

Reading School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Lucy Martin
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Date of last inspection	21 March 2005

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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

Reading School is a selective school within the state-maintained sector. There are currently 883 students, including 66 weekly boarders split between two separate boarding houses, South House and East Wing. The school does not offer weekend boarding and is for boys only. The school is situated close to the centre of Reading, Berkshire and has good access to all facilities in the local area.

Summary

This was an announced inspection carried out by one inspector and one Boarding School Additional Inspector (BSAI) over three days, which covered all the key standards. Overall, the school provides a good level of care to boarders and the area of enjoying and achieving is outstanding. Boarders feel safe and well looked after and enjoy their experience of boarding. There is strong and effective leadership of the school and in the operation of boarding. The behaviour of boarders is good and there are sound relationships between the staff and the boarders. There are extremely low levels of bullying and boarders feel that they live in a supportive community where their views are listened to. Boarders receive high levels of support from a number of staff at the school and take part in a wide range of activities. Parents feel that staff communicate well with them and that the staff know the boarders well. There are recommendations to review the medication and recruitment procedures to ensure best practice in terms of keeping boarders safe from harm. Also, that the school ensures that boarders' views are taken into consideration regarding increased access to the internet. The judgements in this report have been made using new benchmarking guidance that was implemented from 1 April 2008. Information about this guidance can be found on the Ofsted website. The new basis for making judgments is not directly comparable with that used previously.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school was last inspected in February 2005 by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). There were eight recommendations and nine advisory recommendations made. All of these have been addressed. Improvements have been made in a number of areas. The security of the site has been improved with the installation of electronic front gates and the erection of fencing around the site. The recreational areas in both boarding houses have been refurbished and a commitment made to improving the quality of the food with the contracting of a new catering company. Appraisals for boarding staff have been introduced which solely concentrate on boarding tasks and the establishment of the Boarding Strategy Group, which is committed to the continued development of boarding within the school.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The boarders' health needs at the school are well met. Boarders' health is promoted and there are appropriate policies on countering major health risks. The PSHE programme has strong themes on nutrition, drug and alcohol awareness and there is a pupil-led drug awareness programme. The school has a Healthy Schools award and the Sportsmark Gold award. Both boarders and parents are aware of the school's policy on the response to alcohol, smoking and

drug abuse and this policy is followed in practice. Both the boarding houses have a matron who between them are on duty from 7.00 to 21.00 Monday to Friday. They provide first aid and medical care as required by the boarders, although this role is provided by other house staff when they are off-duty. Boarders have access to a local GP for medical treatment and they can choose whether they are accompanied by staff or not. Dental and optical treatment takes place at weekends or in the holidays, although local services are available in an emergency. Written medical permission forms are routinely obtained for the administration of first aid and appropriate non-prescription medication to boarders and to seek medical treatment when required. All medication is securely stored in a locked cabinet. A supply of non-prescribed medication is kept and the school has obtained medical advice on the provision of these medications. Stock controls of medication take place regularly and a log is maintained of all first aid and medication given to boarders. There are good monitoring arrangements in place for these records and there is a sound system in place to assess whether boarders can self-administer their medication. A small number of boarders require prescribed medication. The medication administration records are well kept but a prescribed medication is not being administered in accordance with the pharmacy label on the medication. Written confirmation ensures best practice in this area. The boarders generally receive good quality catering provision. The consistency of the quality of the food has been an area of concern for boarders and for the school who have recently contracted the services of an external catering company. Boarders were involved in the selection process as they are in the choice of menus through their regular food council meetings. Boarders said that there has been an improvement in the quality of meals recently and they particularly enjoy the themed evening meals. Staff involved in preparing food for others receive appropriate training and there are no outstanding recommendations from the Environmental Health Service. Both boarding houses eat all meals together, except for breakfast. Mealtimes are pleasant, sociable occasions with staff and boarders eating together. The food is reasonable in quality and includes a vegetarian choice and a salad bar.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There are extremely low levels of bullying reported by boarders and the school undertakes its own bullying survey for boarders twice a year. The boarders feel safe and are confident about reporting incidents to the boarding staff and say that they are quickly and effectively dealt with. Anti-bullying procedures are in place and are available to parents, boarders and staff. A number of boarders spoke about the 'sense of community' and 'family feel' of boarding which ensures that bullying is not tolerated. The school has an up to date written safeguarding policy which is regularly reviewed. The designated person for child protection is the senior boarding housemaster who has undertaken appropriate training for this role. There are sound links with the local authority and an awareness of local procedures. All the boarding staff have received training in child protection and ancillary staff are provided with booklets about child protection. The standards of behaviour amongst the boarders are generally very good and the use of punishments is fair. The boarders are clear of the rules and feel that punishments are fair and are not used very much. The boarders are involved in agreeing any sanctions used and all punishments are recorded in log books which are regularly monitored. Rewards are frequently given and boarders are able to choose what treat they would most like. Information regarding making a complaint is provided to parents, staff and boarders. The boarding staff have good relationships with the parents and are able to resolve most concerns informally at an early stage. Few complaints are made and those received are recorded and appropriately dealt with. The boarders are protected from the risk of fire with regular fire drills taking place in boarding

time. The fire equipment is routinely serviced and tested. Another safety measure taken is the regular testing of any portable electrical appliances. The boarding houses are free from obvious safety hazards and risk assessments are undertaken. The risk assessments undertaken in relation to boarders' outings are particularly comprehensive. The boarders' personal privacy is respected and the school does not allow unsupervised access to adults visiting the boarding house. The school has made recent improvements to the security of the site by installing an electronic front gate as well as erecting new fencing. The boarders feel safe and the boarding houses have coded entry locks on all the exterior doors. Intruders seen on the school site are challenged and are asked to leave. The school has undertaken a considerable amount of work centralising its recruitment records and has sought advice regarding how best to manage its human resources. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks and references are routinely requested but information is not easy to find and information regarding the interview and proof of qualifications are not on all files. Boarders' safety is compromised if not all the checks are routinely undertaken and are recorded in a clear and consistent fashion.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders say that they enjoy their experience of boarding. They have good access to a wide range and choice of activities. The majority of boarders say that their main enjoyment of boarding is the wide range of activities available to them. There are clubs taking place each afternoon and evening, run by staff, covering varied areas such as softball, cooking and film appreciation. During the summer months, there is an increased emphasis on activities outdoors and the playing field at the front of the school is well used. The staff supervising the activities are enthusiastic in their duties involving all the boarders who wish to participate. The boarders receive outstanding levels of personal support from a range of school staff. There is a clear sense of a strong boarding community and one boarder commented 'boarding is like one big family and is an extremely pleasurable experience. The staff are kind and funny and we are given much more opportunities for sports than if we were day boys'. There are excellent relationships between members of staff and the boarders and the staff know the boys well and genuinely care about their welfare. There are a small number of house tutors who assist the housemasters, assistant housemasters and matrons in their duties. Boarders said that they feel happy talking to staff about any problems or concerns. One boarder said 'the atmosphere in the house is generally very good and there is always someone to support you. In a way, everyone becomes part of your family'. In addition to the school staff the school has a school nurse who is employed by the local Primary Care Trust. She provides a drop-in service once a month and students are free to meet with her. Notices regarding her visits are on public display and boarders are aware of her role. The school has also trialled the services of a local counselling organisation. The boarding community is very accepting of each other and no groups are excluded. One parent commented 'diversity is high on the agenda and actively promoted by all'. The boarders are supportive of each other and older boarders are successfully used to support younger boys who might be experiencing difficulties such as homesickness.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The boarders have good opportunities to contribute their views about the operation of boarding. The boarding houses have regular council meetings where issues can be raised and discussions regarding key areas such as agreeing the punishment and reward system take place. There is

a food council and students (including boarders) were actively involved in deciding which company would be awarded the food contract. Boarders confirmed that they feel listened to and that changes take place as a result. The area that boarders feel most concerned about is the lack of access to social networking sites which are currently banned. They feel disadvantaged compared to the day students as a result and would like wider access to the internet. The school is looking at its IT systems and whether this can be safely allowed. There is regular contact maintained with parents. Most, if not all, boarders have mobile phones which they can freely use out of lesson and homework time and there is a private payphone in each boarding house. All the boarders go home every weekend. Parents say that the staff communicate well with them and records are made of significant conversations. There are social events, such as an annual barbeque, which foster positive relationships with boarders' families.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

There are two boarding houses at the school, each accommodating just over 30 boarders. Conservation issues mean that all the planning of structural works has to be cleared by an external conservation group and the local council before any building works can commence. Despite these difficulties, recent improvements have been made to both boarding houses. The recreational areas have been refurbished and some of the showers. In addition, some new furniture has been purchased for the bedrooms. All the boarders have individual study bedrooms from Year 9 upwards and the highest number of boarders sharing a bedroom is three. Both the boarding houses are suitably decorated and furnished. They are well maintained and the school employs a handyman to work in the boarding houses. There are homely touches in the houses such as displays of photographs of recent events.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school has a range of documentation describing the school's boarding principles and practice available to staff, parents and boarders. The boarding code of practice available to house staff is particularly comprehensive and is a valuable addition to the information available to them. The Principal and the senior housemaster are new in post since the last boarding inspection. The Principal takes an active role in the development of boarding. There is strong and effective leadership of the school and in the operation of boarding. This is further strengthened by one of the governors who takes a keen and active interest. There has been the establishment of a Boarding Strategy Group which meets to discuss the development of boarding. There is routine and regular monitoring of all of the required records maintained in the boarding houses, both at housemaster level and by the Vice Principal. There are sufficient staff on duty to provide good staffing levels for the boarders. A matron is on duty in one of the boarding houses between 7.00 and 21.00 Monday to Friday and there is always a member of boarding staff on duty in both of the boarding houses. In practice, since both the housemaster and the assistant housemasters are resident, more staff are often available. The duty member of staff has a mobile phone which parents and boarders can use. Detailed job descriptions are in place for all boarding staff and an induction process for new staff to the role. There has been the development of boarding specific appraisals which is good practice and ensures that performance and development issues are regularly reviewed. Regular meetings of the boarding staff take place and there are opportunities for continuing training in boarding.

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):

- review the medication procedures to ensure that prescribed medication is being administered in accordance with the prescription or instructions from the pharmacy (NMS 15)
- review the recruitment procedures to ensure that all the required checks are undertaken and are included on file (NMS 38)
- ensure that boarders' views are taken into consideration regarding increased access to the internet, including social networking sites (NMS 12).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for boarding school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' health is promoted (NMS 6)
- safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and welfare are supported by appropriate records (NMS 7)
- boarders' receive first aid and health care as necessary (NMS 15)
- boarders are adequately supervised and looked after when ill (NMS 16)
- boarders are supported in relation to any health or personal problems (NMS 17)
- boarders receive good quality catering provision (NMS 24)
- boarders have access to food and drinking water in addition to main meals (NMS 25)
- boarders are suitably accommodated when ill (NMS 48)
- boarders' clothing and bedding are adequately laundered (NMS 49).

Ofsted considers 6 and 15 the key standards to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are protected from bullying (NMS 2)
- boarders are protected from abuse (NMS 3)
- use of discipline with boarders is fair and appropriate (NMS 4)
- boarders' complaints are responded to appropriately (NMS 5)
- the operation of any prefect system safeguards and promotes boarders' welfare (NMS 13)
- boarders' welfare is protected in any appointment of educational guardians by the school (NMS 22)
- boarders are protected from the risk of fire (NMS 26)
- the welfare of any children other than the school's pupils is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated by the school (NMS 28)
- boarders' safety and welfare are protected during high risk activities (NMS 29)
- boarders' personal privacy is respected (NMS 37)
- there is vigorous selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with boarders (NMS 38)
- boarders are protected from unsupervised contact at school with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures; all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises are supervised (NMS 39)
- boarders have their own accommodation, which is secure from public intrusion (NMS 41)
- boarders are protected from safety hazards (NMS 47)

Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5, 26, 37, 38, 39, 41 and 47 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders have access to a range and choice of activities (NMS 11)
- boarders do not experience inappropriate discrimination (NMS 18)
- boarders' welfare is not compromised by unusual or onerous demands (NMS 27)
- boarders have satisfactory provision to study (NMS 43)
- boarders have access to a range of safe recreational areas (NMS 46)

Ofsted considers 14 and 18 the key standards to be inspected.

Annex A

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school (NMS 12)
- boarders receive personal support from staff (NMS 14)
- boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families (NMS 19)
- new boarders are introduced to the school's procedures and operation, and are enabled to settle in (NMS 21)
- boarders have appropriate access to information and facilities outside the school (NMS 30)
- there are sound relationships between staff and boarders (NMS 36)

Ofsted considers 12 and 19 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' possessions and money are protected (NMS 20)
- boarders are provided with satisfactory accommodation (NMS 40)
- boarders have satisfactory sleeping accommodation (NMS 42)
- boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities (NMS 44)
- boarders have satisfactory provision for changing by day (NMS 45)
- boarders can obtain personal requisites while accommodated at school (NMS 50)

Ofsted considers 51 the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- a suitable statement of the school's principles and practice should be available to parents, boarders and staff (NMS 1)
- there is clear leadership of boarding in the school (NMS 8)
- crises affecting boarders' welfare are managed effectively (NMS 9)
- the school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare (NMS 10)
- risk assessment and school record-keeping contribute to boarders' welfare (NMS 23)
- boarders are supervised adequately by staff (NMS 31)
- staff exercise appropriate supervision of boarders leaving the school site (NMS 32)
- boarders are adequately supervised at night (NMS 33)
- boarders are looked after by staff which have specific boarding duties, and have received adequate induction and continued training (NMS 34)
- boarders are looked after by staff which follow clear boarding policies and practice (NMS 35)
- the welfare of boarders placed in lodgings is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 51)
- the welfare of boarders is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated away from the school site on short-term visits (NMS 52)

Ofsted considers 1, 23, 31 and 34 the key standards to be inspected.