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Sevenoaks School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC024057
Inspection date	16 June 2009
Inspector	Alex Turner
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Sevenoaks School High Street SEVENOAKS Kent TN13 1HU
Telephone number	01732 455 133
Email	enq@sevenoaksschool.org
Registered person	Katy Ricks
Head / Principal	Katy Ricks
Nominated person	
Date of last inspection	6 March 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

Sevenoaks School is an independent, co-educational boarding and day school, set in 100 acres in the heart of Southeast England. There are about 980 pupils in the school, including international students from over 40 countries around the world. Boarding is an important element in the school's life and ethos. There are about 340 boarders and 640 day pupils. There are seven boarding houses. Each one is unique in terms of presentation and layout. Good principles and practice in boarding are shared across the campus.

Summary

At this announced full inspection, all key standards were inspected. A number of supplementary standards have also been assessed. Each of the outcome groups has been rated.

This is an outstanding school. Pupils benefit from a range of excellent facilities, resources, and pastoral care. Management and organisation is very effective. Boarders' health, welfare, safety, and rights are all promoted. Boarding houses are very well appointed and surrounded by attractive grounds both on the main campus and a short walk from it. The standard of sleeping accommodation and bathroom facilities vary between satisfactory and outstanding. Boarders enjoy excellent access to the school's facilities, to contribute to its development, and to take part in community activities and functions.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school has considered and addressed each of the recommendations included in the last report. The complaints process has been added to. The induction, training and appraisal of boarding staff has been reviewed and improved. Safeguards have been improved in relation to food hygiene, medication, and crisis planning. Access to recreational facilities has increased.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health is promoted. There is good access to excellent health care provision. There is a high level of satisfaction amongst boarders in relation to the accessibility, range and quality of emotional and physical health care support. Welfare needs are identified; support is planned, coordinated and kept under review.

Boarders are suitably accommodated, supervised and looked after when ill. Safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and welfare are supported by appropriate records. The management and administration of prescribed medication, first aid and homely remedies is safe. Staff are suitably trained. Boarders receive age appropriate advice and guidance on alcohol, substance misuse, smoking, sex education, infections and diseases, and are supported to consider and reflect on misguided risk taking behaviour.

Boarders benefit from good quality, nutritionally balanced meals. They enjoy a healthy diet and an active lifestyle. There is sufficient time at mealtimes, taking into account any necessary queuing time, for boarders to finish their meals properly. Dining facilities are in line with the

overall high standard of catering provision. The kitchen and dining space in the boarding houses are homely and well appointed. Dietary requirements for religious, health or medical reasons are met very well. The quality and development of catering services is actively managed. Boarders can contribute to and influence this by representation on the food committee. The value of this opportunity is perhaps not being fully exploited.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' welfare is safeguarded while accommodated by the school. They feel safe and feel properly protected. Staff are suitably trained and supported to fulfil their role in this area. Measures to prevent and counter bullying, to prevent unsuitable people working in the school, and to ensure boarding accommodation is secure from public intrusion are carefully thought through and wide ranging. Safeguarding issues are well managed.

Boarders feel confident that sensitive information about them is handled in an appropriate manner and that their confidentiality is protected. Taking into account the context and practicable limits of the boarding environment pupils are satisfied with the level of privacy they have.

Great value is placed upon personal responsibility and consideration of others. The well established prefect system serves to strengthen this position and provides opportunities for boarders to take on activities that promote community minded participation and contribution. Boarders are rewarded with a house tie at break up supper for positive contribution to the house and 'special mention' is emailed home and put on the website to acknowledge very good achievements. In line with a culture of whole school responsibility, concerns for any pupil are shared and addressed appropriately within the bounds of confidentiality. Standards of pupil behaviour are generally very good, and boarders identify the school's use of punishments as fair.

Pupils and parents needing to complain are able to do so. The school provides many good opportunities whereby concerns or upsets can be shared and a satisfactory resolution agreed. There is also a formal means to make complaints, written details of which can easily be accessed or are provided on request. The process is followed in practice when required. An appeal stage is included though where a complaint is against the headteacher the appeals stage is undefined. The omission is not harmonious with the spirit of the policy and jeopardises the attainment of satisfactory outcomes.

Boarders benefit from training, drills and a range of other measures to protect them from the risk of fire, and other hazards associated with activities and the physical environment. Fire safety equipment is tested regularly though not in all instances has emergency lighting been tested in accordance with the schools schedule to do so. The importance of doing so is recognised by the school. The shortfall in monitoring and practice is taken seriously. High risk activities and environmental hazards are carefully considered. Risk assessments are carried out and safety measures are taken. Reasonable steps are taken to minimise unnecessary risks. Sleeping, living and recreational areas, indoors and in the school grounds, are kept free of significant hazards to boarder safety.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have very good access to an excellent range of activities. Sports facilities are superb as are the opportunities and facilities available for social, artistic and other recreational and leisure pursuits. Boarders are busy but do have time to relax, and opportunities to manage their own time. Community involvement is valued and great benefits are derived by boarders in the school and the people and groups they participate with.

This is a truly multicultural, international school where each member of the community is respected and accepted. There is no discrimination on grounds of gender, disability, race, religion, cultural background, linguistic background, sexual orientation or academic or sporting ability. The rich diversity within the school is valued and its facets celebrated. Inclusion and participation is strong. Boarders benefit from appropriate support and guidance for any personal problems. Boarders describe an escalating hierarchy of contacts with whom they feel they can discuss and work through personal problems with. The school counsellor has a prominent profile and contributes a great deal to the high standard of pastoral care including helping to develop a peer counselling service.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have opportunity to contribute views and appropriately influence the operation of boarding provision. There are formal opportunities for example school councils, meetings and surveys for boarders to express views on relevant aspects of boarding provision, either directly or through representatives. These views are taken into account in the development and practice of boarding. One member from each house is co-opted onto the whole school Boarding Committee. Minutes are taken and feedback happens at whole house meetings. Pupils feel they are listened to. Decisions about refurbishment, decoration, planning of social events, availability of water, the role of house chairman, and the problem of lunch queues all provide examples whereby consultation and decision making with boarders has been effective.

There are good channels of communication between pupils, parents, guardians and school. Boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families via mobile phone, house phone or email. The school's website and the online parents' pages now provide an excellent portal of general information about the school, its operation and its events throughout the school year. Excellent provision has been made for boarders to access internet services and to ensure suitable measures are in place to help guard against inappropriate content and use.

Incoming boarders are welcomed, valued and cared for as new members of the community. Pupils describe their introduction and induction to boarding as enjoyable, informative, and reassuring, and as a precursor to making lasting friends.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Reasonable protection is provided for boarders’ personal possessions and for any boarders’ money or valuables looked after by the school. Each boarder has a suitably secure, accessible place to keep personal possessions and valuables. Honesty and trust are held in equal high esteem and is visibly evident in pupils' habits and routines.

Boarders are comfortably accommodated. There is some variation in environmental standards however the unique qualities of each boarding house in terms of the setting, design, and character outweigh the significance of this. Boarders take pride in their surroundings. Boarding houses are appropriately lit, heated and ventilated, suitably furnished, and adequately maintained. Access to boarding by pupils with disabilities is possible. Their accommodation is suitable for their access to all areas and facilities they need to use. The boarding houses and other areas for boarders are kept very clean and tidy. The standard of decoration and upkeep is generally very good. The school follows a scheduled programme of upgrade and improvement in addition to ongoing and timely maintenance, renewal, and repairs. Boarders' accommodation is not unnecessarily noisy and where necessary measures are taken to reduce noise levels. The standard of sleeping accommodation varies between satisfactory and outstanding. Good provision is made for private toilet and washing facilities. Boarders have the facility to change for sport and shower afterwards. Older boarders change in their houses for games and Physical Education (PE) although there is provision in school if time is short. Boarders are generally happy with the facilities they have got.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school recognises and values equality and diversity such that boarders benefit from an atmosphere of inclusion and respect, and from the positive experience of being part of a vibrant and active international community. Students are encouraged to gain insight into the positive impact they can have on their communities through generosity of spirit, active participation and seeking positive outcomes for themselves and others.

Parents, boarders and staff have excellent access to a wide range of written information about the school. This includes clear information about the school's boarding principles and practice. Written information reflects the actual current boarding practice at the school, and remains subject to periodic review and improvement.

There is excellent leadership of the boarding provision and all aspects of pastoral care. Pupils benefit from boarding provision that is carried on in a professional and pupil centred manner, which is subject to effective quality assurance mechanisms and ongoing development of already high standards. Boarding principles and practice are cohesive across the school campus, consistently applied and contribute in a significant way to promoting boarders' welfare, development and progress.

Appropriate levels of staff supervision are provided on campus and of boarders leaving the school site. Boarders have suitable access to a member of staff all the time they are accommodated by the school. Boarders feel safe. They enjoy a modern boarding experience managed by very competent staff who have access to clear guidance and support. Staff have specific boarding duties and receive a planned induction and ongoing training and development opportunities.

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

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- improve the policy on responding to complaints by setting out the process of appeal where a complaint is made against the headteacher. (NMS 5)
- ensure emergency lighting is tested according to the school's written schedule to do so, and that this is detailed in the appropriate records. (NMS 26)