

St Hugh's School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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Inspector	Wilfried Maxfield
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Head/ Principal	Andrew Nott
Nominated person	Andrew Nott
Date of last inspection	27/09/2007

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About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good: this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory: this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate: this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

St Hugh's is a well established preparatory school offering boarding facilities for seven to 13 year olds. It is situated in a rural location close to Faringdon, in the south west of Oxfordshire. St Hugh's is a co-educational facility where there is a flexible approach to boarding. Many day pupils take the opportunity for boarding one or more nights with an increase in nights for those pupils in the upper years. There are no full time boarders. The boarding facilities are such that the maximum number of boarders is 31 boys and 22 girls. The flexi-boarding contributes to the school's sense of a community and day pupils are fully integrated, often remaining at the school to join in high tea, prep and activities before going home later in the evening.

The boarding accommodation is located in the main building of the school and managed by resident house parents, supported by a team of matrons.

A board of governors administers St Hugh's as a charitable educational trust. It is an Anglican foundation but children of all denominations are welcome.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection of the school. The reason for this visit was to look at the progress the boarding school has made with the eight recommendations made at the last key inspection conducted in September 2007. All of the key national minimum standards for boarding schools were inspected and evaluated.

As part of the inspection process boarders and parents were offered the opportunity to anonymously complete pre-inspection questionnaires. A full return of questionnaires was received from boarders. Seven questionnaires were returned by parents. Views expressed by boarders and parents rated the boarding provision very positively and significantly contributed to the good and outstanding comments and judgements contained in this report.

The being healthy, enjoying and achieving and positive contribution outcomes for boarders at the school have been rated as outstanding. All other areas are judged to be good. The overall quality of boarding was judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection. This rating has now been raised to good.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last full inspection a total of eight recommendations were made. They required improvement in the procedures for the recording, dispensing and

monitoring of medication; a review of the accommodation for those boarders who are ill and for the school to ensure that all staff receive appropriate levels of child protection training. In addition, the school was to implement a fire risk assessment and introduce comprehensive risk assessments for the premises, grounds and activities. The school was also asked to arrange for boarders to be able to contact and have access to a person independent of the school and review the recruitment and vetting of boarding staff. Finally, it was recommended that the school ensured the privacy of its boarders.

It is noted that progress has been made in all of these areas. Six of the eight recommendations have now been fully complied with. The recommendations relating to the recruitment and vetting of boarding staff need one further action. This relates to the checking of possible gaps in employment as detailed in this report. Issues relating to the privacy arrangements also need further attention and improvement. Details are outlined in the body of this report.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school's teaching and boarding staff follow excellent guidance and a range of good policies and procedures designed to ensure the health and welfare of all pupils and boarders. Pupils benefit from a curriculum that contains a number of topics on health education and personal welfare and safety. Boarding staff are able to provide age appropriate responses to counter and prevent any possible risks to young people's health.

Children are provided with exceptional health care. Individual health planning and recording of health needs is outstanding. Detailed care plans are completed for pupils and boarders with particular health needs and notable medical conditions. There is excellent consultation with parents and their chosen doctor. Good networking includes all other professionals that might be involved. Specified staff are kept well informed about significant health issues and staff are able to implement responses and actions as directed by the head matron.

Actions to secure medical attention and treatments are effective and reflect the needs of the weekly and flexi-boarding arrangements. Subsequently, all of the boarders are registered with health practitioners local to their family homes. The school employs a very experienced head matron who competently oversees the systems for the safekeeping, recording and administration of prescription and non-prescription medication. These systems have been reviewed and improved since the last inspection. All staff involved in the administration of medication and who might need to be aware of particular health issues receive a full induction and continuous help and advice from the team of matrons.

The school ensures that staff are trained in first aid and that first aid equipment and boxes are widely available across the school and the boarding house. Boarders who are ill are well looked after. A specified sick bay is available and now complies with

the relevant standards. Boarders state that they feel safe, are regularly checked and monitored and are well cared for when ill. A central emergency call bell helps children alert staff in an emergency. A resident matron provides ready and rapid assistance. Boarders benefit from outstanding levels of support in times of stress and homesickness and with any other concerns and/or emotional and health related difficulties.

Boarders praise the school for the excellent quality of their meals. There is unanimous agreement that meals are tasty and outstanding with regards to the quality of the choice and the quantities provided. Children enjoy an excellent range of suitable snacks and drinks outside the set mealtimes. Outstanding levels of care are available for boarders' clothes and personal items. The team of matrons ensures that boarders' bedding and clothing is washed and maintained to the highest standard.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders feel protected and safe from bullying and do not report on any incidents. A wide range of comprehensive safeguarding policies are in place. Policies cover measures to prevent bullying and cyber-bullying and define electronic and all forms of digital bullying. Boarders are provided with clear information, guidance and rules when using the internet. Boarders are aware of the rules and boundaries and know how to protect themselves from potential harm.

The school follows good systems to ensure boarders' welfare is safeguarded and that they are protected from any form of neglect and abuse. Teaching and boarding staff benefit from good guidance and the leadership of a dedicated child protection officer. This member of staff has now updated the required training at a level reflecting this key role. Staff know how to raise any concerns. However, the school's child protection guidance does currently not specify the services provided by the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). A good programme of training in safeguarding is available to teachers and boarding staff at an appropriate level. Child protection induction training and regular refreshers are available to all staff and additional briefings are provided to the different staff teams. Prefects are trained using an excellent leadership training programme. All prefects are clear about the role of the school's designated child protection officer. However, not all feel well informed about the school's primary safeguarding systems and are not fully confident about what to do if they are confronted with a serious safeguarding concern by a pupil.

The school has a range of good policies and procedures on behaviour management which are implemented positively and effectively. Boarders know the school and boarding house rules and benefit from clear expectations. A wealth of relevant information is contained in the literature available to boarders. Policies include clear guidance on the school's preferred behaviour management practices and disciplinary procedures. The school prefers the use of positive guidance and the use of praise to support and enhance good behaviour. Boarders report that they feel always fairly

treated and that sanctions are rarely needed. Clear and appropriate records are maintained of any sanction given.

A comprehensive complaints procedure is made widely available to boarders and parents through a variety of publications. Boarders know how to complain and feel free to voice concerns. A suggestions box in the boarding house is available and regular discussions at weekly boarding meetings ensure good attention is given to boarders' worries and anxieties. No serious concerns have been recorded since the last boarding inspection. Complaints of a serious nature will be monitored by the headteacher and the school's governing body.

Boarders are protected from the risk of fire and know the emergency evacuation procedures. The school has commissioned comprehensive fire risk assessments for the premises, grounds and activities to ensure full compliance with the related legislation. Risk assessment documentation has been further extended and improved since the last inspection. A delegated member of staff ensures that emergency lighting, fire alarms and fire equipment are regularly tested.

Adequate and appropriate safety measures are provided for a wide range of activities. The school can evidence good control over high risk activities. Such activities are supervised by competent and trained members of staff.

Staff supervision of boarders is respectful of their privacy. Clear procedures ensure that staff supervision of boarders is not normally intrusive and that the boarders' privacy is paramount. Boarding staff are sensitive to gender issues and male staff do not supervise the female boarding areas. There is an expectation that staff will always knock on a dormitory door before entering. However, some boarders advise that this is not always the practice and some staff do not consistently do this.

The school's recruitment and vetting procedures apply safe and consistent recruitment practices. For appointments of candidates vetted since the last inspection the elements of standard 38.2. have been rigorously applied. Staff records contain a contract of employment, enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check, two verified references and evidence of qualifications. The school is fully aware that it is additionally subject to safe recruitment practices as detailed in Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education guidance. Employment histories are on file but currently gaps in employment histories are not checked in every case.

There are good systems in place to protect boarders from unsupervised contact with adults who have not been checked, including the supervision of all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises. The boarding house has appropriate security measures in place to protect boarders from public intrusion. Parents and all other visitors are escorted and supervised at all times. Boarders confirmed that they feel safe and well protected in the boarding house. The school implements an effective system of risk assessment to identify, monitor and reduce the risks to boarders. Sleeping, living and recreational areas, both indoors and in the school grounds, are risk free.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are provided with an outstanding range of activities. The Clubs and Activities Handbook provide an excellent overview over the widest possible choice. All boarders agree that this is a particular strengths of the school making each stay enjoyable and fun. The school provides excellent access and opportunities for pupils across the whole school to take part in activities outside the normal school day, such as sports, craft and art clubs, IT and cheerleader/dance classes.

All pupils benefit from an outstanding network of support. Boarders state clearly that they have a range of staff to talk to in case of a concern or a personal problem and boarders know that they can also approach an independent listener. Houseparents and boarding house tutors are praised by all for their ongoing care and personal attention to each boarder's needs. The school has a Christian foundation with a strong overall ethos of enhancing equality and integration, cultural understanding, tolerance and non-discrimination.

Boarders have the use of a range of safe recreational areas and are provided with appropriate study provision. The boarding facility contains a common room and boarders have the use of the school library, an IT suite and the sports hall. There are also excellent outdoor sports facilities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are enabled and encouraged to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school. Formal opportunities form part of the overall structure of the boarding house week. These includes regular house meetings and discussion groups. Boarders enjoy regular weekly and informal contact and discussions with the houseparents. The school council includes a representative from the boarding house.

Staff ensure that day-to-day boarding provides excellent opportunities for pupils to maintain contact with their families and friends. Boarders state that they write letters, emails and occasionally use the landline telephone provided. Weekly boarders use their own mobile phones, which are given to them at appropriate times of the day or early evening. If so agreed, the house parents will provide families with frequent updates regarding a child's welfare and progress.

Excellent written guidance is provided to inform parents and children about the boarding provision, its rules, structures and routines. Positive, trusting and respectful relationships were observed between staff and children. Boarders report that that the overall atmosphere is fun and relaxed and that they trust and feel safe with all staff.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Good levels of protection are provided for boarders' personal possessions. Children do not report any missing or stolen items. Boarders state that they love the boarding house and that it provides a homely and welcoming environment. Bedrooms are well furnished, of a good size and are suitable to the number, ages and needs of the boarders accommodated. Good communal space is provided to meet the individual and collective needs of boarders. There is good provision of baths, showers, toilets and washbasins. The school provides boarders with good changing and shower facilities during the day. All of the accommodation is maintained to a good standard and is kept clean and comfortable.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A suitable statement of the school's boarding principles and practice is available to parents, boarders and staff. A number of specific handbooks are provided to suit the needs of specific groups. Core documents include a wide range of key policies and are also accessible on the school's excellent website. All staff have a clear understanding of their role and benefit from the clear management and leadership of boarding in the school. The school has well-documented health and safety procedures and risk assessments. A comprehensive crisis management policy further provides guidance for dealing with an unforeseen major incident and identifies ways to protect the welfare of all pupils. The systems for monitoring and reviewing of records, risk assessments and policies is good and contribute to boarders' welfare.

There are good levels of staff supervising boarders, sufficient in number and deployment for the age, number and needs of boarders, and the locations and activities involved. Duty rotas demonstrate good levels of staff supervision. Boarders are aware which staff are on duty and state that there are always staff on duty to which they can relate and talk to. Gap students are not left alone in charge of children.

The school is organised in a manner that ensures that boarders receive a good standard of care and accommodation. Written documentation reflects and supports the practices that are implemented. There are clear arrangements for the management of staff. Boarding staff state that they feel well supported. Staff benefit from the school's systematic and effective approach to training, supervision and performance management.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school is committed towards improving and promoting equality and diversity on an ongoing basis. The individual needs of boarders are well known, promoted and respected. The school successfully promotes an open and trusting environment ensuring children's rights are

paramount. The school's positive ethos continues to attract and support families and children with a range of differing needs.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- update child protection guidance. In particular inform staff about the procedures for raising issues with the designated member of staff or the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), in the event of a concern, and ensure that boarders and their parents are informed about the possibility to report to the LADO (NMS 3.4; 5.4)
- ensure prefects know how to act if they hear allegations of abuse and/or serious concerns from pupils (NMS 13.4)
- ensure that each boarder's personal privacy is respected at all times (NMS 37)
- ensure that all vetting includes an explanation of any gaps in an applicant's CV, and records of the reasons for any gaps are made. (NMS 38.2.)