

Vinehall School

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 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

Vinehall is a co-educational day and boarding school for children aged between two and 13. It is set in 47 acres in the Sussex countryside. Although the school is centred on a 1830's country house there are a wide range of modern facilities such as: a purpose built theatre; an indoor sports hall with an adjoining indoor heated swimming pool; a Millennium Building providing classrooms; an Information Communication Technology (ICT) suite and a library.

Vinehall School started as a country preparatory school in 1938 when the school opened with six local children. There are currently approximately 38 full time boarders and 30 temporary (flexi) boarders. Most boarders are local children but a few are from overseas or other parts of the country. The boarding accommodation is located in the main school building, with segregated boys and girls dormitories. Boarders are accommodated in dormitories of between 5 and 10 children in single or bunk beds. Two house parents and their two young children live on site in the boarding accommodation.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This announced full welfare inspection was undertaken to fulfil the three year inspection requirement for boarding schools. All of the key national minimum standards were inspected. The health provision for children who board is outstanding; there are excellent facilities and care when children are unwell as well as robust measures to ensure the nurse, doctor and boarding staff meet children's health needs well. Suitable consents are in place although they do not specify that permission is given for the administration of first aid. There are very good catering arrangements and good boarding accommodation. Staff believe children's views are important and ensure there are different avenues available for them to voice any concerns. They are suitably trained and provide excellent support whereby children can develop and achieve as individuals. However, not all those staff involved with boarding have a job description that fully reflects their role.

Improvements since the last inspection

The last full welfare inspection of the school was undertaken in January 2008. One recommendation was made to ensure that the two worn chairs in one of the boys dormitories were repaired or replaced. This has been fully met as all the furniture is now in a reasonable state of repair.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Staff provide excellent support for children, by ensuring their health is promoted when they board. Although children learn about personal, social and health education within the school curriculum, the boarding staff provide additional support by discussing the risks associated with smoking, alcohol, drugs or sexual activity with them, when appropriate. The nurse and school medical officer are also readily available whereby the children can discuss any concerns they may have. A fundamental ethos across the school is that children's well-being is paramount and there are comprehensive policies in place to guide staff to respond in the event of any such substances being misused.

Comprehensive medical information forms are completed when children join the school and again when they move from the pre-preparatory to the junior school. Appropriate additional information and consents are then gathered prior to them boarding. All medical information is safely stored and accessible to staff on a need to know basis.

Effective arrangements ensure that boarding staff are appropriately trained and competent to administer first aid and treat minor illnesses. Boarders are registered with a local General Practitioner (GP) and parents then choose whether they see a local optician and dentist. They also consent that emergency and medical treatment, as well as appropriate non-prescription medications, may be administered to boarders when required. However, the consents do not stipulate the administration of first aid. The school's nurse who is registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) then oversees the management of any health issues. She links closely with the local GP for her own professional guidance and consultation. Protocols and care plans are appropriately shared on the school's electronic information system. For those children with particular medical needs, excellent communication between the nurse and the boarding staff ensures that prescription and non-prescription 'household' medications are appropriately administered and recorded. Medications are stored in a locked cupboard and well recorded when administered. Some children can access their own medication in the dispensary and self administer under supervision; although informally assessed as competent, this assessment is not recorded. This risks confusion as to how competent the individual is or whether they fully understand how to manage their medication safely; however, it has minimal impact on the children's welfare while their medications remain in the dispensary.

There are very good arrangements for any boarder who is ill. If feeling unwell, staff arrange for children to go home when possible. Alternatively there are two 'San Rooms' where they can be cared for by the nurse and boarding staff. Staff are mindful of the risk of the spread of infection; the 'San Rooms' have their own toilet and wash facilities and all laundry is extremely well managed. Excellent records are made of the care children are given when unwell; similarly, signed records are maintained of all significant illnesses, accidents and injuries.

The catering provision at the school is very good and the children are positive when discussing the food provided. They prefer the lunches to the evening meal but enthuse over breakfasts as 'the best'. A varied nutritional menu with plenty of choice is developed for each half term. The food is locally sourced, organic and freedom food whenever possible; 'meat free Mondays' was an idea put forward by the school's food committee which has been adopted recently and enjoyed. The school has been accredited with a bronze achievement award from 'food for life' and are working towards attaining the silver award. The catering staff are all well trained and the last environmental health report awarded five stars; there are no outstanding recommendations for the school's catering provision. The school is imaginative in the way it explores multi-cultural foods and any special dietary needs are accommodated. Meal times are happy, sociable occasions, held in the school's spacious dining room.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school's policies and procedures for managing bullying are robust and well known to staff, parents and children. Staff are alert to any behaviour that suggests a child is being singled out, teased or criticised and any concerns about individuals are well communicated. Very good behaviour was observed during the inspection and children report that incidents of bullying are very rare. They understand that there are incidental disagreements but believe any ongoing intimidation would not be tolerated and would be dealt with swiftly. In addition, the risks with electronic bullying are also well addressed by the school. Their policy for managing bullying includes the need to ensure children remain safe when communicating electronically. A filter system ensures there is rigorous scrutiny of the sites accessed on computers and the use of mobile phones is well monitored, greatly reducing the opportunity for them to be used inappropriately; this is balanced well with the need for boarders to communicate with their parents, family or friends.

Similarly, there are policies and procedures to protect children from abuse. A suitably trained, senior staff member is the designated lead for safeguarding. By facilitating a good rolling programme all staff are trained in child protection, either during in-service training or individually when they join the school. There are clear procedures for managing child protection issues and the school has the required guidance available to reference. In addition, the designated lead meets regularly with other key staff to share any pastoral concerns and liaises regularly with the local authority.

Behaviour is very well managed at the school so the incidence of poor behaviour is minimal. Staff place considerable emphasis on responding positively to good behaviour and ensure any punishments are consistent and not excessive. Boarders are enthusiastic about the dormitory and individual rewards they can earn, but are equally aware there are consequences for poor behaviour. Overall, they believe that staff are fair. Good monitoring of detentions within the school enables any trends and themes of behaviour to be identified and well managed. Any serious incidents are managed by the headteacher and he is fully involved with major punishments

administered.

Children confirmed that they can raise a concern and they believe they are listened to. They particularly identify the matrons as people they can chat with; but equally they know they can use the comments box or the 'concerns' button which is on each computer, particularly if they wish to remain anonymous. These are regularly checked and followed up well. Equally, details of external organisations such as 'Child Line' are well publicised. Similarly, the school responds positively to any queries raised by parents and information about how they can raise issues is readily available. Although there have not been any, the headteacher is clear that he would co-ordinate the investigation of any serious complaint so he could monitor any trends and frequencies.

Regular procedures are undertaken to protect children from the risk of fire. Appropriate checks of emergency lighting, fire fighting equipment and fire alarms are carried out; staff are well trained and there is always a trained fire marshal on duty. The fire evacuation procedure is well displayed and fire drills are practised during boarding time each term; they are well evaluated to ensure they remain effective. The priority recommendations following a fire authority inspection earlier this year have been completed. All the staff and young people spoken with during the inspection confirmed they knew the action to take in the event of a fire alarm.

Staff respect children's privacy. They are readily available to monitor and care for the boarders but are not intrusive. Overall, children believe their privacy is respected although some feel that boarding in a dormitory means they sometimes lack privacy.

Very good processes are undertaken for the selection and vetting of all staff who care for the children who board. Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures are sought and references are required prior to employment. The school employs gap students and similar checks, as well as a certificate of good conduct or equivalent, are obtained prior to them helping with boarders. In addition, an enhanced CRB disclosure is sought for any adult who lives on site who is not employed by the school.

There are very good arrangements to protect boarders from unsupervised contact with adults who have not been appropriately checked, as well as to ensure the boarding accommodation is secure from public intrusion. All visitors to the school are required to sign in at reception and to wear a visitors badge; they are then well supervised while on site. In addition, parts of the school's grounds are used during the week by clubs whose members are staff, or that have a direct link with the school.

The boarding accommodation is accessed via the school's main entrance hall and is not a thoroughfare for children, staff or visitors. Once boarding starts, children are discreetly but very well supervised and there are good security arrangements for the buildings. In addition, no adults can stay overnight in the boarding accommodation, without permission from the headteacher. As stated previously, all staff are checked through the CRB when recruited to work within the boarding area; however, similar

checks have not been undertaken for all long standing employees, employed prior to the requirement for such recruitment checks.

Health and safety is high on the school agenda. There are appropriate maintenance contracts and staff undertake the required safety checks. There are many effective health and safety policies as well as risk assessments, to identify and reduce risk for boarders. Risks to health and safety are rigorously addressed by the school and all out of bounds areas are known to boarders.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders take part in a wide range of activities when they board. Well supervised active sports as well as sedentary activities are arranged. They say they generally have sufficient time for rest and relaxation, with free time when they can be quiet or pursue a pastime of their choice. Computers are available and the consequences of inappropriate use are known to boarders. In addition, there are effective safeguarding systems to minimise the risk of children accessing inappropriate material on the internet.

Excellent communication between all staff involved with boarding ensures that welfare concerns about children are shared, enabling a cohesive plan of support and care to be introduced. Staff encourage children to discuss any anxieties or concerns with them and feedback from boarders and their parents confirms that they strongly believe staff help and support them. They comment that boarding is, 'really helpful - good learning', 'fantastic' and 'a real community'. The school's ethos is to enable children to speak with whoever they feel most comfortable with. But each child has a designated member of staff as their boarding mentor, to whom they can turn for personal guidance or support. In addition, details of 'out of school listeners' are also publicised so children can contact them in confidence. Similarly they can use the 'concerns box' or a computer's 'red button' to share anxieties.

Boarders and staff believe that difference is valued, which facilitates respect across the school for children with different ethnic backgrounds. English is the first language of the majority of boarders, but there are excellent arrangements and specific support for those who need to study English as an additional language. Policies refer to equality of opportunity and how the school will manage any incident of discrimination. Although historically Christian, it embraces those from differing religious faiths. Some children require special diets although not usually for cultural or religious reasons; their needs are well met within the excellent catering provision. Staff are alert to those boarders who struggle to integrate and ensure they are well supported to prevent them being isolated.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There was extremely positive feedback about boarding through questionnaires prior to the inspection. This was then endorsed by boarders during the inspection who also confirmed that the school considers their views to be important. Boarders feel well represented at the different school forums and believe they have the opportunity to contribute their views in a variety of ways. These include more formal forums such as school council, food committee and prefect meetings with the headteacher, as well as many informal avenues.

Boarders confirm that the school enables them to keep in private contact with their parents and families. They can have mobile phones, provided they are not used during lessons, at formal occasions or overnight. Pay phones and e-mail contact are also readily available and one computer is enabled with 'Skype'. Similarly, the headteacher and staff believe good communication is essential; they communicate promptly with parents and guardians about any significant welfare concerns relating to their child, either by telephone or through e-mail. As previously reported, the numbers of help lines and outside contact numbers that the boarders may call if they are distressed are well publicised

The 'Boarding Handbooks' provide comprehensive information for any child who wishes to board at the school, as well as for their parents. Children confirm they felt looked after when they boarded for the first time. They get help from those who have boarded previously which enables them to have a 'buddy' and feel less isolated. 'Taster nights' have also proved to be a positive experience for children. Excellent communication amongst the staff ensures any child who is initially anxious about being away from home is very well supported.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school's policy of discouraging children from having money or valuable personal items with them reduces the risk or opportunity for items to go missing. They can each purchase a lockable trunk where they can keep personal possessions by their bed, and they all have a locker within the school changing room. The school culture is one of trust and mutual respect whereby petty theft is rare. In the event, it is promptly and effectively managed by staff.

The boarding accommodation at the school is light, warm and well ventilated and the boarders' dormitories are welcoming and comfortable. Some of the furniture is old and worn but remains serviceable and suitable. There is a mix of single and bunk beds in each dormitory and the boarding accommodation is divided to provide separate areas for boys and girls. Each boarder has a pin-board by their bed, enabling them to personalise their own bed space and there are good shower, bathing and toilet facilities. All the dormitories are kept very clean and well

maintained by a team of additional staff who work across the school. Although the dormitories would not be easily accessible for a child with mobility difficulties, staff are clear that if there was a requirement within boarding, arrangements would be made to accommodate a child's individual needs. The house staff have their own sleeping accommodation within the boarding area.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

There is comprehensive up to date information available for boarders, parents and staff, that clearly outlines the school's boarding principles and practice.

The school offers full time and temporary boarding to accommodate varying numbers of boys and girls. All the accommodation is furnished to the same standard and the boys and girls have access to similar facilities. The boarding provision is well coordinated by the head of boarding and his wife. They are resident house parents and are supported by resident tutors, matrons and gap students. All the boarding staff are experienced and suitably trained to ensure that boarders' welfare is safeguarded and promoted. They provide very good levels of supervision for the boarders who are clear about which member of staff is responsible for them at all times.

Staff communicate effectively with the head of boarding to ensure he is aware of any incidents, accidents or any concerns raised. The house parents then meet regularly with the headteacher. Therefore, although there are no formal processes in place to monitor incidents, behaviour management and complaints, at least twice a term trends can be identified so that appropriate action is taken. In addition, key staff are identified to monitor accidents and to ensure risk assessments remain relevant; decisions are made following discussions at the monthly health and safety meetings which include a member of the governor body. The headteacher then includes any boarding issues as part of his report to the governors each term, enabling them to monitor the welfare provision in the school and consider boarding needs in any developments.

Staff involved with boarding initially undertake an induction which includes training in child protection. Although they understand their role within boarding and who they are accountable to, they do not all have job descriptions which reflect their boarding responsibilities. All staff have annual appraisals which take account of any specific boarding training as part of their professional development. All staff have access to information to guide them in the school's approach to boarding, as well as how to safeguard children and promote their welfare.

The promotion of equality and diversity at the school is outstanding. Staff promote respect amongst all the children; those from differing backgrounds and other religious faiths are welcomed and individual dietary needs are well catered for. Staff are alert to those children who struggle to integrate and ensure support is in place to prevent them from being isolated. Inclusive practice underpins the pastoral care

provided. Staff are aware of the expectations and pressures that may be placed on boarders and promote the need for a healthy work life balance for them.

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...

- ensure that the consents obtained from parents include permission for the administration of first aid (NMS 15.14)
- ensure all staff with boarding duties have job descriptions reflecting those duties and lines of accountability. (NMS 34)