

The New Eccles Hall School

Inspection report for Boarding School

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| Inspector | Lucy Martin |
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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

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| 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

New Eccles Hall School is an independent boarding and day school situated in the Norfolk countryside between Norwich and Thetford.

The school accepts day pupils from the age of four to 17+. Boarding accommodation is offered to children aged eight years and above. The school has three separate boarding houses. Junior boys are accommodated in the main hall, senior boys in the main school area and girls are accommodated in the converted stable block behind the main hall. There is also a sixth form boarding house behind the hall. There are currently just over 40 boarders who are accommodated on a weekly or full boarding basis.

Grassed and hard surface play areas are provided in the extensive grounds which are surrounded by farmland and woodland.

The school accepts children of mixed ability, some with specific learning difficulties for whom special education facilities are available.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

The school was given short notice of the start of this inspection which was carried out at the same time as the education inspection undertaken by the Independent Schools Inspectorate. All the key standards identified by Ofsted were inspected.

Overall, the school is judged to be satisfactory, although the areas of 'helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do' and 'helping children make a positive contribution' are judged as good. The school provides strong levels of personal support to boarders who enjoy boarding and feel that the boarding staff know them well. Boarders enjoy the range of activities on offer after school and new boarders receive a good induction to the school.

The school does not have a written protocol on the provision of non-prescription medicines to boarders and the procedures regarding the administration of prescribed medication are in need of review to ensure best practice. The senior member of staff designated to take responsibility for child protection has not received inter-agency training in child protection in the last two years and the arrangements are not clear regarding the supervision of staff who start work before their Criminal Records Bureau checks are returned. The security arrangements are generally good but there are areas which are less secure and are in need of review.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were four recommendations made at the last inspection in 2007. Two of the recommendations concern aspects of privacy within the toilets and showers and staff patrolling these areas. The recommendations have been met although there are still showers in the boarding accommodation which do not offer high levels of privacy and which are not used regularly as a result. The third recommendation, regarding the use of particular sanctions and their impact on other boarders, has been met. Sanctions are seldom used in boarding. The fourth recommendation, that the school seek professional advice regarding the administering of controlled drugs, has not been met.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders' health is promoted well through physical activity, opportunities for a balanced diet and ensuring that there is access to information from a variety of sources. The school has a personal, social and health education programme delivered through the curriculum covering a range of relevant topics. Additional advice and support is available from boarding staff, personal tutors and from the health centre which is on site. One of the clubs currently on offer to pupils after school is 'health and fitness' and boarders enjoy the opportunity to take part in physical activities, including football and swimming in the heated, indoor pool on the school site.

The school has a medical centre which, since the last inspection, has been moved to a more central location giving more easy access to all pupils. Boarders feel well looked after when they are ill by the two matrons who, between them, provide cover 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The school doctor from a local surgery visits once a week and boarders can be taken to the surgery at other times, if required. There is access to doctors of both genders. Visits to opticians and dentists are arranged and facilitated by school staff. A good amount of information is obtained regarding each pupil's medical history including written parental permission for the administration of first aid and medication. Health care plans have been written for some pupils with specific medical conditions which is an area of development and there are good written records maintained of contact with parents.

All medication is stored securely in locked cabinets. Clear records are kept of all visits by pupils to the medical centre and any treatment or medication which is administered to them. Non-prescribed medications are administered but the school has not secured qualified medical or nursing advice in a written protocol on the provision of non-prescription 'household' medicines to boarders. In addition, the matrons regularly administer a number of prescribed medicines, including some controlled drugs. It was a recommendation made at the last inspection that the school seeks professional advice regarding the administration of controlled drugs and this has not been done. Although the medication administered is clearly recorded,

there is a lack of clarity about the systems in place as two administration records are maintained. There is also uncertainty regarding the legal responsibilities of administering medication and controlled drugs.

Boarders have a choice at all meals, including a substantial salad bar at lunch. Pupils are offered a taste of foods if they want to try something new and pupils are encouraged to complete a food feedback form. Provision is made for pupils with special dietary needs. All meals are eaten in the main dining room and are pleasant social occasions, with staff and pupils choosing to sit together on tables. The school obtained the top five star award in food hygiene at their last inspection by the local authority in 2009. Boarders are divided in their views about the quality of the food. Some are extremely satisfied whilst others are less so and a minority feel that the evening meal is served too early at five pm. However, snacks are available later in the evening.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The school has a detailed anti-bullying policy which includes strategies to prevent bullying and a separate policy on cyber-bullying. Boarders report that, when bullying incidents take place in the boarding house, the staff take effective action to deal with it. One boarder said 'if any bullying is going on it is soon dealt with.' Incidents are recorded and are included in the boarding care plans. Pupils and school staff have received training regarding cyber bullying.

Boarders know what is expected of them and the likely consequences for breaking the rules. Pupils are involved in the drawing up of the 'School Charter' which outlines expectations regarding standards of behaviour. It is reviewed and published at the start of each school year. Boarders know how to complain and all complaints are recorded by the headmaster.

Records of incidents of misbehaviour are maintained and dealt with appropriately through the tutor system, the house staff and more serious incidents, by the senior management team. A central record is maintained of serious punishments within the school but very few sanctions are given out in the boarding houses. Generally boarders report that discipline is dealt with fairly. The house merit system works well and reinforces courtesy, helpfulness and anything that is 'over and above' good behaviour. Rewards or treats are regularly given out, such as flexibility around bedtimes at weekends, pizza night and special outings to Cambridge or Norwich.

The school has a detailed child protection/safeguarding policy which has recently been reviewed. All the staff received training from the local authority in September 2010 and the ancillary staff receive an annual update about their responsibilities in this area. Three senior staff have undertaken training in safer recruitment. School staff are clear about their responsibilities regarding child protection. The headmaster is the child protection officer. He has attended training in child protection but has not

undertaken the required inter-agency training in child protection in the last two years. There are well established links with the local authority and all incidents are recorded.

The staff recruitment procedures are essentially sound with written references and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks routinely undertaken before employment. However, there are a few staff who started boarding duties before their CRB checks were returned. There was no information to indicate how the individuals were appropriately supervised before the check was returned. This could compromise boarders' safety.

The arrangements made by the school to protect the boarders from fire are sound. Staff and boarders are aware of fire safety procedures and have experienced evacuation of the boarding areas at different times of the day. Fire detection and prevention equipment is regularly checked and serviced. There is a fire risk assessment and some staff are trained in fire safety.

Boarders' privacy is protected and acknowledged by staff and other boarders. The security of the site is generally good, with CCTV cameras and digital locks in place. The school has a policy in place restricting access to premises and pupils are encouraged to report the presence of unidentified strangers. Boarders generally say they feel safe but there are areas of boarding accommodation which are less secure from the inside. Matters of health and safety are responded to quickly by the school's maintenance staff. All staff are given responsibility to provide risk assessment for their work area and are encouraged to take responsibly for hazard damage reporting. The risk assessments are monitored and are of good quality. There is evidence of action being taken of near misses as well swift maintenance to rectify damage and hazards reported.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

There is a good range of activities for boarders to choose from outside formal lessons and at the weekends. The school has a wide range of clubs on offer after school which pupils can choose and range from sporting activities to board games and gardening. Swimming in the school pool is popular and there are organised activity nights, such as bowling. A few of the senior boarders commented that they would like more organised activities, but generally boarders feel that there is enough for them to do in the evenings. There are low numbers of boarders at weekends and this means that activities can be more individualised. Weekend activities include trips to the cinema and to nearby Norwich and Cambridge.

It is a strength of the school that boarders experience a high level of pastoral support and guidance. Boarders can identify a range of adults whom they can approach within the school with a concern or a problem. Boarders feel that the boarding staff know them well and that they care about how they are doing. All

pupils have a personal tutor, whom they choose, and can talk to about personal and welfare issues as well as academic ones. Pupils are supportive of each other and relationships are strong between pupils and with the staff team. Pupils are treated individually and issues, such as discrimination and racism, are debated by the school council. Although there are far fewer girls boarding than boys, none of the girl's reported any inappropriate gender discrimination. All boarders are encouraged to achieve their best and the school is committed to equal opportunities for all.

The school has an independent listener who visits the boarding houses twice a term. He is well known to boarders and may be contacted directly by telephone about personal problems or concerns at school. The contact details are on display in the boarding houses.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders have good opportunities to contribute their views on boarding. There is a school council and both the junior and the senior boarding houses have daily house meetings. Boarders are able to raise issues at these meetings and there is regular consultation about trips and activities. Changes have been made as a response to feedback from boarders, such as changing the evening timetable in the junior boarding house. In addition, the school has recently undertaken a survey for boarders to express views on aspects of the boarding provision.

Boarders can contact family and friends by accessing the school email and using the school's pay phones. There is good provision of internet access in designated areas of the school, including the boarding houses. Only senior boarders are allowed to use their own mobile phones at weekends. School staff are in regular contact with parents who are contacted promptly regarding concerns.

All new boarders are invited to the school for two days to include one night in the boarding house. There is an organised induction programme but it is flexible according to the needs of the boarders. New boarders are always allocated a 'friend' in the same year or the year above to help and initially, there are daily meetings with their personal tutor. These factors all help new boarders to settle in quickly.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

The school has a junior and a senior boarding house as well as a separate sixth form house and the senior girls are accommodated behind the junior house. The two main boarding houses are in old buildings which offer some challenges in terms of design and layout. For example, some of the bedrooms are inter-connecting. Generally, the accommodation is adequate but some of the furnishings and décor is of basic quality and is looking tired, particularly in the senior boarding house. However, many boarders have their own bedrooms and the sixth form boarding house provides a

good standard of accommodation.

There is some personalisation of bedrooms, particularly in the junior boarding house and there is a good amount of communal space. There are some lockers for boarders to use if they wish, although boarders say that there is respect for each others property. The bathroom facilities vary; some are functional but basic, whereas other bathrooms are more homely and domestic in appearance.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

Since the last inspection the school has appointed a deputy head with responsibility for pastoral care and boarding. This position raises the profile of boarding within the school. There is regular discussion between the two house masters regarding boarding to ensure consistent practice and key records are supervised appropriately .

There are adequate levels of staff supervision in the boarding houses and a number of staff are resident in or near boarding accommodation. Staff are provided with opportunities for training and updating in boarding practice. There is good written information available to staff in a recently revised staff handbook which details policies and procedures. Parents are also provided with a written handbook and there is up-to-date information available on the schools website.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The pastoral care ensures that support systems are equally available to boarders regardless of age, gender or nationality. The school fosters a big commitment to community service which extends beyond the school into local communities and support for projects at a local and international level. For example, pupils volunteer during the holidays to act as mentors on special needs youth exchanges based at the school and the school raised money for a trip to Morocco last summer where pupils built a playground structure and refurbished classrooms for a local 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...

- review the procedures regarding the administration of prescribed medication, including controlled drugs (NMS 15.8)
- ensure that there is a written protocol on the provision of non-prescription 'household' medicines to boarders (NMS 15.9)
- ensure that the senior member of staff designated to take responsibility for child protection, receives inter-agency training in child protection which is refreshed

- every two years (NMS 3.6)
- ensure that there is clear evidence that staff who have not had their CRB check returned are appropriately supervised (NMS 38.2)
 - review the security arrangements in the boarding houses (NMS 41.5)