

Bedales School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Bridgette Lowe
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Date of last inspection	26/05/2011

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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

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

Bedales School is a co-educational boarding school situated on the outskirts of the town of Petersfield in Hampshire. It is the senior school of three schools, including pre-preparatory and junior schools, sharing separate parts of the extensive Bedales campus.

There are three boarding houses, called 'flats', one of which is for girls, one for boys and a co-educational sixth form flat. All are supervised by house parents, matrons and additional support tutors. Single and shared dormitories are available in all of the flats.

Although Bedales School describes itself as a boarding school, limited numbers of day pupils are fully integrated into the life of the school.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This full inspection was carried out on an announced basis. The school's boarding provision is judged as outstanding overall with outstanding outcomes in all areas apart from economic well-being which is judged as good. All key standards for boarding schools were assessed and the recommendations made at the last inspection were revisited. Feedback from boarders and parents has been taken into account while carrying out the inspection. All boarders had the opportunity to complete a questionnaire and numerous boarders were spoken with throughout the inspection.

Bedales School is a unique school that focuses on developing inquisitive independent individuals who are enabled to explore their own personalities and differences in a safe and nurturing environment. Students receive excellent health care from the school's nurses in the health centre and within the boarding 'flats' from house staff. Boarders' health and well-being are promoted to an excellent degree. There is a positive and confident focus on child protection and safeguarding that results in the students feeling safe at the school. There is an ethos of openness by staff in trusting students to behave in a positive manner. Behavioural guidelines are clearly known and understood by the boarding community. The school has extremely robust health and safety measures in place to promote the safety of the boarding community. Recruitment practice fully adheres to Safer Recruitment in Education guidance.

Systems for students to achieve and enjoy are excellent, with invaluable support from the independent counsellor, house staff and 'dorm bosses'. Opportunities for boarders to have a voice and input into their lives at the school are actively engaged in by students, whose opinions are listened to and acted on. The boarding houses

have had some refurbishment work started with a continued programme of refurbishment underway to bring all boarding areas up to a good standard throughout. The management of the school and boarding community is extremely effective and coordinated, with a dedicated boarding staff team committed to ensure the boarding experience is positive and enjoyable and students reach their potential. There are no recommendations made as a result of this inspection.

Boarders' comments include: 'It's the best years of my life, it is so good here, I couldn't imagine better house staff, I really don't want to leave.' The vast majority of parent responses were equally positive with comments such as: 'The pastoral care is truly superb, mixed-age boarding is a real positive for all the children. My child has thoroughly enjoyed and benefited from the experience.'

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the school was asked to act on four recommendations. These were: to risk-assess students' competency to self-medicate; confirm the difference in the new furniture purchased for boys' and girls' flats; ensure that concerns identified about bathing and showering facilities are promptly resolved; and review the use of twin doors in dormitories, ensuring compliance with fire safety legislation. All these recommendations have been acted upon satisfactorily, with improved outcomes for the boarding community.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders have access to excellent quality medical treatment and first aid provision. The relocated health centre is situated in the school grounds and is easily accessible for all boarders. It is efficiently run by the school's qualified nurses, who are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All procedures and policies relating to health matters are maintained effectively. The school's first aid policy clearly details the process undertaken for assessing if boarders are competent to self-medicate and store their own medication. The boarders are positive about the care given and expressed a view that their health and well-being are well looked after. The new health centre provides appropriate provision for students when they are ill and they are also able to be looked after in their boarding houses should they wish. Excellent health management plans detail the student's illness and the protocol in place to manage this effectively and safely.

Health information for each boarder is requested from parents including permission for first aid, medical, dental or optical treatment should there be a need. Excellent care plans are maintained and regularly reviewed for all students who have significant medical or health needs. This is shared with staff on a need-to-know basis further promoting the health of students to a high degree. Record keeping throughout the medical centre is excellent with information securely recorded on the school database and within the health centre for each individual. The boarders have access to the local General Practitioners who attend the health centre on a weekly

basis.

The school has undertaken a full review of the personal, social and health education programme to ensure it fully meets the diverse needs of the students. The curriculum involves aspects of health, well-being and provides education for pupils on how to keep themselves safe. The programme covers a wealth of health and safety education including cyber bullying and keeping students safe and well. Many aspects of the programme can be student led, for example, when students reflected they need more support at time of exam stress and how this can be managed positively. Boarders commented that the ongoing support in all areas of personal and social health have enabled them to become more independent and self-confident.

The catering staff have an excellent understanding of boarders' dietary needs and wishes, and provide a varied balanced diet. The variety, quality and quantity of food are excellent with an abundance of fresh fruit available to the boarding community throughout the day and evenings. The school caters for many different diets, for cultural and medical reasons if needed. Boarders can access fresh vegetables, salad and fruit at mealtimes and enjoy the social occasion mealtimes provide. Boarders have the opportunity to prepare or make snacks in the boarding house kitchens and rotas are in place to ensure boarders keep these areas tidy and clean. The boarders are actively involved in the food provision via the school council and boarders' meetings. Suggestions by the boarders are routinely sought and acted upon.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders live in an environment which they reported makes them feel safe. The school is extremely thorough in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the boarding pupils.

The school has a clear and responsive anti-bullying policy which is known by boarding pupils. The boarders feel confident that issues associated with bullying would be rigorously addressed, although boarders commented that there are rarely any incidents of bullying behaviour. The boarding community commented that it is a supportive and inclusive school that welcomes new students and helps them settle in quickly. The school provides excellent education to boarders, parents and staff in relation to cyber bullying and internet safety, with external speakers working with students and staff to educate them.

The boarders are protected from the risk of harm or abuse by appropriately trained and experienced staff who follow robust policies and procedures. Suitable child protection training is provided on a regular basis to all staff employed at the school including non-teaching staff. The staff have a clear understanding of key child protection matters and the action they need to take if they suspect a student is at risk of, or is, being harmed. The school liaises with the Local Authority Designated Officer to ensure robust policies, practices and procedures. There is a real and clear focus on safeguarding and child protection, with competent and experienced

designated staff taking overall responsibility for this. The boarders reported that they feel safe at the school and have a variety of adults they can talk to. There have been no child protection referrals since the previous inspection three years ago.

The behaviour of the students seen throughout the inspection was exemplary. The students were relaxed and very open about their experiences as boarders. The school addresses inappropriate or negative behaviour in a positive manner, with clear guidelines known by students should they go against the school's rules. The school's ethos is based on promoting students to take responsibility for their actions, and addresses any misdemeanours with open discussion. The boarders understand what sanctions may be implemented and feel these are fair and only used when necessary; however, these are few and far between. There have been no formal complaints since the previous inspection in relation to boarding welfare. Complaints or concerns raised by boarders are dealt with on an individual basis or through the boarders' meetings. The boarding community is empowered to advocate for themselves and are very vocal in raising any issues with a variety of staff.

Health and safety are given high regard at the school, with excellent measures to ensure all areas are fully risk assessed and reviewed regularly. Excellent fire safety measures ensure mechanisms are in place to continually safeguard the boarding community. Boarders confirmed they routinely practise the evacuation procedure and are well versed with all exit routes from their boarding houses. Boarders were very clear about areas within the school site which are out of bounds and staff are vigilant to ensure members of the public using the public right of way do not stray onto school grounds.

Boarders reported that all staff are respectful of their privacy especially at times of showering or changing. The addition of new shower and bathing facilities in some boarding areas has provided boarders with much improved facilities in which to bathe and shower in private.

Boarders are protected by robust and thorough recruitment procedures. Key staff involved in the recruitment process have attended Safer Recruitment in Education training. Staff demonstrated a thorough understanding of safer recruitment procedures and maintain extremely well-organised personnel files on all staff. All visitors are checked and supervised if moving around the school, providing enhanced protection for students.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are offered an excellent variety of activities in the evenings and at weekends. The boarding community is involved in the development of new activities, with opportunities for students to run sessions of interest to them. The school excels in offering a huge range of diverse opportunities such as early morning baking sessions where students can make their own bread and cook this in an old-fashioned, wood-fired bread oven. Opportunities are available for all students,

whatever their interests.

Personal support to individual students is an area in which the school excels. A cohesive committed staff team ensures all boarders have someone to talk to if they need to and this is confirmed by the boarders. The school actively supports each student as an individual and works to ensure their individual needs are met. The additional support of an independent counsellor whom students can contact readily is an invaluable resource for the boarding community. Comments from parents were extremely positive about the support and care offered to their children while boarding at the school. Throughout the inspection the boarding community were very positive, happy and relaxed and spoke freely about life at the school. Feedback from boarders confirmed the variety of staff they would go to for support. Boarders reported: 'It's the best years of my life, it is so good here, the staff are excellent.' Students and teachers are on first-name terms, and the school ethos is that respect is earned by the individual not their position. Boarders confirmed there was an excellent level of mutual trust and respect between staff and students.

The school values the different cultural needs of its boarders. During the inspection the inspectors heard of, or saw, no inappropriate discrimination of gender, disability, race, religion or culture. All boarders are encouraged to develop as unique individuals and are given opportunities to participate in all areas of the school life. Other areas of interest are explored to ensure each student is able to reach their full potential. Boarders confirmed that the boarding community is very supportive in welcoming overseas and new boarders so they are made to feel very welcomed and to ease their transition into boarding at the school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders are considered an integral aspect of the school, with their views and wishes being acknowledged and acted upon. They are encouraged and supported to contribute their views through the school council, boarding meetings and open discussion with a range of staff during boarding hours. The boarders reported their views and opinions are always listened to, with actions being clearly communicated to them through notices and the school council. Boarders also have many informal and formal opportunities to express their views. The school harbours an ethos in which boarders are encouraged to show responsibility, self-discipline and care for others. A number of very positive comments were received from parents about the support and care received from the boarding staff, resulting in confident self-assured students.

The boarders are assisted to maintain contact with their families and friends. Mobile phones are allowed, and there are private telephones for boarders to use. The school maintains excellent communication links with parents, especially through telephone, discussions, email or school events.

New boarders are helped to settle into the school by an effective 'dorm bosses'

system. Boarders reported they are made to feel very welcome when they start boarding, by existing students and the dorm bosses, and this helps them settle in quickly. There is clear information relating to boarding available for parents and students, outlining what to expect from boarding at Bedales School.

Relationships between staff and the boarders are exceptional with very happy students who obviously enjoy their time at the school. Boarders said: 'I have gained so much confidence and independence since being a boarder.' Boarders were observed to be very relaxed in the company of staff, who showed care and understanding especially in providing extra support, as many students were undertaking exams at the time of inspection.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The boarders are provided with good accommodation that is well organised and supervised. Recent improvements to the boarding house provide excellent bathing and showering facilities in some boarding areas, with a programme in place to undertake this high standard of work throughout all houses. The boarding community is based in three boarding houses known as 'flats'. Boarders and parents confirmed that the mixed-age ranges in dormitories contribute to the positive boarding experience.

The boarders have areas around their beds that they can personalise, with all boarders having lockable storage for personal items. However, some concerns were raised by a few parents and boarders about possessions going missing. The school has actively worked with all students to educate them about the importance of securing their personal items and taking responsibility for their own possessions. Boarders confirmed this to be the case and echoed that it is up to individuals to secure their own possessions, rather than leaving them on display or unsecured.

The standard of cleanliness is good throughout the boarding houses. Boarders reported being very happy with their environment and that boarding at the school is, 'one of the best times of my life'.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Individual needs are very well catered for, from religious and cultural to dietary needs. Different cultures are explored, with boarders being involved in events such as working with members of the community and fundraising for an overseas school. Teacher and student exchange programmes offer opportunities for students to experience life in places such as Shanghai.

The management of the school is extremely effective and coordinated. The

headteacher ultimately has responsibility but is also supported by a managing head who has a dedication for boarding welfare. The boarding staff are very committed to providing an excellent boarding experience for the students, which was very evident from conversations with boarders. There is a well-structured senior management team which is well informed of its roles and responsibilities and effective in delivery. The boarders are cared for by good numbers of staff who are trained and sensitive to their needs. The boarding staff receive regular training to ensure they are up to date with child protection and first aid. The staff interviewed and observed during the inspection were extremely committed to providing boarders with a positive experience.

The monitoring of all areas and records is excellent. Effective monitoring of the current practice is taking place on a weekly basis, with key boarding staff meeting to discuss any issues relating to boarding welfare. Appraisal of boarding staff is conducted through regular formal and informal meetings. The school database provides an excellent monitoring tool for staff to ensure any pastoral or welfare issues are continually reviewed and action is taken to address any issues relating to boarding students. Effective risk assessment highlights areas to ensure boarders' welfare is protected and promoted. Off-site activity risk assessments are completed to a very good standard.

The school provides a wealth of information to parents and boarders about the boarding practices and principles of the school. The school's website has clear and updated information for parents and prospective parents to view. A boarders' handbook is in place that fully informs boarders of what to expect from their boarding experience.

The boarding houses are well organised and provide a safe and secure environment for boarders. The boarders report they have no difficulty in finding a member of staff when they need to. The staff receive appropriate training commencing with induction and regular updates, and have guidance on boarding policies and practice which are regularly updated.

The boarders are closely supervised, and staff are aware of their whereabouts at all times. Boarders are well informed of where they can and cannot access on the school site including the school grounds. There are clear protocols for staffing of organised trips away from school.

The relationships between staff and boarders are relaxed, friendly and respectful. Senior and boarding staff are committed to providing excellent standards of care and to continue to promote and develop boarding, with a focus on striving towards improved practice and improving the boarding environment in the near future. Positive comments received from parents and boarders were that boarding at Bedales School has really helped individuals gain confidence and independence while developing as positive individuals.