady progress, with the majority of the recommendations being partly or fully met.

Staffing levels have increased, consultation forums have further developed and boarders now speak more positively about their relationships with staff.

Work is underway to improve the boys' boarding house and a number of key policies and procedures have been updated.

Whilst additional recommendations have been made from this inspection, the overall welfare provision for the boarders has improved sufficiently to now judge the school as providing a satisfactory service.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

A total of 20 recommendations were made from last year's inspection and it is positive to find that sound progress has been made.

Nursing hours have increased, as have the staffing levels within the boarding houses. Medicines are now suitably and safely stored and all these factors serve to protect and safeguard boarders more fully.

Boarders report improvements with regards food and laundry provision and are very positive about the two recent tutor appointments which have increased the overall level of activity provision.

Consultation forums are being reinforced and the complaints procedure has been updated and widely advertised. There is a clear description of the independent listener available to the boarders.

Major works are clearly underway to improve the boys' house and the boys are particularly pleased to now be able to lock their own bedroom doors.

Further improvements are necessary to fully safeguard boarders and these include robust monitoring, improved risk assessments and the continued training and development of staff. These areas are further described throughout the text of this report.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders benefit by having their health and medical needs promoted and met. A dedicated nursing Sister runs an efficient medical centre and a recent increase to nursing assistant hours has had a positive impact. Medical records are securely held and all boarders are registered with local health services. They are able to see a GP of their choice, and in private. Boarders report very positively about the nursing team, which consists of two qualified nurses and an assistant. They refer to them as a very good source of both health and emotional support.

The medical centre is situated some distance away from the boarding houses and its location on a second floor compromises physical access to anyone with a mobility difficulty. There are a limited number of beds available for the care of ill boarders, however, clear and appropriate plans remain in place to accommodate boarders within their boarding house, should the need arise. There is good liaison between nursing and boarding staff which further serves to ensure boarders are being well looked after.

Boarding staff have received appropriate first aid and medication administration training. Medication within the houses is appropriately stored, including controlled medicines and those boarders who self administer have been deemed as safe to do so through appropriate risk assessment. Whilst medication audit control systems are in place, not all records are up to date and this presents potential risks.

The personal social and health education programme (PSHE) is taught under the umbrella of general studies. The programme offers a varied and interesting range of topics. Much of the subject matter is delivered by the nursing team and the recent increase to nursing hours has resulted in protected teaching time for the Sister. This has reduced the number of sessions being cancelled due to attending to accidents and illnesses of pupils, which take priority. Written information demonstrates lessons being delivered across all year groups, however, it is not possible to determine exactly how much time is dedicated to the core subjects of smoking, drugs and alcohol.

Staff follow clear guidance in terms of specific health care plans written by the nursing Sister. Boarders receive the input they need to maintain good physical health and to manage health conditions appropriately. There is less written prescribed guidance in terms of meeting the more generic welfare needs of boarders which are not predominantly health related. Hence, although much verbal discussion occurs across the school staff team, the absence of written plans compromises consistency of approaches and it is impossible to determine that planned approaches to significant welfare concerns are being agreed and reviewed.

Boarders positively benefit by receiving healthy, nutritious meals. The food committee routinely consults with the Chef to present preferences and new ideas from the pupils. Allergies and special diets are suitably catered for. Boarding houses are suitably equipped for boarders to prepare their own snacks and drinks in between mealtimes. It is positive to note that the issues reported from boarders at the previous inspection with regards Sunday lunches have now been resolved.

Boarders now report more positively about laundry provision than they did at last year's inspection. Systems for this service have improved and the girls' request for their own washing machine has been met.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders are suitably protected from bullying because there are clear reporting systems in place which result in swift action being taken. In addition to staff, prefects are also very keen to report any concerns they pick up through their day to day contact with their peers. Written records support swift and strict sanctions being implemented in terms of perpetrators, combined with effective support for victims.

A clear and effective child protection policy is being implemented in practice. This serves to protect all pupils and training is being routinely delivered and refreshed. All staff have now received training and prefects also receive clear guidance. They are fully aware of how and when to report concerns to the school's designated child protection officers. New staff joining the school receive immediate initial guidance, however, they may already be in post for a number of weeks before receiving the full training. This presents potential risks.

School rules and behavioural expectations are made clear to all pupils and parents upon joining the school and there are many ways for pupils to receive rewards. It is very positive to hear from pupils that effort is largely regarded as more important than achievement. Within the boarding houses, written records are made with regards the use of sanctions and punishments. Those deemed as serious are communicated to the senior school head teacher, who is able to effectively monitor and take appropriate action. There is less evidence of the formal monitoring of less serious sanctions within houses. Whilst the head of boarding examines these records regularly, this is not recorded in a written format and thus makes it difficult to track potential patterns and trends.

The complaints procedure for boarders has been reviewed and updated since the last inspection. It has been delivered to boarders through house meetings and is displayed throughout the boarding houses, it now includes the details of an independent listener as well as other useful external agencies.

The school prefect system has improved since the last inspection. A clear description of the role is provided in writing and this is further supported through a sound induction programme and regular subsequent meetings with key staff. The role is set as a supportive one and prefects are not permitted to give punishments or sanctions. Those interviewed demonstrate a sound understanding of child protection procedures and are viewed by other pupils, particularly younger ones, as a source of good support. Prefects are given clear additional responsibilities which encourages the development of maturity and a sense of responsibility; all very positive in terms of their own development.

Within the last year the school has engaged in taking responsibility for a small number of guardianship arrangements. Shortfalls in the processes of the agencies in use have been identified which presents unacceptable risks to the welfare and protection of those boarders placed. The school has taken immediate remedial steps to rectify the situation.

The school implements a sound approach with regards fire safety which serves to protect boarders against the risk of fire. The fire risk assessment is regularly reviewed and an external agency provides ongoing training and guidance. Systems and equipment are routinely tested and serviced during term time and boarders receive clear guidance with regards evacuation procedures. Whilst drills are regularly practised, recent records indicate the absence of a practise during one term and a lack of clarity within the 'actions required' column in one set of fire drill records.

Risk assessments are completed for all high risk activities. These detail the potential risks and how these will be minimised, thus serving to protect boarders from potential harm. Parents are required to provide their written consent before a boarder is permitted to join any such activity.

The lack of attention to detail with regards generic premises risk assessments presents potential risks to the boarders. Work has commenced to improve upon these in terms of covering every area within the boarding houses. Electrical appliances are being tested annually, however there is no clear system to check new appliances being brought in by boarders immediately. Boarding staff do report maintenance and repair issues when these are noticed and the head of senior school conducts regular visits to the boarding houses to monitor health and safety issues. The school is mindful of the need to conduct ongoing risk assessments with regards the boys' house as refurbishment works are currently underway. Progress so far has improved aspects of privacy for the boys as they now all have their own keys to their bedrooms.

Boarding houses are secure from public intrusion and the senior management team reviews whole school security on a weekly basis. An area of land, owned by the local council separates areas of the whole school site. This is a known potentially high risk area as it allows public access and is very dark at night. The school has requested additional lighting be provided by the council. Boarders are continually advised of the presenting dangers and are not permitted to use this short cut at set times.

Recruitment processes continue to be safe and robust, thus affording good protection to boarders. Staff members are unable to take up their duties until all recruitment checks have been satisfactorily completed.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The range and frequency of activities provided for boarders has significantly improved since the last inspection. Boarders report far more positively in terms of trips and excursions and the boys are particularly positive about the recent appointment of two tutors, whose main brief is to expand upon activity provision. Whilst a number of boarders report frustration at being unable to access local sports facilities, the head of boarding states this can be accommodated if requests are made.

Boarders comment positively with regards their relationships with staff. The nursing team and prefects are also described as excellent sources of support. Access to external individuals and

agencies has been clearly communicated and advertised to boarders who demonstrate a sound understanding as to how they can access support outside of the school if they need to.

The school has taken an active response to the recommendation made from the previous inspection with regards equality and diversity training. Staff are sensitive to the specific cultural needs and backgrounds and good support is in place for those needing additional support for whom English is not their first language. Boarders are particularly positive that they are now required to attend fewer Cathedral services and parental requests for children to be supported to attend other religious services are being accommodated.

Boarding houses are suitably furnished and equipped with safe recreational areas, including games' rooms, televisions, DVD players and music systems. Boarders further benefit by having appropriate study areas within the houses.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Forums aimed at obtaining the views and opinions of boarders have developed and improved since the last inspection. Whilst mixed views are expressed by boarders in terms of the effects and outcomes of such meetings, the majority offer positive comments about house meetings, the school council and food committee.

Boarding staff and tutors contact parents routinely to discuss academic reports and any other matters. A number of parents say they would appreciate a more structured approach to receiving boarding updates, in line with the clear communication they receive about academic matters. Boarders say that are able to contact their families regularly and in private. For those with parents overseas, improvements to internet facilities has had a positive impact in this regard.

New boarders are in receipt of a sound induction programme which supports them to readily settle into the boarding regime. They say the staff and prefects really help them and although they are provided with a mentor, they may not meet this person until after their first few weeks.

Boarders say they enjoy positive relationships with staff across the whole school. They are confident to seek support and the two new tutors have been particularly well received.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders' money and personal possessions are being suitably protected. This has improved significantly due to all of the boys being provided with locks to their bedroom doors. Staff hold and distribute pocket money and records of amounts tally. These records are signed by staff but not the boarders.

The girls' accommodation exceeds the national minimum standards for boarding schools. Bedrooms are spacious, well maintained and have en suite facilities. Whilst the boys' house is significantly poorer in comparison, much work has been completed over the last year to address this shortfall. Funding has been secured and work has already commenced to bring this house in line with the same level of facilities as the girls' house.

Boarders report inconsistently with regards the action taken in response to reporting maintenance concerns. Whilst some say immediate action is taken, others report lengthy delays

and this is further exacerbated by the lack of detail held within the maintenance books. A rolling programme of mattress replacement is in place and similarly a number of boarders report no issues whilst others complain of theirs being uncomfortable.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Staff, pupils and parents are well informed of the school's philosophy and ethos through appropriate written material, which is subject to ongoing review and amendment. Information for parents in a variety of languages may be accessed on line, however, hard copies of documents may also be requested.

School records and risk assessments remain in place and are currently being reviewed and updated. Current gaps present potential safety hazards and these such records have been identified by the school as a priority to update and improve upon. Whilst monitoring systems are in place, there remains a reliance, in some instances, upon informal measures being used. This compromises the ability to evidence patterns and trends and ultimately, any remedial action being taken as a result. A crises plan is in place and this explores a range of foreseeable problems, detailing the measures the school will take to minimise disruption and difficulties for those accommodated.

Adequate staffing levels are in place to ensure boarders are safely supervised. Boarders feel secure because they know how and who to contact during the night if they require assistance. Boarding staff receive clear descriptions of their roles and responsibilities, however, other staff, for example administrative personnel, whose responsibilities impact upon the boarding provision are not as clear. Relevant training courses for the boarding team are on offer and these are further explored during the annual appraisal process. Within this, boarding duties are being reviewed, however, there is no clear separate focus specifically dedicated to this key role.

Staff with boarding duties demonstrate a keen commitment to provide the best service possible and are led by a head of boarding, and the senior school head teacher, who in turn work very hard offer clear leadership and support to the boarding team. There is also a school governor who retains a particular lead with regards the boarding provision.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Since the last inspection, clearer and specific training and guidance has been provided for the boarding team, albeit the newest recruits have yet to receive this. Staff demonstrate an improved awareness as to the specific presenting needs of those boarders from overseas, those with specific religious and ethnic backgrounds and those for whom English is a second language.

As previously stated within this report, the school has recently taken a degree of responsibility with regards guardianship and host family arrangements. The arrangements in place are not sufficient so as to fully protect the welfare of those accommodated and the school is now fully aware of the arrangements it must make if these arrangements are to continue.

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 audits of medication held and administered within the boarding houses are up to date and accurate (NMS 15)
- ensure the school's PSHE programme accurately reflects sufficient time being dedicated to the core subjects across all Year groups (NMS 6)
- ensure welfare plans are written and implemented with regards boarders' individual welfare needs outside of those which are predominantly health related (NMS 7)
- ensure new staff receiving child protection training before they commence with their duties (NMS 3)
- show greater evidence with regards the ongoing monitoring of sanctions and punishments within the boarding houses (NMS 4)
- ensure fire drills occur every term and that records of such drills continue detailed information with regards the 'action required' column and to further ensure the weekly testing of appliances and systems occurs throughout school holidays (NMS 26)
- ensure the school remains clear and explicit with regards its role pertaining to the appointment of guardians (NMS 22)
- ensure generic premises risk assessments include all areas within the boarding houses (NMS 47)
- ensure all staff receive training with regards equality and diversity (NMS 18)
- ensure boarders are fully aware of the local facilities for hobbies and leisure activities available to them (NMS 11)
- make arrangements for new boarders to meet their mentors as soon as they join the school (NMS 21)
- ensure boarders sign their own pocket money records upon receipt (NMS 20)
- further explore boarders' comments in relation to showers, mattresses and heating and take appropriate remedial action (NMS 40)
- ensure all of the records and risk assessments described under this standard be formally reviewed in line with the prescribed timescales (NMS 23)
- ensure all staff members throughout the school whose role impacts upon boarding are fully aware of their own responsibilities (NMS 8)

- ensure the appraisal system fully explores the boarding role (NMS 34)
- ensure any use of lodgings fully meets the criteria described under this standard. (NMS 51)