

# Bedford School

Inspection report for boarding school

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| <b>Unique reference number</b> | SC015027         |
| <b>Inspection date</b>         | 24 February 2010 |
| <b>Inspector</b>               | Warren Clarke    |
| <b>Type of Inspection</b>      | Key              |

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| <b>Registered person</b>       | The Harpur Trust,  |
| <b>Head / Principal</b>        | John Moule   |
| <b>Nominated person</b>        | Michael Cassell  |
| <b>Date of last inspection</b> | 22 January 2007  |

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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

This independent school for day and boarding pupils is owned by the Harpur Trust. It occupies a large campus close to a town centre and all its amenities. The campus also accommodates the preparatory school, of which some pupils are boarders. Additionally, the school also controls a study centre that provides language programmes for international boarders.

Boarders in the preparatory school are aged 8 to 13 years and in the senior school, including the study centre, aged 13 to 18 years. Currently the total number of boarders, including flexi boarders, is 295. They are accommodated in eight boarding houses either directly on the campus or nearby. The preparatory school and the study centre each have an exclusive boarding house.

### Summary

This announced key inspection assessed the school's boarding welfare arrangements against all the national minimum standards relevant to the Every Child Matters outcome framework areas: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution, economic well-being and organisation.

The school is held in high regard by parents and particularly by boarders who believe they have been enabled to have a most positive boarding experience that supports them in their academic endeavour. This arises out of all round excellent performance of managers and staff in using the very good resources effectively to provide boarders comfort and a beneficial environment for their care and education. Of particular remark is success in instilling values that allow boarders of diverse background to relate well to each other and thrive in the school's community. Three recommendations have been made to address two minor health and safety issues and a problem with the heating in a particular area.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### Improvements since the last inspection

There were no recommendations arising from the last inspection.

### Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

A range of well-established and coherent arrangements are in place. These are most effective in promoting and maintaining boarders' good health. Very good provisions are made to support boarders in maintaining high standards of personal hygiene, an aspect of health promotion that staff encourage. For instance, boarders take pride in their clean, smart appearance and place a high value on the excellent laundry service and other facilities that enable them to maintain such standards.

Boarders benefit from encouragement and guidance from various sources to be aware of their health and to take some responsibility for maintaining their own well-being. They have access to health promotion material in the school medical centre, informal opportunities that house staff take to raise awareness and health promotion is formally taught as part of the Citizenship curriculum. These measures are complemented by school rules that prohibit smoking and taking

of illegal drugs and substance abuse. Balanced against this is the wide range of opportunities to maintain physical and emotional well-being through sports, artistic endeavour and other extra-curricular activities.

Particular care is taken to ensure that the school is provided adequate information about each boarder's health. This information is used effectively to maintain boarders' good health and address appropriately, any existing health problems. For example, there are detailed health care plans for boarders with conditions such as asthma and diabetes. These are underpinned by the necessary authorisation from parents permitting staff to arrange any medical treatment a boarder may need. Excellent resources are made available to address boarders' health needs. These include a well equipped medical centre staffed by qualified nurses and used by the visiting medical doctor to see boarders. The medical centre also provides facilities for boarders to receive confidential counselling from the school counsellor. These resources are efficiently co-ordinated to provide boarders with a comprehensive service that responds effectively to their physical and emotional health needs.

Boarders consider that generally they maintain good health and this is supported by their observed vibrancy and alertness. Those recovering from injury or unwell at the time of inspection commented in complimentary terms about the excellent care they are given by medical and house staff. This is unsurprising as the school ensures nursing staff have training opportunities to consolidate and update their skills. They in turn ensure that boarding staff are trained or sufficiently briefed in areas such as first aid and safe handling of medication. Should boarders become ill and need to be cared for outside their dormitory, sufficient sick bay provisions are made and clear contingency plans are in place for any outbreak of infectious illness.

Boarders rate the overall catering arrangements highly and particularly the quality of the food. They also appreciate the new state of the art dining hall, which is well-equipped and enables them to dine in comfort. The regular meals which boarders are provided are varied, permit reasonable choice and a wholesome diet. Boarders, via their food committee, are able to influence the catering arrangements, including the menus. Examples of this are reflected in the range of food at breakfast to satisfy the preference of some international boarders. Proper provisions are made for boarders who may require a special diet for health or religious reasons and appropriate food for vegetarians is a standard provision. Encouragement is given to boarders to eat healthily and the planning of menus supports this. Great care is taken to ensure dining is a pleasurable experience that contributes to boarders' overall well-being.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

A well coordinated and coherent range of policies, procedures and practices ensures boarders are safeguarded from harm and abuse. For their part, boarders comment favourably on this aspect of their care expressing feelings of complete safety in the school's environment. This is echoed by parents and staff.

Boarders consider that they are very well looked after including being protected from bullying. Indeed none report any experience of bullying in the boarding houses. The school has a clear anti-bullying strategy, the purpose and application, of which staff and boarders share a common understanding. The promotion of anti-bullying by a variety of means such as assemblies and Citizenship lessons is successful. For example, boarders regard bullying as socially unacceptable and instead appreciate and support the ethos of respect, helpfulness and caring which is evident.

That said, staff are not complacent and ensure that practical measures are taken, such as identifying and providing supervision at the times and places where any bullying could occur.

The school takes seriously its duty to safeguard boarders. In this regard it equips all staff through training and briefing, to contribute to this objective. Staff therefore know how to recognise abuse and how they are expected to act to prevent it. Staff are provided with clear guidance and procedures for any event where there is suspicion or allegation of abuse. Senior pupils such as prefects are also given appropriate guidance so that they too know how to respond to any concerns in this area. Whilst there are no safeguarding concerns, the systems in place inspire confidence that should any arise, they will be dealt with competently. In safeguarding boarders and pupils generally, the school takes effective measures to deter intruders. It also has arrangements to identify and supervise official visitors and respond in a timely fashion to events where a boarder may be missing or absent without consent.

A robust staff recruitment and selection policy is rigorously applied and ensures that only those who are suitable are employed in the school or have substantial contact with boarders. Staff are, for instance, not permitted to commence employment without satisfactory criminal records disclosure and outcome from other vetting processes. Staff are guided to perform their duties within a safe caring context that promotes boarders' privacy, minimises professional compromise and scope for embarrassment or misunderstanding. There are no concerns about any member of staff's professional conduct. Boarders say that they feel safe and comfortable with the people who look after them.

In its approach to their education and care, the school seeks to shape boarders' development so that they mature and know how to behave and use social skills in their relationships with others. There is therefore a preparedness to encourage boarders to reasonably express views and opinions including dissatisfaction. This is reflected in the fully compliant complaints procedure that permits formal complaints. Boarders are also encouraged to make suggestions for improvements and express any immediate concerns about their care. Boarders say that their comments or complaints are taken seriously, fairly assessed and they are given a timely response. This and other avenues through which boarders are able to influence how they are cared for perhaps account for there being few formal complaints and none during this academic year.

The culture of giving boarders a voice and fostering of good relationships is also reflected in the sound behaviour management policy. The policy safeguards boarders from unfair treatment by clearly establishing sanctions or punishment which are not permitted. It also clearly sets out the parameters for any use of physical intervention for which, to date, there has been no cause. Generally, boarders and staff enjoy good relationships and mutual respect. Staff demonstrate genuine commitment to their boarding welfare duties and are enthusiastic about their caring role. Boarders appreciate this and comment warmly about staff. This set of circumstances minimises any serious conduct problems in the boarding houses and throughout the school. Boarders regard school rules and discipline as reasonable and acknowledge that there is equal emphasis on rewarding good behaviour and other achievements. Above all, boarders are kept constructively occupied with curricular and extra-curricular activities.

In successfully protecting boarders from harm, the school has in place a comprehensive range of health and safety measures. These include fire precautions involving risk assessment, drills and installation of alarm and detection and fire fighting equipment. This is tested regularly to maintain operational efficiency. Risk assessments are carried out and necessary control measures

taken where boarders are involved in contact sports and other activities with an element of predictable hazard. All outings and educational visits are subject to careful planning that takes account of safeguarding issues and other safety considerations. However, the lack of restrictors on some windows above ground level to which boarders have access is a potential hazard should they seek to exit the building by this route. Trailing flexes in some bedrooms also present a trip hazard.

## **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

The school has in place a clear rationale to ensure that boarders are provided the support they need to promote and safeguard their welfare and well-being. This is sufficiently successful that it not only leaves them and parents content, but enables them to thrive both socially and academically. Boarders and parents express confidence in the boarding welfare system that intelligently co-ordinates education and care resources. These resources are used effectively to address any welfare and special educational needs issues which may threaten a boarders wellbeing. For example, a sufficient number of experienced house staff of both sexes are allocated to each house. These staff run the houses so that there is both excellent physical care and sound emotional anchorage for each boarder. This is complemented by teachers, some of whom are assigned to act as tutors to each boarder. Together with the medical staff, the independent school counsellor and chaplain, they provide the diverse range of people within a supportive umbrella under which boarders in need can find reassuring shelter. Parents are also required to play a part in this by keeping staff up to date with any welfare issues that may adversely impact on boarders in school.

Effective support of boarders and their proper development are also exemplified in the school's unequivocal equality and diversity strategy. The school makes facilities and services accessible to all who satisfy the reasonable eligibility criteria. This is reflected in the diversity of pupils and staff in terms of race, nationality, religion culture and linguistic background. Accommodated in the school are boarders from almost all continents who are enabled to become integrated and included in all aspects of school life. The school actively promotes respect for all and courtesy and consideration for the feelings of others. These are values that boarders have adopted and which are commonplace in their relationships with each other and with staff. Staff take care to establish needs arising from boarders culture, race and disabilities and make effective arrangements to meet them. For example, whilst all boarders take part in some form of spiritual reflection, those whose religion requires different or more obvious demonstration such as in prayer regimen, dress and diet are more than adequately accommodated.

Equality and diversity is celebrated throughout the school. This provides boarders with a balanced perspective of the world. It also equips them with good inter-personal relationship skills and a healthy respect and regard for people who are different. Boarders recognise this and regard their entry to the school as a good choice because it is welcoming and friendly. Boarders say they value the diversity of their group. For example, the firm friendships established with others from different backgrounds, believe their lives have been enriched.

## **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders regard the school as a welcoming and friendly place where everyone is included and has a voice. They recognise that whilst they do not always get what they want, staff listen to them and take seriously what they have to say. Boarders cite among other things regular house meetings, tutor groups, the food committee and the comment and suggestions books as means by which they are enabled to convey their views. There is confidence in the representatives that boarders elect such as house captains and monitors through whom they say they are also able to convey views, opinions and suggestions about how the boarding houses are run. The excellent relationships between boarders and staff allow boarders to discuss matters openly, which seems to give them a mature confidence and poise with peers and adults. Several examples such as menus and leisure equipment in the boarding houses are outcomes of boarders' effective influence and the staff willingness to listen.

Staff recognise the importance of boarders being able to maintain contact with their parents and make excellent provisions to facilitate this. Pay phones are installed in each boarding house and located so that boarders can use them to make and receive calls in private. No unnecessary restrictions are placed on boarders using their own mobile telephone, email or letters to maintain contact with their families. Boarders are satisfied with these arrangements and that they have regular opportunities to go home or to their guardians during holidays and long weekend breaks.

Boarders say they feel settled at the school and those from overseas are pleasantly surprised at their rapid adaptation to the culture. Staff's collective experience of boarding is effectively harnessed to ensure that boarders and their parents are provided with helpful information to commence the familiarisation process before a boarder joins the school. On arrival, new boarders are provided with a sound and supportive induction programme. In the process, effective use is made of boarders who are older or established, to befriend and support new arrivals. Boarders regard this as helpful and it seems to contribute to the welcoming and friendly ethos with which parents who responded to the survey are impressed and reassured. Records demonstrate that staff are sufficiently experienced and skilled to recognise boarders who are not settling or are homesick, even when they try to conceal this. Such situations are approached with requisite care and sensitivity.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Staff take great care to ensure that the boarding accommodation is comfortable, homely and equipped to meet boarders' needs. Each boarding house is maintained in a clean and orderly condition. Pictures and other domestic accessories help create a warm, welcoming and home-like atmosphere. Each house provides spacious accommodation with comfortable sitting, games and hobby rooms that permit boarders to pursue a range of different leisure activities simultaneously. Areas designated for completing homework or private study are well equipped and comfortable.

Bedrooms and dormitories are spacious and efficiently arranged to provide enough privacy for their occupants and more than adequate storage for their personal possessions. This includes some safe storage for valuables. Bathrooms and toilets are provided in sufficient numbers and are conveniently located and properly equipped. This ensures that boarders are able to use them in comfort and without fear of any compromise of their privacy.

Throughout, the boarding houses are structurally sound, maintained in a good state of repair and are pleasingly decorated. Boarders' accommodation benefits from sufficient lighting, good quality furniture and fittings including sound floor and window coverings, all of which contribute effectively to their privacy and comfort. Cleaning and repair and maintenance arrangements are sound hence the houses are kept clean and orderly. Boarders who commented at inspection or via the survey rate the quality of boarding accommodation and care highly. A small minority would prefer more single bedrooms for some of those in the sixth form who are accommodated in shared rooms. However, the shared rooms comply with the national minimum standards and the basis on which accommodation is provided for those entering boarding is not concealed. In a particular area of one of the boarding houses, the ambient temperature is too low because of a problem with the heating system. Staff are aware of this and have sought to mitigate the effects by using portable heaters. This, however, requires a permanent solution so that the boarders affected may enjoy similar comfort to those who benefit from acceptable heating in their living accommodation.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The boarding arrangements are underpinned by a sound set of working principles and adoption of good practice, which are well embedded. This is set out for boarders, parents and guardians in the prospectus and in specific guides for boarders. The information in these documents is current and accurately reflects the exceptionally high standard of care provided and the resources that support it. In addition, the school guides parents and boarders to all the relevant boarding policy and procedure documents available on its internet and intranet websites.

Coordination of the substantial boarding facilities is excellent. Each boarding house is very well resourced and effectively managed. All boarders are given a consistently good quality of care in keeping with their needs. Boarders value highly their overall care and are most satisfied with the boarding facilities and services.

Boarders' welfare is confidently safeguarded by the senior manager's active involvement and rigorous scrutiny of aspects of care such as discipline, complaints and representations and matters of health and safety. There are regular reviews of these matters for which periodic reports are prepared and presented for additional scrutiny by the school governors. In essence, there are no worrying patterns or trends arising from the disciplining of boarders and there is scarcely any of a serious nature. This is also the case in relation to complaints and accidents.

A consistent feature of boarders' and parents' feedback on the boarding welfare performance is that the staff, academic and non-academic, are of high calibre. Staff are caring and always available in sufficient numbers to provide an acceptable level of supervision and respond effectively to boarders' needs. This reflects the more than adequate number of staff available and their efficient deployment in each boarding house.

Staff are clear about their roles and tasks, which are confirmed in the job descriptions for their various posts. They are through induction and ongoing in-service training, equipped to be able to act to safeguard boarders and ensure that they are looked after safely. All staff are subject to periodic appraisal, but while training and development programmes for academic staff are clearly set out, this is less so for non-academic boarding staff. Although not a specific national minimum standard requirement, senior staff acknowledged this observation and intend to look at ways of enhancing the training and development of said staff. Staff are committed to the

school's philosophy for the care of boarders. They work well together in their house teams and are observed to approach their tasks with purpose and confidence.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. This is manifested in all aspects of school policies and reflected in boarders' care and the ethos of the boarding houses and the school generally.

## 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):

- ensure that boarders' accommodation is free of trailing flexes which are likely to cause a trip hazard (NMS 47.2)
- ensure windows accessible to boarders above ground level are fitted with restrictors (NMS 47.3)
- ensure that boarding houses and all other areas for boarders are adequately heated. (NMS 40.2)