

Leighton Park School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Lucy Martin / Maire Atherton
Type of Inspection	Key

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Head / Principal	John Dunston
Nominated person	
Date of last inspection	8 November 2004

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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

Leighton Park is an independent co-educational school for day and boarding pupils founded upon Quaker principles, which emphasise tolerance, peace and understanding, integrity and dialogue and respect for other cultures and faiths. The school is situated approximately a mile south of Reading town centre, close to all local amenities.

There are currently approximately 490 pupils, of whom 161 are full, weekly or flexi boarders ranging from 11 to 19 years of age. There are five houses which accommodate all the pupils, including boarders. There is a junior house for pupils in years seven and eight and four mixed senior houses.

Summary

This was an announced inspection carried out by two inspectors and a Boarding School Additional Inspector (BSAI) over three days, which covered all the key standards. The judgements in this report have been made using new benchmarking guidance which was implemented from 1st April 2008. Information about this guidance can be found on the Ofsted website. The new basis for making judgements is not directly comparable with that used previously and the application of this guidance has resulted in the overall judgement being satisfactory. The satisfactory judgements made in Being Healthy and Staying Safe have an impact on the judgement made in Organisation and on the overall judgement of the school. The areas of Enjoying and Achieving and Equality and Diversity are both outstanding. Making a Positive Contribution and Achieving Economic Wellbeing are both judged to be good.

Boarders feel safe and well looked after and levels of bullying are low. The boarders receive high levels of support from a number of staff at the school. One boarder said 'it feels like home, the community here and just the welcoming approach.' Boarders have access to an excellent range and choice of activities, both after school and at weekends. The school promotes equality and diversity very well and provides good support to overseas boarders.

There are recommendations concerning the storage, administration and recording of medication, and recruitment procedures, to ensure best practice in terms of keeping boarders safe from harm. Other recommendations have been made concerning the formal monitoring of key records.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school was last inspected in November 2004 by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). There were five recommendations and eight advisory recommendations made. All of these have been addressed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

The health of boarders is well promoted at the school. There is an extensive health education programme which is implemented through weekly Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) lessons, delivered by the tutors supported by specialist staff as required.

External speakers and talks on key issues are a regular feature of the PSHCE programme often involving parents as well as staff and pupils. In addition, there are a wide range of health education leaflets available in the health centre. Staff and pupils know the school's policy on the appropriate response to alcohol, smoking and drug use, and staff follow that policy in practice.

The school has a health centre which is staffed from 8am until 7pm Monday to Friday and the nurses are also on 24 hour call. This resource provides a good medical service to all pupils. There are two General Practitioners (GP's) from a local surgery (one male and one female) who hold surgeries at the school twice a week. Boarders who are ill can be accommodated in sick rooms in the houses or the health centre, including overnight if necessary. The nurses keep a written record of all the medication, treatment and first aid administered to boarders in the health centre but this is not being regularly monitored by an appropriately designated senior member of staff. Detailed permission is obtained from parents regarding the administration of named non-prescribed medication but the medical consent forms do not include permission to seek medical, dental or optical treatment when required, or for the administration of first aid. Adding these details would ensure that there are no delays in boarders requiring urgent treatment. Accidents are recorded but few appear to take place and there is no consistency regarding where the forms are sent within the school.

In the last 12 months a school counsellor has been appointed and the arrangements are working well. The counsellor introduces herself to pupils and leaflets are available to pupils and to staff explaining the role and contact arrangements.

Each of the senior houses has a full time matron and in the junior house a housemother. They provide medical treatment for minor illnesses/injuries and liaise closely with the health centre. The houses keep a stock of named non-prescribed medication and in some houses some prescribed medication is stored and administered to boarders by staff. The medication is not always securely stored and the prescribed medication is not always being appropriately recorded. One controlled drug is being put into an envelope for other staff to administer which is secondary dispensing and could lead to accidental mix-ups and errors. Medication is not always securely stored and no stock controls take place. The shortfalls in the storage, administration and recording of prescribed medication could place boarders at risk of harm.

The boarders receive high quality catering provision. Most catering is provided centrally in a modern, purpose-built dining room which has been specially designed and provides a pleasant environment. The meals provide good quality and choice and special dietary, medical or religious needs are well catered for. The junior house has its own kitchen and provides breakfast and the evening meal in the house. The boarders are generally positive about the food provided. The main kitchen has been awarded the highest award possible by the local environmental health service.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The school has an effective policy on countering bullying which is known to parents, boarders and staff and which is implemented in practice. Boarders report low levels of bullying and say that when it is reported to staff, swift and effective action takes place. The school has a comprehensive child protection procedure and the designated person for dealing with safeguarding issues is the deputy head. Appropriate training for this role has been undertaken

and there is regular training provided for all staff working at the school covering safeguarding. There are good links with local authorities in the area and experience of working together on child protection concerns. There is good written information in the staff handbook about safe working practices.

The use of sanctions with boarders is fair and appropriate. The school's disciplinary practice is well known to pupils and practice is consistent. All pupils are treated as individuals and generally warnings are given for minor misdemeanours before sanctions are imposed. Major punishments are recorded and are monitored by the deputy head. All the houses record the sanctions imposed on pupils but not presently in a consistent way.

A complaints procedure is available to staff, boarders and parents giving clear information. Few complaints are received but those received are taken seriously and appropriately followed up and responded to. Boarders' personal privacy is respected with no boarders expressing concerns in this area.

There are robust recruitment checks carried out for academic staff but the same procedures are not always carried out when non-academic staff are appointed. Some non-academic staff have started work at the school before their Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check has been returned and before two written references have been received. There is no system in place to contact each referee to verify the reference for non-academic staff. These shortfalls could place boarders at risk of harm. The school has appointed a member of staff who starts in January 2009 with expertise in human resources whose job will include staff recruitment.

The school ensures that external work personnel in the houses are supervised by house staff and there are written agreements in place for any adult not employed by the school but living in the same building as boarding accommodation. The school has taken steps to ensure that the taxi companies used have their drivers CRB checked.

The school has robust health and safety procedures. There are sound fire precautions in place with regular fire drills and routine testing of the system being carried out. The boarders know the evacuation procedures and drills take place during boarding time. There is a school policy restricting access to school premises and boarding areas to only adults who have been subject to the school's full vetting procedures unless appropriately supervised. A review and audit of security has been carried out by an external organisation and some improvements are being carried out as a result. The management of vehicles on the school site is currently under review with some changes imminent which include the installation of CCTV technology. There have been improvements made to security alarms in the houses and to external lighting in the past 12 months. The school has a comprehensive health and safety policy available to all staff. There are risk assessments in place for all aspects of safety of the premises and grounds as well as boarders' behaviour and activities. Each house has its own handyman which ensures that minor maintenance issues are quickly attended to.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have access to a wide range and choice of activities. There are numerous clubs and activities available after school to suit all interests and there is a new and enhanced weekend activity programme. Boarders enjoy the activities and are actively involved in choosing which ones they would like provided. Some older pupils have the opportunity to run some of the

activities for the younger pupils and this is enjoyed by all. It also offers opportunities for pupils from a diverse range of cultures to share their own culture with younger pupils. For example, a Chinese culture activity for younger pupils.

Boarders receive high levels of personal support from a wide number of staff at the school. One boarder commented 'there is always someone I can go and talk to if I have a problem or am being bullied.' The house system provides a wide range of staff of different genders and ages who boarders can talk to. The house tutor system works well and provides opportunities for boarders to discuss personal or welfare issues as well as academic matters. A peer mentoring scheme has recently been introduced which provides additional support on a peer level. Training and support is provided for the peer mentors. In addition, the introduction of a school counsellor has enabled pupils to gain confidential support if desired. There has been a good programme of introduction and the counsellor talks to new pupils at the beginning of the school year.

The school is international in its outlook and has a number of overseas boarders from different religious backgrounds, races and cultures. The school's Quaker ethos is underpinned by the belief in equality and that the qualities of each individual are celebrated. There is the 'Collect' which takes place most days and each week a team of students and staff take responsibility for preparing the Collects and a wide variety of material is presented. For example, some Chinese students recently talked about the Chinese earthquake. All the pupils call the staff by their first names, again to emphasise the equality of all.

The boarders enjoy being part of a multi-cultural school and the overseas boarders generally feel included. Each new boarder has a 'buddy' for support. The English as a Second Language (ESL) department works closely with overseas boarders and offers support as well as help with English. Each year they take the overseas students away on a residential break and arrange for groups to celebrate their own cultural traditions. For example, Russian students cooking a traditional meal together or Chinese students visiting a local Chinese restaurant to celebrate their New Year.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are a number of opportunities for boarders to express their views about the school. There are monthly meetings which any pupil can attend as well as house meetings, prefect meetings and food committee meetings. Boarders feel that the weekly house meetings provide a good opportunity to quickly effect change. All the meetings allow any pupil to raise issues and boarders are clear that their views are listened to and that changes are made as a result. For example, the introduction of fair trade tea and coffee and the peer mentoring scheme.

Boarders are able to maintain private contact with their parents and families in private. The school allows mobile phone use in the houses and boarders say that they can freely use them out of school time. All the houses have private payphones which are still used on occasions. Helpline numbers are clearly displayed on the house notice boards and in the school calendar which all pupils are given. The houses have wireless access to the internet which enables boarders to have ready access to e-mail if they have laptop computers. In addition, there are a number of desktop computers available in all the houses. Parents are positive about the communication from the school and welfare concerns are quickly communicated. Appropriate records of telephone and e-mail conversations with parents and guardians are maintained.

The school has a thorough and effective induction programme for all pupils and especially for new boarders. Boarders are provided with separate information packs which include details and comprehensive information about the school. There is an informative booklet for new pupils in the junior house which explains all aspects of the school in a child-friendly way and contains lots of colour photographs.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school has five houses which accommodate both day pupils and boarders. All the houses are mixed with boys and girls accommodated in separate areas with joint communal facilities. The houses vary in physical appearance and age but overall they provide good accommodation for boarders. The school is developing a strategic plan for upgrading the facilities and work has been undertaken in upgrading the washing facilities in two of the houses in particular.

The houses are large and there is a good use of space. The games rooms and common rooms have high quality equipment such as televisions, table tennis tables and pool tables, as well as computer games and books. The school is developing new kitchen areas in the senior houses to allow boarders to cook more snacks themselves. The bedrooms are all a reasonable size and sixth form boarders can usually have single rooms if they wish. The programme of replacing all the mattresses has been completed and new duvets, pillows and bedding have been supplied across the school.

There are sufficient bathrooms and toilets and the programme of improving the bathroom facilities is continuing. A number of boarders raised concerns about the showers not working properly and having low water pressure. The school has been aware of this problem and has dealt with it by employing an external company to carry out an audit of every shower in the school. The audit is complete and the school is waiting for the report.

All boarders have access to a house bank in which they can deposit money. Records are maintained and are inspected regularly by the bursary. The houses have been supplied with safes where money and valuables can be securely stored. All boarders have a lockable space where they can keep personal possessions and valuables.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

An accurate and up to date statement of the school's boarding principles and practice is available to parents, boarders and staff. The school's prospectus as well as the staff handbook, house handbooks and information sent to parents reflects current boarding practice at the school and its particular ethos with its Quaker principles.

There are clear leadership and management systems in place. The management systems are focused very clearly on boarding as although 70% of the pupils are day pupils the school is run almost entirely on boarding lines. The deputy head is in charge of pupil welfare but there has been some reorganisation of the school's leadership and senior management and the creation of a new post since September 2008 of assistant head (pastoral and boarding). This further strengthens the management of boarding.

Some informal monitoring of the operation of the houses takes place and there are weekly meetings of the pastoral management team which includes all the housemasters. There are currently few formal monitoring systems in place to ensure that key records such as risk assessments, punishments, complaints and accidents are regularly monitored at least twice termly by a senior member of staff. This would enable more consistent record keeping across the houses and trends or patterns would be more quickly recognised.

There are good staffing levels in the houses. Boarders know where to find staff at all times, including at night. In addition to at least one member of the teaching staff being on duty, the matron is on duty in the house during the day. This role has been given a higher pastoral focus and they no longer have responsibilities for some of the domestic tasks within the houses. There is a good range of staff on duty in the houses in terms of age and gender. There are sound systems in place to ensure that the staff on duty know where the pupils are at all times.

All staff who are new to boarding duties are inducted by the housemaster and regular house meetings ensure that staff are clear about their duties. New staff typically 'shadow' more experienced staff until they feel confident in their role. Staff appraisals include a review of boarding duties. Staff attend conferences and training courses run by the Boarding Schools' Association (BSA) and two are presently undertaking the professional development training provided by this organisation.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All pupils are treated as individuals and boarders from different cultures and religions are well supported, in particular by the ESL department. The programme of 'Collects' encourages pupils to share aspects of importance to them such as culture and identity. All staff are called by their first names to promote equality and special diets are well catered for. A disability audit has been undertaken to assess accessibility issues throughout the school.

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):

- review the medical consent obtained from parents to ensure that it includes the administration of first aid as well as to seek medical, dental or optical treatment when required (NMS 15)
- review the storage, administration, recording and stock control of medication in the houses (NMS 15)

- ensure that there is monitoring of all medication, treatment and first aid administered to boarders by either the school nurses or matrons by an appropriately designated senior member of staff (NMS 15)
- ensure that there is consistent practice within the school regarding the recording of accidents (NMS 15)
- review the recruitment procedures relating to non-academic staff to ensure that all the appropriate checks are successfully completed before they start work at the school (NMS 38)
- ensure that key records such as risk assessments, punishments, complaints and accidents are regularly monitored at least twice a term by a designated senior member of staff (NMS 23).