

Kent College

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Liz Daniels / Lindy Latreille
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	23 January 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

Set in the rural outskirts of Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent College Pembury comprises a Nursery, Junior and Senior School, offering continuous education to girls aged three to 18 years. Though Christian in its approach, the school welcomes pupils from all religious and cultural denominations and this is reflected within the boarding community. Currently, over 90 boarders are accommodated, many of whom are from overseas.

The school boasts an excellent academic record and offers a day and boarding provision. The boarding accommodation is separated by age group into the junior house above the main school and the senior house in a purpose built building nearby. Both areas offer good security and clean, suitably furnished living accommodation. A senior housemaster and senior housemistress lead a team of experienced and well trained staff in caring for the boarders.

Great emphasis is placed on providing the individual and specific support required for each young person to realise their full potential. The school continues to celebrate the academic success of its pupils, with a proven track record of securing places at prestigious universities and other institutes of higher education.

Summary

This announced full welfare inspection was undertaken alongside an education inspection by the Independent Schools Inspectorate and fulfilled the three year inspection requirement for boarding schools. All of the key national minimum standards were inspected. The visit provided the opportunity to meet with the headmistress and key staff as well as some of the young people who board. Feedback from surveys completed by young people and parents was also considered as part of the inspection process.

The school provides comfortable boarding accommodation and a small team of staff ensure the young people's good health is promoted and that they are kept safe while they stay. The staff believe the young people's views are important and ensure there are different avenues available for them to voice any concerns. They provide excellent support whereby the young people can develop as individuals. Where areas of shortfall in practice are identified, the senior management team are responsive and demonstrate a willingness to explore changes to improve the provision.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last full welfare inspection of the school was undertaken in January 2006. Eleven recommendations were made, all of which have been met. As a result, minutes are now taken for meetings such as the school council enabling the young people to know the decisions that have been made. In addition, the young people can access an independent visitor at times that are convenient to them. Medications are well managed and welfare plans are well circulated for those young people with specific health needs. Similarly, sanctions are appropriately recorded and monitored. The boarding accommodation has been refurbished and now provides private telephone booths for telephone calls, as well as improved shower and wash facilities. In addition,

each young person has a bedside light. Excellent health and safety arrangements are in place and the young people confirm that, in general, they see their relationships with boarding staff as being very positive.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The staff team at Kent College support the young people's physical, emotional, social and intellectual health. A fundamental ethos across the school is that each young person's well-being is paramount and that healthy living should be promoted. Personal, social and health education is included in the school curriculum and the boarding staff are aware of the programme content. They have also had additional training through the Boarding Schools Association in topics such as internet safety, drug and alcohol misuse; this enables them to appropriately discuss the risks associated with smoking, alcohol, drugs and sexual activity with the young people. The Sister in the school's medical centre is also readily available, as a resource for the young people to raise any concerns they may have.

Comprehensive medical information forms, completed when the young people join the school, are regularly updated to ensure they are current. Parents also consent that first aid and appropriate non-prescription medications may be administered to boarders as required. This information is safely stored and shared with staff when needed. Protocols and care plans are well circulated for those children with particular medical needs and effective arrangements ensure that first aid is provided and minor illnesses are appropriately treated. Those young people who board are registered with a local general practitioner (GP), opticians and dentist. Sister, who is registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council oversees the management of any health issues for them. She links closely with the GP for her own professional guidance and consultation. Medications are safely stored and the emergency medications individual young people may need are kept with them. Good communication between Sister and the house staff ensures that prescription and non-prescription 'household' medications are appropriately administered and recorded. Risk assessments underpin practice for those young people who self-medicate.

There are good arrangements for any boarder who is ill. Where possible the staff arrange for them to go home or to their guardians; when not practical, two rooms within the medical centre provide appropriate facilities. Recent events demonstrate that by careful planning, infections are well managed; good hygiene is promoted by the wide use of alcohol gel within the school and by ensuring all areas where infectious young people have stayed are deep cleaned. However, the medical centre currently provides access between a boarding area and part of the school, compromising the confidentiality of any young person being cared for.

There is excellent catering provision and the majority of young people are enthusiastic when discussing the food at the school. A varied nutritional menu with plenty of choice is developed each half term; the food is seasonal and locally sourced wherever possible. The catering staff are all well trained and many special dietary needs are accommodated; similarly, they support the boarders in preparing food safely by ensuring those who are senior are trained in food hygiene. The school is imaginative in the way it explores multi-cultural foods and meal times are happy, sociable occasions, held in the school's spacious dining room. The inspectors sampled several meals while at the school and found them to be of a high standard.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school's policies against bullying are well publicised and the procedures protect the young people from bullying. In addition, the staff provide guidance and good support; they are vigilant and recognise those young people who have the potential to bully as well as those who are vulnerable. The incidence of bullying is low and good communication throughout the school ensures that staff manage behaviour fairly and consistently.

Similarly, there are policies and procedures to protect the young people from abuse. A well trained, senior staff member is designated to take responsibility for safeguarding and facilitates a good rolling programme of training for staff; this ensures all staff are trained in safeguarding, either during in-service training or individually when they join the school. The school liaises regularly with the Local Authority Designated Officer and copies of the Kent safeguarding procedures are readily available for staff to reference. Internet use is very well monitored, greatly reducing the opportunity for the young people to access inappropriate sites.

Behaviour is well managed at the school. Considerable emphasis is placed on responding positively to good behaviour, but any punishments for poor behaviour are consistent and not excessive. The young people are aware of the consequences of poor behaviour and believe that the staff are fair. Good records are kept and summary sheets maintained, enabling any trends or themes to be identified.

The school responds positively to any queries or concerns raised by parents and boarders. Information as to how they can raise any issues is readily available; various avenues are accessible for them and the school responds promptly to any concerns, investigating them as necessary. The headmistress co-ordinates the investigation of any serious complaint and also regularly reviews a summary of all concerns raised, whereby she can monitor any trends and themes. Details of external organisations such as Child Line and the number of the independent listener are well publicised; however, the number for Ofsted is not as readily available for the young people.

Regular procedures are undertaken to protect the young people from the risk of fire. Appropriate checks of emergency lighting, fire fighting equipment and fire alarms are carried out and fire drills are arranged during boarding time each term. A fire risk assessment is in place and if there are any concerns, the school readily seeks advice from the local fire authority.

The staff recognise that the young people must have personal privacy and although readily available to monitor and care for the boarders, they are not intrusive. The young people confirm that they believe the staff respect their privacy although some commented that one of the dormitories is sometimes used as a shortcut to the wash facilities, which could compromise privacy.

Good processes are in place for the selection and vetting of all staff who care for the young people who board. Enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) disclosures are sought and references are required prior to employment. The school is affiliated to a school abroad through which it arranges pupil exchanges and recruits Gap students; however, no recruitment of Gap students is planned for January 2010.

Excellent arrangements are in place to protect the boarders from unsupervised contact with adults who have not been appropriately checked. The controlled entry systems for the boarding houses makes them secure from public intrusion and neither boarding house is a thoroughfare for young people, staff or visitors. Once boarding starts, the young people are well supervised and there are good security arrangements for the school buildings. As stated previously, all staff are checked through the CRB when recruited to work at the school and similarly, CRB checks are required for any adults who live on the premises. In addition, the school requires written agreements for any adults who stay in the same building as the boarding accommodation. The school uses taxi firms who employ robust checking procedures and anecdotal evidence during the inspection demonstrates that every precaution is taken to ensure the young people are kept safe when travelling to and from the school.

Health and safety is high on the school agenda; the recent appointment of a compliance manager demonstrates its commitment to continued vigilance in how it protects the young people from safety hazards. As the lead in health and safety he monitors and co-ordinates the necessary risk assessments. Appropriate maintenance contracts are in place and the staff undertake the required safety checks. However, although the windows in some of the boarding accommodation are restricted, they do not minimise the risk of access; the staff are alert to this and having previously recognised the risk are currently exploring what changes are necessary.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The young people have access to a wide range of activities when they board. Timetables provide well supervised active sports as well as sedentary activities. Equally the young people have free time when they can be quiet or enjoy a pastime of their choice. Newspapers and journals are evident and there are a variety of videos and DVDs available. The young people can also use the school's computers or have their own laptops at school; as reported earlier, internet sites are filtered and internet access is very well monitored.

The school encourages the young people to share any anxieties or concerns with staff. A pastoral care leadership team includes senior staff from within boarding and across the school, as well as the Sister and the chaplain. It meets regularly and its aim is to enable good communication between all the staff involved with boarding; by ensuring that welfare concerns are shared, a cohesive plan of support and care can be introduced. Each young person has a form tutor they can turn to for personal guidance or support and the school's ethos is to enable them to speak with whoever they feel most comfortable with. Details of the school's independent listener are also well publicised and a counsellor attends each week to see any young person who asks for particular personal guidance or support. Feedback from the young people and their parents is positive; they confirm they have excellent personal support and clearly identify different people they can share any concerns with.

The school promotes its policy of equal opportunities, thereby facilitating a theme of respect amongst the young people and the staff; there is a strong ethos that all the young people are valued as individuals. Facilities are in place to enable access for young people with disabilities and although historically Christian, the school embraces pupils from differing ethnic backgrounds and religious faiths. Many of the young people require special diets, some for cultural or religious reasons; their needs are well met within the excellent catering provided. The staff are alert to

those young people who struggle to integrate and ensure support is in place to prevent them being isolated.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Although the school uses the school council as the main forum to discuss any boarding issues, there are many informal avenues the young people can choose to express their views. The school promotes the importance of listening to the young people and takes their suggestions into account when developing boarding practice. One of the governors who takes a lead in boarding issues ensures that they visit the school regularly to spend time talking with the young people; she reflected during the inspection that 'it's great to be taken round by one of the girls; you get a different perspective.' The young people who board confirm that they know the school considers their views are important and the questionnaires received prior to the inspection also showed very positive feedback about boarding at the school.

The young people are enabled to maintain contact with their families; pay phones are readily available for them to use and e-mail contact is also facilitated. In addition, there are no restrictions on mobile phones other than that they cannot be used during lessons, at formal occasions or late at night. Similarly, the school communicates promptly with parents about any significant welfare concerns relating to their child, either by telephone or through e-mail. The numbers of help lines and outside contact numbers that the young people may call if they are distressed are well publicised.

The Boarding Handbooks provide comprehensive information for a young person who wishes to board at the school, as well as for their parents. A mentor system within the houses enables those older pupils who are familiar with boarding to support new boarders, helping them to feel less isolated; the young people who board confirm that they feel looked after and there are good procedures whereby they 'know what to do.' Good communication amongst the staff ensures any young person who is initially anxious about being away from home is very well supported.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The young people are allowed to bring laptops and other valuable items into school although are encouraged not to hold large amounts of money. Pocket money is well managed and each boarder has access to lockable storage cabinets. The school culture is one of trust and mutual respect but the young people confirm that if there ever is any petty theft, it is promptly and effectively managed by the staff.

The young people stay in light, heated and well ventilated dormitories which are welcoming, homely and comfortable. The rooms are clean and well-maintained. There are two separate houses, each protected by doors with keypad or swipe card access. Each house has different sized dormitories and in the senior house some of the sixth form pupils benefit from a single room. In one of the houses, some of the beds in the girls' dormitories are closer together than required by the national minimum standards, although the rooms are of an adequate size. Boarders are enabled to personalise their own rooms and have access to good bathing and toilet facilities. Although the dormitories and bedrooms are not easily accessible for a young person with mobility difficulties, the school are clear that if there was a requirement within

boarding, arrangements would be made to accommodate a young person's individual needs. The house staff have their own sleeping accommodation within or adjacent to the boarding areas.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Comprehensive up-to-date information that clearly outlines the school's boarding principles and practice, is made available for parents, boarders and staff.

Boarding has a high priority within the school. Recent changes in staffing and reorganisation of the boarding houses, has resulted in clear leadership and a knowledgeable, experienced staff team within boarding. Excellent systems ensure the welfare provision in the school is carefully monitored and the governing body is kept informed. The headmistress and heads of boarding review records regularly whereby risks, concentrations or trends are identified and the appropriate action taken; key staff also monitor accidents and ensure risk assessments remain relevant. In addition, a named governor meets regularly with the boarding team and visits the boarding areas; she is proactive in taking any issues to the governing body.

When staff initially become involved with boarding, they undertake an induction and all are trained in child protection. Each has a job description that confirms their responsibilities and they are appraised. All the staff have access to a wealth of information to guide them in the school's approach to boarding, as well as how to safeguard the young people and promote their welfare. A boarding rota ensures that there is always a mix of male and female staff on duty. Activities are well planned whereby the young people are appropriately supervised; each young person knows who is responsible for them and how they can contact staff.

The promotion of equality and diversity at the school is outstanding. The staff promote a theme of respect amongst all the young people; those from differing backgrounds and other religious faiths are welcomed and any special diets are well catered for. The staff are alert to those young people who struggle to integrate and ensure support is in place to prevent them from being isolated.

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):

- consider how to avoid using the medical centre as a thoroughfare, to maintain confidentiality (NMS 7)

- ensure the boarders have details of how they can contact Ofsted regarding any complaint concerning their welfare (NMS 5.4)
- review the windows which have restricting bars to ensure they restrict access for the young people. (NMS 47)