

Bishops Stortford College

Inspection report for Boarding School

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Inspector	Martha Nethaway
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Registered person	Bishops Stortford College
Head/Principal	John Trotman (Headmaster)
Nominated person	Chris Woodhouse (Head of Boarding)
Date of last inspection	17/10/2006

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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

Bishops Stortford College is a co-educational school of 1094 pupils comprising of a Pre-Prep department (ages 4-7), Junior School (7-13) and Senior School (13-18). Each has its own classroom buildings, and a range of shared facilities on a single campus. It is both a day school and a boarding school with full boarding, weekly boarding and flexi-boarding. The pupil body comprises local, national and international students.

The college was founded in 1868 as the Non-Conformist Grammar School and has retained its non-conformist roots whilst welcoming pupils of all faiths. Originally a small boys' school, it is now a co-educational establishment across three constituent schools.

The college first accepted girls into the Sixth Form in 1978 and began the process of moving towards full co-education in 1996. A Pre-Prep was also established in 1996.

There is one junior school boarding house (Grimwade House). There are two boys' boarding houses (Robert Pearce House and School House) in the senior school and one girls' boarding house (Young House), together with a flexi-boarding house for girls (Tee House). There are 124 full boarders and 111 are flexi-boarders.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection undertaken by one Ofsted inspector and a boarding school additional inspector over three days. The inspection looked at the key boarding school national minimum standards under the 'Every Child Matters' outcome groups.

The overall outcome judgement is good with outstanding features. The outcome judgements in enjoying and achieving and positive contribution are outstanding. The outcome area for being healthy, staying safe and economic wellbeing and organisation is judged as good. There is one recommendation being set.

There is much added value in this college where the boarders enjoy outstanding achievement and access to a wide range of activities run by dedicated staff who consider the welfare and safety of pupils as paramount. There is wide and clear access to the extensive college facilities.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, the school was recommended to improve access to communication in the junior house. This has now been fully addressed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The promotion of boarders' good health and well-being is good. Boarders' health and welfare are promoted through a thorough personal, social, health and education (PSHE) programme. This covers a broad range of topics including smoking, alcohol, drugs, sexual health and personal safety. Boarders are confident about approaching house staff to discuss personal and health matters. Some excellent examples of good practice have taken place with inviting external agencies whose remit is working with children. For example, health care professionals.

Boarders are able to access an excellent medical centre which contains a surgery, consulting room, kitchen and waiting area. This is staffed by a qualified nurse and health care assistant covering 24 hours. A counsellor is available to boarders on a confidential basis to complement the other pastoral support structures. This means that boarders' well-being is successfully met.

Boarders enjoy a good range of healthy foods which are served by the school's large catering team. Meal times are orderly and sociable occasions. Boarders are very satisfied with the breakfast and lunchtime meals. However, some boarders are pressing for improvements with the quality of the evening meals. The college recognises this is a live issue and are taking action to address the matter. The college has an active 'catering committee' who are making constructive suggestions to help improve and resolve issues related to food.

Boarders enjoy the themed evenings, such as, Mexican, Greek, Italian, Chinese and German. They enjoy the chance to take part in the preparations of the food and decorating the dining hall and dressing up for the occasion. These events take place in the evenings and are particularly special for the boarders. This encourages an appreciation of cultural differences.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders continue to benefit from their boarding experience. They commented that they 'feel safe and secure'. Boarders live in a welcoming, caring and supportive environment where their welfare is promoted and protected. Staff take seriously their responsibility to protect and safeguard the welfare of boarders in their care. Staff are well placed to recognise abuse because they regularly receive mandatory child protection and safeguarding training. The designated senior person for child protection in the school has also received relevant training.

The college has a complaints procedure and boarders are aware of their ability to make complaints. No complaints have been received by the college since the last inspection.

Boarders' rights to privacy is given the utmost priority and staff provide sensitive support. The arrangements in place for showering and bathing are adequate to ensure boarders' personal privacy is respected.

Staff clearly understand that good behaviour in all aspects of boarding is necessary. This is achieved through promoting boarders' self-esteem and self-discipline. They are courteous, respectful and take responsibility for their actions. This cultivates a good positive environment. As a result, boarders' behaviour is exemplary.

Boarders understand that bullying and any form of harassment is wholly unacceptable. Staff clearly communicate to boarders the college's expectations. Boarders' routines and structures of boarding life maintain this high standard of behaviour. The college rewards good behaviour through the 'house colours' which is awarded to any boarder who makes an outstanding contribution to any area of excellence, academic, social or sporting. The college's sanctions for poor behaviour are clearly understood by boarders. Boarders commented, 'that these are fair'.

The college has a highly accomplished health and safety programme that meets the college's legal obligations. There are highly effective rules for visitors within the college. The security of the boarding accommodation is extremely well managed and this is achieved because the alarm systems prevent intrusion. Risk assessments for each boarding house are available and regularly reviewed. Risk assessments for sports, activities and daily school life are comprehensively completed with regular reviews. Boarders are further protected because they have regular opportunities to participate in fire evacuations. This means that they know what to do in the event of an emergency.

The college has in place, good systems for the safe recruitment and selection of staff. Staff files demonstrate that the school ensures all the necessary pre-employment checks are completed robustly. All staff are deemed suitable for working with children. In addition, staff have attended advanced safer recruitment training which takes account of the latest guidance about safeguarding and protection.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders enjoy the true essence of boarding which allows them outstanding personal achievement. Staff are committed to helping boarders develop their potential in all areas of school life and this encourages success with the boarders at all levels.

Boarders have access to an extensive range of activities, during the week, in the evening and at weekends, that enhance their personal development and

achievement. There is wide and clear access to the extensive college facilities. One boarder commented, 'the college has fantastic facilities'. Boarders are able to access the list of activities easily by means of notice boards, handbooks and the college internet. The boarding houses compete, without discrimination, with the other 'Houses' in all competitions from debating to music. The nature of the activities means that they meet members of the local community regularly with the chance to have a genuine input and the opportunity to feed experiences back to the school through school assemblies.

The boarders have access to a broad adult structure of teachers and other staff. There is an extensive line of support beginning with the boarding house staff. Boarders are aware of this line of support and they feel supported and valued as part of the community and are able to give positive and negative feedback at any level from 'exeat' experiences to the kind of food that they have in the dining hall. They feel that they can join in every activity yet they also have unique opportunities such as 'Brunch on a Sunday'. The use of flexible boarding widens the access of the boarding provision to day pupils and enhances the experience for the boarders who enjoy the company of a wider range of pupils; this is particularly important for the international pupils. Boarding house staff and other visiting tutors monitor the demands on the boarders to ensure that they have a balanced and productive programme.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The college is outstanding in securing boarders' views and encouraging them to make a positive contribution to all aspects of college life. Boarders are confident that their points of view will be listened to and acted upon. There is extensive use of questionnaires, activity charts and private discussions with boarders in a very effective and non intrusive manner. Boarders have the confidence to be detailed with their feedback. They are well informed about school activities and parents receive newsletters each week. Boarders are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the wider community with courtesy shown to visitors to the campus and by taking part in social service activities outside school. For example, boarders' involvement is encouraged in the charity committee for the local community.

Boarders have the opportunity to give feedback through a structured questionnaire program and know that their points will be carefully considered and action will be taken. There is the chance for individual feedback to the Head, house staff and senior boarders both formally and informally and at an individual level or through representative committees. The most relevant and effective committees are the 'International Committee', the 'Boarding Committee' the 'Catering Committee' and the 'Prefect Committee' according to the boarders.

Boarders are encouraged to contact parents regularly, which they do via mobile phones, landlines or email. Boarders have wide access to the internet through the open access with the information and communication technology (ICT) department

and wireless internet in the boarding houses. The school alerts boarders to the dangers of modern technology through the tutorial system, PSHE and lectures with boarders and parents. Parents contact teachers regularly.

There is an outstanding school induction programme for boarders and each house also has its own induction programme that begins with the arrival of new boarders. There is a special two-day programme for the induction of sixth form pupils entering the final year in preparation for their role in contributing to the running of the house. There is an induction course for new sixth formers before they join the school. A buddy system operates in each of the boarding houses and special 'bonding' activities take place throughout the first term. All new boarders receive a pupil-friendly handbook and joining pack and the staff have a more detailed handbook to discuss with new boarders.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The physical boarding facilities for full boarders are outstanding in the girls' boarding houses but not in all parts of the boys' boarding houses. The areas used for flexible boarding are of a good standard. Boarders are provided with good accommodation that meets their needs. Boarding houses are all well lit, appropriately heated and ventilated and furnished appropriately in a homely and comfortable way. The school employs a dedicated maintenance and cleaning team and this loyal team maintains the grounds and boarding houses to a high standard. All boarders have lockable bedrooms either as individuals or shared, depending on the age of the boarders. Older boarders have an individual room whereas younger boarders will expect to share with up to four other boarders. Where boarders share a room they are each provided with their own individual work area, wardrobe space and a lockable cupboard for valuables. Boarders are able to personalise their individual spaces because the school provides pin boards.

The arrangements for bathroom, showers and washing facilities are adequate to meet the needs of the boarders. The school has in place a continual programme of improvement to refurbish and update shower facilities and a cycle of renewal for soft furnishings.

Older Boarders are encouraged to have bank accounts in the town and thereby to manage their own personal finances. For junior boarders the house staff operate an account system to provide money for boarders when they require it.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The management and organisation of the college is good. The leadership and management of the college are well organised and provide a clear vision and ably run an effective and efficient boarding school. One boarder commented, 'it is calm

and peaceful with an air of academic excellence and achievement'.

The college provides a range of published material which fully explains what boarding can offer. The head commented that, 'the school makes excellence affordable'. Boarders commented about, 'the excellent variety of sports activities and societies including music, drama and the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme'.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. One boarder commented, 'I can proudly say the college is the best centre for fun and excellence not just in the UK but on an international scale also'.

The boarding houses are well staffed. There are resident management staff and also visiting assistants who work two nights a week. This is also supplemented with academic tutors attached to each boarding house. The lines of management and supervision in the boarding houses are clearly set out and understood by all members of the boarding community. Boarders are fully aware of which member of staff is on duty in each house.

There is effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as the complaints, child protection and behaviour management. Any shortfalls in these areas are identified and addressed very quickly.

The college governorship is highly efficient and contributes successfully by monitoring and reviewing all aspects which is first rate.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that the evening meals provided for boarders are adequate in terms of quality. (NMS 24.1)