

Oundle School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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Inspector	Lucy Martin
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Setting address	Oundle School, Bursars Office, Church Street, Oundle, PETERBOROUGH, PE8 4EE
Telephone number	01832 277120
Email	admissions@oundleschool.org.uk
Registered person	Oundle School
Head/ Principal	Charles Martin Peter Bush
Nominated person	Charles Martin Peter Bush
Date of last inspection	13/03/2008

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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

Oundle School is an independent co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years of age and above. It is situated near Peterborough in the small market town of Oundle. The school's buildings are dispersed throughout the town and include one junior boarding house and 13 senior boarding houses.

At the time of this inspection there were 1113 pupils at the school, of whom 861 were full boarders. The school has termly boarding only and does not operate weekly or flexi boarding.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The school was given short notice of this inspection at which all the key standards identified by Ofsted were inspected.

There are substantial strengths in the quality of provision and care for boarders at Oundle School. All the areas inspected were found to be outstanding and the school has many examples of exemplary practice.

The welfare of boarders is very firmly at the centre of the school. The leadership of pastoral care and the boarding houses is exceptionally strong and there is a firm commitment to continuous improvement. All the staff work cohesively and effectively together to ensure that the welfare of boarders is prioritised. Health needs are well met and the school is committed to making sure that boarders are kept safe. Boarders feel well looked after by highly committed staff and there are a number of people, including external professionals, to whom they can talk. Boarders feel they can take issues to any number of people, confident that they will be taken seriously and addressed.

There are comprehensive systems in place to induct new boarders into the school and there is a commitment to promoting equality and diversity, ensuring that all aspects of planning and practice are highly personalised to meet the individual needs of boarders. The boarding houses provide high quality accommodation and there is a varied programme of activities to meet the interests of boarders. Boarders enjoy boarding and there are excellent relationships between boarders and staff.

Boarders reported that there is some variation in the quality and quantity of food provided. In some houses, boarders are entirely satisfied with the food, in other houses less so. It is a recommendation of this report that this issue is addressed in consultation with boarders.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the school has made significant improvements relating to the care of boarders. There is excellent self-awareness and reflection of practice with a strong commitment to consolidation and further improvement.

At the last inspection in 2008, there were eight recommendations made, of which seven related to health or medical matters. The school has undertaken an excellent amount of work to ensure that all these matters have been comprehensively addressed. Improvements in this area include the development of high-class welfare and health plans for vulnerable pupils with specific support needs. All house matrons have received training in first aid and in the safe administration of medication. Each house has a secure medication cabinet in a surgery area and there is a quality assurance system in place. The eighth recommendation made at the last inspection was to ensure that all staff understand the role of the school's designated child protection officers. This has been met. There is a consistent and clear understanding among all staff regarding their role.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health and well-being needs are being actively promoted through established and effective services. There is a nurse available throughout the day based at a well-resourced sanatorium. A surgery is held every weekday and during sports on a Saturday by doctors from a nearby practice with whom they work in close partnership. This health service is further enhanced by the availability of male and female doctors, an independent counsellor, physiotherapist, asthma nurse and on-call nurse cover. This ensures boarders' medical needs are identified, monitored and met.

There is proactive communication between the medical centre and boarding team. There is a matron based in each boarding house and they are the first port of call for any pupil who is feeling ill. Each house has a sick bay or the facility to enable boarders to stay in their own boarding house when unwell. The boarders value the matrons, who play an integral part of house life and ensure they are sensitively cared for. Boarders stated: 'House matron is very good at keeping the house running smoothly'; 'matron is awesome, the best'; and 'our matron is fantastic – she really cares for us both physically and psychologically.'

Boarders are being supported through guidance, education and positive role models to lead healthy lifestyles. There is an established personal, social, health and education programme (PSHE) that is delivered through tutors, academic staff and external lecturers. This programme is enhanced by regular training for staff that has recently included how to manage stress and dealing with anger and grief.

This school demonstrates a strong commitment to developing the health, nutrition

and well-being of boarders. All meals are served in the homely environment of the boarding houses. These social occasions are valued by boarders and staff alike, strengthen their sense of community within the house and promote the school's family values. The menus and the chefs are rotated between kitchens to ensure that there is variation. At lunch and supper, there is one main choice provided, with a vegetarian option and a salad. In inspection surveys and discussions boarders' views were thoughtful and considered. They felt strongly that there was still work to be done to achieve a diverse and consistent quality and quantity of meals. In some houses, boarders are entirely satisfied with the food, in other houses less so. There are systems in place to capture boarder feedback on meals served. The school senior management team acknowledges this feedback and is committed to making sure the varied needs of the boarders are consistently met.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school has comprehensive and robust measures in place to ensure that boarders are kept safe from harm. Bullying is an ongoing discussion topic for staff and pupils both formally in PSHE and tutorials, and informally in houses. Boarders confirm that any bullying incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively. Countering bullying is a development plan theme for this year which has raised awareness, and training sessions in topics such as cyber bullying have taken place.

Standards of pupil behaviour are high and boarders are aware of expectations and are generally keen to live up to them. The school has clear and published rules and good behaviour is positively endorsed. Significant disciplinary incidents are reported to the director of pastoral care who keeps a central record. There is a clear pastoral element to the disciplinary process at senior management level and boarders report that the system is generally fair. Monitoring of major incidents takes place and there has been a marked reduction this year in incidents involving alcohol.

Boarders are encouraged to raise concerns either formally or informally and the complaints procedure is published on house notice boards. Any complaints received are thoroughly investigated and recorded.

Staff show comprehensive awareness regarding safeguarding and the role of the child protection officers at the school. Boarders feel safe as a result of a comprehensive safeguarding training programme in place for all staff. This includes a number of external courses for the child protection officers, and the local authority has provided training for staff at the school. All safeguarding incidents are well recorded and referred to the local authority when appropriate.

There are robust staff recruitment checks completed before new staff start work at the school. A number of school staff have completed training in 'safer recruitment' and are knowledgeable about safeguarding requirements. Staff files clearly document the checks carried out and no staff start work in the boarding houses before all checks have been successfully completed.

Health and safety matters are taken seriously with thorough fire safety procedures in place. Boarders are protected through regular fire drills at different times and some drills incorporate various scenarios to ensure that boarders are aware of alternative emergency escape routes. Fire training is undertaken by all staff. Other checks including gas and electrical safety are routinely undertaken.

Excellent security measures are in place which include closed circuit television, security lighting, alarm systems and fob or key-coded entrances to each boarding house. The school employs a professional security team and there is an excellent working relationship with the local police. As a result of these and other measures, security incidents have significantly reduced in number.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have an excellent range and choice of activities outside of teaching time. Over 100 different options are on offer and there is a programme of art, musical and theatrical events for cultural enrichment. Tutors monitor participation to ensure that pupils are not over committed. Outstanding facilities are provided for a wide range of team and individual sports, many of which are available in the evenings and at weekends. Similar availability is offered in music, art, drama and more individual pastimes. There is also an extensive programme of voluntary projects within the community, many of which involve helping elderly residents, children and the disabled. Boarders take every opportunity to participate in new and/or stimulating opportunities and activities in which they feel able to achieve their full potential.

Boarders receive outstanding levels of personal support from a range of adults at the school. Staff support to boarders is a significant strength of the welfare provision in this school. There is an effective, joined-up approach and pupils feel very confident that they can always find someone to talk to. Boarders value the support networks and feel that their concerns are listened to. There is a warm rapport and meaningful interactions in the boarding houses. Boarders value their relationships with the array of staff and individuals and use such terms as 'matron is five star', 'our house master is great' and 'house friends are easy to talk to'. Parents are also extremely positive about the support that house staff provide to their children. In addition to housemasters/mistresses, assistants, matrons and house tutors, most houses have 'house friends' who visit weekly and provide an extra person boarders can talk to. The school also has a counsellor who provides support to pupils. Bookings can be made anonymously via the school's intranet system.

The school's child protection and welfare group has an effective impact on the support and welfare of pupils. The group comprises the school doctors, the school counsellor, the two child protection officers and is chaired by the director of pastoral care. It meets regularly and every pupil requiring support is discussed. There is excellent teamwork and use of professional expertise. Concerns are reported early, interventions are timely and support structures are drawn up with the inclusion of

the pupil. These practical welfare and health plans are implemented by the boarding and teaching staff.

The school is an inclusive community with boarders from diverse cultures included as members of the house. There are a number of students from overseas who say that they are integrated well into school and boarding life. Equality and diversity are an integral part of the school. There is a breadth of organisational approaches, from developing the role of Head of International Admissions, excellent input for all young people in PHSE, to the general culture of the school which is based on respect, tolerance, acceptance and integration. Differences are positively identified, respected, responded to and very much celebrated. Pupils show high levels of understanding and tolerance of each other. As one boarder said: 'I am looked after well and I am accepted as myself.' There is a clear commitment and emphasis on meeting identified needs in conjunction with educating and enabling young people to understand and celebrate difference.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' contribution to the running of the school and boarding houses is outstanding. There is an excellent range of channels available to boarders to express their views and feelings. They feel they can make comments about the running of the houses, give their ideas and influence change. The recently introduced personal appraisal and self-assessment process where pupils give their views electronically is a useful addition to the other methods whereby feedback is obtained. Boarders gave examples such as change of prep time, alterations to food menus and house sports equipment where changes have been made as a result of their comments.

Links with boarders' parents and families are seen as an indispensable part of the support and development of boarders at this school. The school demonstrates a very positive attitude to boarders' families and promotes parental contact in achieving outstanding outcomes for their children. House staff are in regular contact with parents and they are invited to house and school events such as house meals, parent receptions and sporting events.

The introduction and induction of new boarders to the school is sensitively managed by boarding staff in partnership with parents. There is one mixed gender junior house which accommodates the youngest two years but new boarders are welcomed to the school in all years. There are clear formal processes for the induction of new boarders including comprehensive written information, a guide written by boarders, taster sessions and a 'buddy' support system prior to and when children first arrive at the houses. The process includes existing boarders and provides a meaningful and sensitive approach to young people and the importance of them settling and feeling happy at the school. New junior boarders have a busy timetable of activities which is designed to keep them occupied. All young people say they settled well and quickly into their boarding houses. As one new boarder said: 'I think my house is very good because if I am homesick I always have someone to talk to and can always contact

home. There is always lots to do and if I ever have a problem, I feel I can talk to any tutor or housemaster/mistress.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Oundle school operates a traditional boarding house system that is successfully providing boarders with secure, stable homes and welcoming environments. There are 14 boarding houses: five for girls, eight for boys and one mixed gender. All senior houses are vertical, in that boarders of all ages are accommodated in the house.

There are established strategic plans, which ensure a rolling programme of maintenance and refurbishment. All the houses retain their own individuality and character, for example, some are purpose-built boarding houses, while others are old town houses. They range in quality with some areas identified on the strategic plan for refurbishment in the future, and other areas recently refurbished to a high standard.

All houses are cleaned and maintained to a high standard by dedicated teams of ancillary and maintenance staff. Boarders can choose to decorate their bedrooms, which can help to maintain a homely environment. Many bedrooms are personalised, which helps boarders take pride in their surroundings as well as helping them to develop ownership of the environment.

Both staff and boarders are very proud of their house and quick to describe why theirs is the best. Boarders stated: 'It's brilliant living here with all my friends'; 'this is my second family and second family home'; and 'there is real house spirit – there is unity and allegiance.'

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

There is strong and effective leadership both of the school and of boarding. Since the last inspection, the position of director of pastoral care has been established which has improved pastoral input at senior management level and has directly led to improvements in the welfare of boarders. Boarding is an integral part of the school and all the senior management team and the governing body take an active and informed interest in monitoring the welfare of boarders. There are development plans in place to improve practice and a strong commitment to provide the very best for the boarders. Forward planning is detailed and thorough and includes challenging targets to be achieved.

There is a regular programme of meetings between the housemasters/mistresses and the director of pastoral care, including visits to one another's boarding houses and sharing of good practice. A recent example has been staff training in

bereavement and loss which led to a sharing of ideas to support boarders in this situation. Records such as punishments, complaints and accidents are appropriately monitored by members of the senior management team. Each housemaster/mistress is required to return a monthly record detailing pupil welfare and disciplinary issues. This ensures that there is a continual focus on those pupils who are in need of support.

Staff with boarding responsibilities receive a comprehensive induction both centrally and through the housemasters/mistresses in boarding houses. Staff at all levels are actively encouraged to attend external training courses and the professional development committee identifies areas for development and future plans. Recent training events have included cyber bullying and e-safety.

The school provides detailed and up-to-date information about boarding principles and practice. This is published on the school's website along with other key policies and information about the school. Each boarding house has its own handbook which provides information to new boarders and parents. The staff handbook contains all the school's policies and procedures and is currently under review.

The boarding houses are well staffed at all times, including at night. The housemasters and mistresses are supported by their deputies, matrons and a team of house tutors. Boarders feel that there are enough staff on duty and say they can find one quickly when needed. The houses run smoothly, so that boarders are extremely well cared for and fully supported in all respects. As one parent commented: 'I cannot speak highly enough of the boarding provision at Oundle. It has been outstanding in every respect.'

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Boarders are accepted from a variety of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds and their customs and beliefs are respected and supported. The PSHE programme incorporates sessions on discrimination and disability awareness and pupils volunteer at the annual residential children's camp at the school during the holidays. There are links with schools in developing countries and pupils raise significant sums of money for charities and have recently organised a fashion show with the proceeds going to charity. A 'life changing bursary scheme' has been launched for children whose lives have the potential to be transformed by boarding at the school.

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 quality and quantity of the food is consistent, taking boarders' views into consideration. (NMS 24)

