

Dunhurst (Bedales Junior School)

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Brian Mcquoid
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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

Dunhurst School is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils between the ages of eight and 13 years of age. The school is independent and part of the Bedales group of three schools, all of which share the same campus located just outside of Petersfield, Hampshire. The schools share the same governing body and as a preparatory school the great majority of Dunhurst pupils move up to Bedales senior school. Boarding accommodation consists of two wings which provide suitable separation by age and gender, and which are both located within the main school building.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

The school makes outstanding provision for its boarding pupils. There is a strong sense of community with which staff and pupils identify, and which contributes greatly to the welfare of pupils. Both parents and pupils comment extremely positively about their experience of boarding. The school provides an inclusive environment where pupils are safe and where they enjoy positive relationships with staff and with their peers. Pupils are actively encouraged to lead healthy lifestyles and feel that they are able to influence events affecting them. Levels of support available to boarders and their parents and families are excellent. The boarding provision is being extremely well managed and there is effective oversight by the school's governing body. Staff are remarkably well supported and are clearly committed to the welfare of pupils. Local and international community involvement is exceptional and enables pupils to learn about different cultures and to respect differences.

There are two recommendations arising from the inspection. One refers to recruitment checks on gap-year students, and the other relates to privacy in the shower facilities.

Improvements since the last inspection

Following recommendations at the previous inspection the school has: introduced procedures for pupils who may wish to self medicate; taken action to remove the risk to pupils from radiators; and ensured that addition all matters relating to health and safety are now being addressed in a timely manner.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school makes excellent provision for promoting the physical and emotional well-being of pupils. A comprehensive personal, social and health education programme is delivered at age appropriate stages and addresses all of the major risks to health such as smoking, drugs and alcohol. The programme promotes healthy lifestyles and is supported by the provision of healthy and nutritious meals for pupils as well as lots of opportunities for physical activities. Pupils have excellent access to the school counsellor, to whom they can self refer, and parents and families benefit from the availability of a family counselling service through the school. The school also provides workshops and presentations which reflect parental concerns and which have addressed such topics as cyber bullying, relationships, and the transition to senior school.

Pupils benefit from excellent health care arrangements at the school with a team of matrons providing 24 hour cover. There is an extremely good relationship with the local surgery where pupils are registered and matrons are very well supported by the school doctor who visits weekly to hold surgeries. Matrons are located centrally within the boarding accommodation and provide a welcoming environment which is supportive of pupils. Pupils are able to see the doctor independently of the school if they wish and have access to both a male and female doctor. All matrons are first aid qualified and have attended training on non-medical matters including basic counselling skills. Comprehensive policies and procedures provide for the management and administration of all medication, and ensure there are the necessary safeguards to protect pupils' welfare. All medication is stored securely, meticulous records are maintained of administration, and written parental permissions are on file. Clear procedures which include an assessment of risk are followed for any pupil who wishes to self medicate. Individual protocols are in place for those pupils with severe allergies and staff have received training in the use of epipens which are located around the school for quick and easy access.

The school provides meals for pupils which are varied, healthy and of a high quality. There is always a choice, vegetarian options are always available and special dietary needs are very well catered for. The school dining room is spacious and well suited for its purpose. Meals are very pleasant and sociable occasions with sufficient time allowed and with appropriate levels of supervision. Themed evenings provide opportunities to experience food from different cultures and the catering manager is mindful of suggestions put forward by the food committee.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school provides an environment for pupils within which they feel safe and where they are suitably protected from harm. Relationships between pupils and staff are mutually respectful, pupils are very supportive of one another and say that bullying is

not a problem within the school. There is an acute awareness of cyber bullying amongst staff and both pupils, and parents have received presentations on the topic. Suitable measures are in place to ensure the safe use of the internet. Safeguarding policies and procedures support and promote good practice across the school and include an up-to-date child protection policy. There are designated senior staff across Bedales with responsibility for child protection matters and this includes the deputy head of Dunhurst. All staff receive child protection training which is updated annually during the September inset programme. The welfare of pupils is paramount at the school and staff have a sound understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities.

Pupils benefit from having a very wide range of people they can approach with any concerns or problems they may have. A 'peer listening' scheme operates within the school and was originally set up in conjunction with ChildLine. Volunteer peer listeners from year eight receive training during a weekend away at the start of the school year. All peer listeners have allocated classes they assume responsibility for and with whom they build relationships. The group of peer listeners meet on a weekly basis to receive support and to discuss issues arising. Pupils much value the scheme and the support it provides. In addition pupils have 'boarding reps' they can go to as well as a number of other people which include house staff, matrons, tutors, teachers, gap-year students, and the school counsellor.

The behaviour of pupils at the school is exemplary. Informal but mutually respectful relationships exist between pupils and staff, and pupils report being fairly treated. Sanctions used were described by pupils as being appropriate.

The school premises and accommodation provide a safe and secure environment for pupils within which there are excellent arrangements for the management of risk. All staff receive a health and safety handbook which makes clear their responsibilities and a health and safety committee meets regularly to monitor and address all aspects of safety. A specialist health and safety consultant advises the school and ensures all legislative requirements are being met. Health and safety checks of the boarding houses are carried out and recorded every month and matters arising are addressed effectively by on-site maintenance personnel. Written risk assessments are in place for the premises and for all activities undertaken by pupils both on and off site. This includes provision for trips overseas and those which involve hazardous pursuits. Pupils are well aware of the school's fire evacuation procedures and confirmed there are regular practices, including at night time. Fire safety arrangements include an up-to-date fire risk assessment and regular checks and tests of fire safety equipment by specialist services. Security measures across the campus were seen to be effective and there were no identifiable hazards observed during a tour of the school premises.

The school's human resources department oversees the recruitment of all staff and maintains the single central record. Designated staff have completed training in 'Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education'. Personnel records sampled showed the relevant checks to have been carried out and to include identity checks, proof of qualifications, right to work in the United Kingdom, and Criminal Records Bureau disclosures. The one shortfall was the lack of overseas police checks

for the school's gap-year students. The gap-year students spoken to were sure they had completed such checks but the school did not have any evidence of these.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils benefit from outstanding levels of individual support being available to them. Communication across the school is excellent with pastoral staff meeting regularly and ensuring close and effective monitoring of individual welfare matters. Peer listeners, individual tutors, house staff, matrons, gap-year students, and the school counsellor are all available and easily accessible to pupils for support should they require it. Both male and female staff are available to all pupils. The contact details for the school counsellor and for ChildLine are provided for pupils, and on two occasions the school's housemistress has taken groups of pupils to events held by the Children's Rights Director (for England).

The school provides an inclusive environment within which pupils feel fairly treated and have access to equal opportunities. Pupils are not being subject to discrimination in any form. There is a strong sense of community at the school with which pupils identify. 'One big family' was a term used by several pupils during discussion groups to describe what life was like at the school. At the time of the inspection there were no pupils with any specific requirements associated with their religious or cultural background or who required support because English was not their first language. School documentation clearly demonstrates a commitment to providing equal opportunities and to tackling discrimination in any form.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Open dialogue and discussion is integral to the ethos of the school and as such pupils feel listened to and able to influence matters affecting them. Excellent relationships with staff enable pupils to freely express their views and opinions. In addition there are a number of ways that the views of pupils are able to be considered and acted upon. There is a school council which has elected representatives, boarding representatives in each boarding house, a food committee, and a suggestions box.

The school makes extremely good provision enabling pupils to maintain contact with their parents and families. There are telephones in each boarding house exclusively for the use of boarders and which are able to be used in private. Pupils are permitted mobile phones which they are able to use during designated periods and they may send and receive letters. In addition pupils have access to email facilities. Parents regularly visit and are overwhelmingly positive about their communication with the school. They are consulted and kept informed about significant welfare concerns, there is an active 'Friends of Dunhurst' association, and weekly updates are posted on the school website. The school's headteacher also provides her mobile telephone

number to parents and is contactable 24 hours a day during term time.

Pupils reported very positively on the arrangements for supporting new boarders upon their arrival. An induction day provides opportunities to meet staff and to get to know the school premises. Peer buddies are appointed both within the class and in the boarding house, and the peer listeners are sensitive to the needs of new pupils. Those pupils who reported being homesick at times said that they were extremely well supported by both staff and fellow pupils.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Pupils were overwhelmingly happy with the accommodation provided for them and raised no significant concerns. The boarding houses provide accommodation of a good standard which is well furnished and well maintained. All dormitories are carpeted, centrally heated, provide natural light, and all pupils are provided with a lockable space. There is appropriate separation by age and gender and no discernible disparity in the quality of provision across houses. The school has a rolling programme of refurbishment and the heating system is due to be replaced during the next financial year. Pupils have access to a wide range of facilities during the evenings with lots of opportunities to do the things they enjoy doing. One example was an outdoor 'rock concert' taking place on the evening of the last day of the inspection, which was to be attended by parents.

Toilet and washing facilities are provided in sufficient numbers and are of a good standard. The facilities are kept clean and there is sufficient hot and cold water. Both showers and baths are available to pupils. A number of pupils raised concerns about the shower curtains fitted, saying that they did not provide sufficient privacy.

The school makes good provision to ensure the welfare of pupils placed in lodgings is suitably safeguarded and promoted. Records showed host families had been appropriately assessed and vetted, that the accommodation had been checked, and that there was a written agreement in place between the school and family. Host family members were clear about their responsibilities and the pupils being accommodated were extremely happy with the arrangements. Written guidance was seen to be provided for host families and they confirmed that there was support available for them at all times from the school.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school provides excellent information for pupils and their parents via an informative website, detailed prospectus and handbook. Information was seen to be up to date, to describe the aims the school has for pupils, and to accurately reflect current practice within the school. The boarding provision was seen to be extremely well managed by the designated housemaster and housemistress with effective

oversight provided by the school's head teacher and the governing body.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. School documentation displays a clear commitment to providing equal opportunities and to tackling discrimination in any form. The school provides an inclusive environment within which respect and consideration for others is promoted and where pupils learn about respecting differences, and about other cultures and religions. Pupils feel part of a school community and do not experience discrimination of any kind. A comprehensive personal, social and health education programme and community service programme contribute remarkably to the promotion of diversity and appreciation of differences. Pupils routinely visit schools in the local community where they help with reading and a variety of other subjects. This includes a school for children with a learning disability. In addition the school has an established link with a school in Nicaragua and pupils regularly raise money for ongoing projects associated with the school. A 'fair trade' committee is also active within the school and promotes the sale of fair trade goods such as coffee and items of school clothing.

Boarding provision is very well organised and managed, and contributes very positively to the welfare of pupils. Established systems provide for effective record keeping and there is close monitoring of all matters concerning pupils welfare. This includes complaints, sanctions, accidents and risk assessments. Staff rotas are displayed so pupils are aware of who is on duty, and pupils commented that they are always able to contact a member of staff should they need to. Matrons use a pager system to ensure they are always contactable should they be away from the boarding house, and there are always sufficient staff on duty. Matrons provide night time cover and a number of staff are immediately available within the boarding accommodation.

Staff with boarding responsibilities have clear job descriptions reflecting their responsibilities and complete a programme of induction prior to commencing their duties. The staff group communicate very effectively and operate extremely well as a team. All those spoken with clearly love working at the school and described the support they receive as outstanding. This includes a dedicated staff member with responsibility for staff welfare, an annual appraisal system, and excellent opportunities for further training via the boarding schools' association. Staff were more than happy with the levels of staffing and reported having clear information provided for them in relation to welfare policies and procedures.