

# Polam Hall Boarding School

Woodard Academies Trust

Polam Hall School, Grange Road, Darlington, County Durham DL1 5PA

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this boarding school

Polam Hall Boarding Academy School is located near the town centre of Darlington, making it close to all local amenities. It offers education to 743 pupils and accommodation to 23 boarding students in two boarding houses. The head of boarding has been in post since October 2016. He is an experienced teacher who has a range of skills and management experience.

**Inspection dates:** 14 to 16 May 2019

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account** **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

**Date of last inspection:** 20 September 2016

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good**

The boarding students have positive experiences. They are thriving and developing valuable life skills as a direct result of their attendance at this school. The boarding students are complimentary about their time in their boarding houses. They all identified that their relationships with the boarding staff, and with each other, are 'one of the best things'.

The staff, known as boarding parents, are genuinely caring and nurturing, which has a significant impact on the boarding students. This offers them stability and emotional security. The boarding students say that the boarding parents consult them, and that their views and wishes are considered. This enhances their equality, diversity and their inclusion.

Transition arrangements for new boarding students and those leaving school are good. Where possible, the staff arrange introductory visits to help the boarding students acclimatise into their new environment. The boarding students are encouraged to learn independence skills and good careers advice is available. This supports the boarding students to move into adulthood.

Extensive pastoral support ensures that the boarding students have several options where they can seek guidance and advice. The school counsellor is readily available, and she can quickly access a wide range of specialist agencies and organisations. This ensures that the boarding students' primary health and well-being needs are met.

The arrangements for caring for boarding students who are unwell are insufficient. There are no healthcare facilities within the school for unwell boarding students. Sometimes, unwell boarding students are left alone in their boarding house, with periodic checks made by school staff. This leaves them isolated and unable to summon help quickly.

Shortfalls in the safe administration of medication were highlighted during this inspection. The boarding students who self-administer their medication have not been risk-assessed to ensure that the staff are confident in the boarding student's ability to take and regulate their medication correctly.

There are no systems in place to carry out regular stock checks of medication to ensure that all medication can be safely accounted for. Some medication was out of date, and not all the medication charts were fully and correctly completed.

There is no indication that any boarding student has experienced any harm due to these omissions. However, unsafe medication handling increases the risk of future medication errors.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good**

The boarding students report that they feel safe. They are confident that they would tell the boarding staff or school staff if they were worried about any safeguarding issues. All the boarding parents have received level 1 safeguarding training, and the head of boarding is a designated

safeguarding lead.

There have been no boarding students go missing and none are at risk from exploitation or radicalisation. The school educates all the pupils about the risks that they may encounter, and how to get help. This empowers the boarding students to be aware and self-reliant.

There are no issues linked to antisocial behaviours or behaviour management. The boarding students are very respectful of the boarding staff and each other. These positive relationships reduce the likelihood of behavioural issues or unwanted behaviour.

Environmental health and safety and fire safety is good. The school ensures that regular health and safety checks are carried out and that all utilities are regularly checked and serviced. Staff recruitment is thorough, which protects the boarding students from having access to unsuitable adults.

The boarding staff understand the concept of risk management, but their knowledge has not translated into actively addressing known risks. For example, there have been two incidents in the boarding houses involving the use of illicit drugs but there are no written risk assessments that set out how future risks can be identified and minimised. This potentially compromises the boarding students' safety and their well-being.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good**

The school is emerging from a turbulent period of change, which had affected the stability of leaders and managers and the operation of the school. A positive consequence of these changes is the emergence of a new, restructured senior management team whose members are motivated to improve the school. A new head of boarding was appointed, and he is focusing on prioritising the needs of the boarding students.

Regular oversight of the boarding houses is improving. An academy councillor, who is part of the governing body and whose role is to monitor the boarding houses, is forging strong links with the boarding students and the staff and she is beginning to implement positive changes.

Improvements to how all pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported are making a considerable difference. The special education needs coordinator is quickly completing assessments that identify all pupils who need help at an early stage. Consequently, early interventions are resulting in a noted improvement in the pupils' outcomes and progress.

A previous area for improvement to review staffing levels is not met. The staffing ratio of two boarding staff to care for 23 boarding students has not significantly changed. As a result, off-site activities continue to be limited and there are insufficient staff to cover unforeseen circumstances or emergencies. This potentially compromises the welfare of the boarding students.

Staff training is also lacking. None of the boarding staff has received any relevant social care training, for example training in emotional and mental health well-being, exploitation or drug

misuse. In addition, all the staff training for administering first aid is out of date.

A previous area for improvement to increase security around the school perimeters is met.

## **What does the boarding school need to do to improve?**

### **Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools**

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for boarding schools:

- 3.1 The school has, and implements effectively, appropriate policies for the care of boarders who are unwell and ensures that the physical and mental health, and emotional wellbeing of boarders is promoted. These include first aid, care of those with chronic conditions and disabilities, dealing with medical emergencies and the use of household remedies.
- 3.2 Suitable accommodation, including toilet and washing facilities, is provided to cater for the needs of boarding pupils who are sick or injured. The accommodation is adequately staffed by appropriately qualified personnel, adequately separated from other boarders and provides separate accommodation for male and female boarders where this is necessary.
- 3.4 All medication is safely and securely stored and proper records are kept of its administration. Prescribed medicines are given only to the boarders to whom they are prescribed. Boarders allowed to self-medicate are assessed as sufficiently responsible to do so.
- 6.3 The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
- 15.3 The staff supervising boarders outside teaching time are enough in number, training and experience for the age, number and needs of boarders, and the locations and activities involved.

### **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the 'Social care common inspection framework'. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Boarding school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC000830

**Headteacher:** Principal Kate Reid

**Type of school:** Boarding school

**Telephone number:** 01325 463383

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## **Inspectors**

Debbie White, social care inspector (lead)

Simon Morley, social care inspector

Jane Titley, social care inspector



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