

St Martin's Ampleforth

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Michael McCleave
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Head / Principal	
Nominated person	Nicholas Higham
Date of last inspection	6 November 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 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

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

The school is a co-educational Roman Catholic boarding school. Children of all faiths are welcome to attend the school. There are excellent sport facilities, and the school provides the children with a caring community environment. There is a strong emphasis on respect and valuing differences irrespective of religion or culture and children are integrated into the school community with no distinctions between Catholic or non Catholic backgrounds.

There is a motivated team of staff who care for children who board at the school.

Summary

At this announced full inspection all key boarding school standards were inspected.

The school provides an excellent quality of care for those children who are boarders. The boarding facilities are managed by an experienced team led by the head of boarding. There is a high level awareness of safeguarding at the school, and responsibility for all matters relating to child protection rests with the Head Teacher. Positive links have been established between the school and the Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB). All boarding staff have been trained in child protection awareness.

The boarding houses are well maintained and there is an ongoing major refurbishment programme to modernise and improve facilities.

Boarders' care and welfare is clearly paramount and every effort is made by staff, to encourage the children to enjoy boarding life. The sense of community and respect for each other is strong.

There is a positive commitment to ensuring equality and diversity at the school. Although a Catholic school, the children are taught to respect all religions and cultures.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the Head Teacher was asked to update the child protection policy and improve security in an external building. The Head Teacher has taken appropriate steps to comply with the recommendations.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The health care needs of the children is very well managed by the school nurse and the matrons. A doctor attends weekly, and if required, children can be taken to the clinic based at the nearby village. All boarding staff and the matrons can provide first aid. Specialist health services are provided, if required, at the local clinic. The infirmary provides a comfortable place for the children to rest if they feel unwell. It is clearly evident that the children's health and care is appreciated by the children, some said, 'if I feel unwell I go to see matron who is very helpful and kind' and 'they are kind and look after us and don't send you away if you are feeling unwell'.

Medical records are well maintained. Where required, the health facilities at the school can be enhanced by using those at the nearby senior school.

The meals provided are excellent. All tastes and dietary needs are catered for and choices are available every day. There is an emphasis on healthy meals and the catering manager meets regularly with the food committee to listen to their views about meals. There is a range of choices each meal time including a well stocked salad bar. This means that most if not all tastes can be met. There is a positive willingness to ensure that the children enjoy a healthy well balanced diet. Children said, 'we always have a hot meal or choice of salads every day' and 'teachers make sure we have vegetables and healthy foods'. A popular practice at the school is to celebrate different cultures with themed meals. On these occasions the catering staff even dress up in national costumes to represent the culture being celebrated. If required, the school will provide for specialist diets of children who have specific religious catering needs. This is an excellent reflection of diversity practiced at the school. The professional commitment of the catering manager and staff ensure that good quality meals are an important part of the health and well-being of the children.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There is a strong sense of community at the school and the children show respect for each other. It is evident that bullying is not a major issue. Nevertheless, staff are vigilant and aware that situations could occur which may result from misunderstandings. Where examples of these occur, staff will resolve matters by bringing the children together to discuss the problem.

Safeguarding of the children is taken seriously by the boarding staff. Training in child protection awareness is mandatory for all staff employed at the school. There are excellent links established with the North Yorkshire Safeguarding Children's Board. The Head Teacher and head of boarding, have both completed appropriate advanced training in safeguarding. The school is part of an Educational Trust, and a Safeguarding Commission established by the Trust, oversees all child protection practice at the school. The commission comprises representatives from the external statutory agencies. This is excellent practice. The systems in place ensure that children who board are protected. The behaviour of the children is very good and disciplinary measures are rarely used.

Systems to protect the children from risk of fire are excellent. Maintenance staff carry out weekly checks on the fire safety systems and they are on call 24 hours a day to deal with emergencies. This promotes the safety of the children. Although there are areas where children can have private time alone, staff maintain a constant awareness of their whereabouts. This is very good practice.

There are robust recruitment procedures in place and appropriate checks are carried out on all applicants for work, including those from outside of the United Kingdom. The school has followed the guidance from the Department for Children and Families (DCSF) in respect of staff recruitment. However, the practice is enhanced so that all staff are required to have Criminal Records Bureau checks at the highest level before appointment. This ensures that boarders are looked after by staff who are safe to care for them. Visitors to the school are required to be signed in at the reception and their movements are monitored by appropriate staff throughout the visit.

The boarding accommodation is safe from access by unauthorised persons. There are excellent detailed risk assessments in place and these are kept up to date. Any areas where there may be hazards, have been identified and appropriate strategies developed to keep the children safe. There is a detailed emergency plan in place and this has been successfully used during unforeseen incidents. The head of boarding is responsible for all health and safety matters and it is evident that this is very well managed at the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The children who board at the school have a range of staff who are available to offer support and guidance. The support provided is excellent. The children confirm that they enjoy a family style atmosphere where they can discuss any concerns with boarding staff. Matrons play a key role and children will go and see them if they want to talk in private. Some children said, 'I like visiting matron to talk, her room is cosy and warm'. An independent listener is available to talk to any child, but this service is rarely used due to the positive level of support from boarding staff. The independent listener referred to the school 'as a wonderful place', 'staff are very alert to any boarder who is away from home for the first time and who may be unhappy or home sick'. This is particularly evident for children who are from outside of the United Kingdom.

Throughout the school, the prevailing culture of care and respect is demonstrated by the children who enjoy strong friendships with each other. Equality and diversity is a key strength and children from different cultures and religions are clearly welcomed within the school community. This is reflected in comments made by children, 'we all get on well', 'I don't care where anyone comes from, we are all friendly to each other'. The children are able to forge friendships through the extensive range of activities that are available during and out of teaching time. This promotes friendships through cooperation and improves the self confidence of children, especially those from abroad.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The views of the children who board at the school, are expressed through regular meetings with the head of boarding and house staff. These meetings involve all the children who board and it is clearly evident that these sessions are enjoyable. It enables the children to have a positive influence on boarding life. The children are very enthusiastic about boarding and are confident, that their contributions to these meetings are taken seriously. Another method of influencing boarding is through the dorm prefects. They are responsible for ensuring that the members of the dormitory are happy and settled. If there are any concerns, then these are passed onto house staff or head of boarding. In addition, children can inform their dorm prefect of any issues they may have about their dormitory. The prefects meet regularly with the head of boarding to discuss dormitory matters. These communication forums, ensure that the views of the children are heard and for the head of boarding to initiate the appropriate response if required. This is very good practice.

There are a number of ways for the children to communicate with their families. Contact with home, is actively encouraged by boarding staff and computers are available so that that email contact can be made. Mobile phones are a popular means of home communication. Should a child need to make urgent contact with their family, then they can have use of the office

telephone. A new IT system being developed, enables parents to log into the school computer system in order to have access to their child's records. This provides up to date information about each child and additionally ensures that parents know if there are any issues or concerns. Parents said that they are kept very well informed about their children.

Those children who enter boarding for the first time, are positively supported to ease their move into boarding life. An introduction to boarding is held before the term commences, this is where children are introduced to the house staff. A system known as guardian angels, involves older children being allocated to new boarders to support and befriend them. This is very popular and an important part of the overall support to children when they start their boarding life. This is excellent practice.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarding accommodation is well maintained and kept clean by a committed and dedicated ancillary staff team. A large common room, is comfortably furnished and provides the children with a pleasant place to relax and socialise during out of school time. The large television has satellite and DVD facilities. The school library is available for those children who wish to spend quiet time reading. The toilet and washing areas are clean and located close to the dormitories. Some showers are still communal, although individual facilities are available to the children who wish to use these. The children sleep in spacious dormitories using bunk beds. There is a planned programme to update and modernise the boarding facilities. Within the dormitories the children have suitable storage furniture for their clothes and secure lockers to keep personal possessions safe. A very good system is in place whereby children do not bring money into the school. Tuck expenditure is limited to £1 and this is debited to their account. This ensures that all the children are treated the same irrespective of family means.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. There is an excellent approach taken to promoting respect for different cultures and religions. Although a Catholic setting, children of any religion are welcome to join the school. The children are taught to appreciate and celebrate religious and cultural differences. This is demonstrated through a number of ways. For example, themed meals representing cultures are regularly held. Non Catholic children are supported to practice their own religion, and staff are appointed on merit, rather than because of their religious faith. Children with social or special educational needs are admitted to the school if, following assessment, it is determined that they would benefit from the education offered. The school positively supports and values diversity.

The school has a very detailed statement of principles that is known to parents and the children. There is a strong emphasis on moral and social care. The parent's handbook and information booklets for boarders, clearly set out the positives of boarding life. The student handbook contains relevant information to ensure the children have a clear understanding about boarding life.

The management of boarding is excellent. Boarding staff work well as a team to ensure that children who board, are safe and happy. All records relating to boarding, are well maintained and these include, environmental risk assessments, sanctions, accidents and complaints. It is

evident that through the leadership of the headteacher and head of boarding, staff are provided with clear and effective management. They have an excellent understanding of their duties and they have access to policies and guidance relating to boarding responsibilities. As it is a small community, the head of boarding has daily contact with boarding staff and communication is very effective. This ensures the efficient operation of the boarding provision and promotes positive outcomes for children.

The headteacher reports to the board of governors on all aspects of boarding provision. The governors are very positive about management of boarding and the care of the children.

Training is provided for all new staff through an induction programme that includes child protection awareness. However, not all staff involved in recruitment have completed safer recruitment training. The children are cared for by staff who are motivated and passionate about their work. As commented by some boarding staff, 'this is a way of life and you must love children to do it'.

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 all staff involved in recruitment, receive safer recruitment training (NMS 34.7)