

# Brooke House College

Inspection report for boarding school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Warren Clarke
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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	22 February 2010

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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

The school is an international boarding school preparing the majority of students for A level and foundation qualifications in order to obtain entrance to universities in the United Kingdom. The majority of students are from overseas and may also access additional English language tuition while at the school.

The school has been established for over 40 years. Young people under the age of 18 years are accommodated in 12 different boarding houses. Some properties are located in the grounds of the school and these are for younger students between 14 and 16 years of age. Other boarding houses of varying sizes are dispersed throughout the local town.

Some boarders contributed to this inspection via their school council representatives and informal discussions with the inspector.

### Summary

This full unannounced welfare inspection follows a previous welfare inspection, an Ofsted independent school standard inspection and a British Accreditation Committee inspection all of which were conducted within the last 12 months. This inspection assessed the school's performance against all the key and other national minimum standards for boarding schools relevant to the national outcome framework for children. Assessment of performance also took account of recommendations and observations from the previous inspection.

Significant improvement has been made in the school's arrangements for promoting boarders' good health and responding effectively to their health needs. Boarders are in good health and are confident that they will be well looked after should they become ill. Although boarders are unreserved in expressing feelings of safety and security, both in school and boarding, there remain some shortfalls in procedures and practices. The management team recognises this and has formulated a range of strategies to address them.

There are significant strengths in the management team and staff skills in creating an environment in the school in which boarders of different races and some 20 nationalities are enabled to settle quickly, feel included and are fully integrated into the school and local community. Boarders are positive about their experience which they regard as a unique opportunity to live among and learn about a diverse group of people. A remarkable feature of the school is the warmth, courtesy and cordiality of pupils and staff. Boarders recognise this and say that this has helped them to feel at home. Against this background boarders are thriving both educationally and socially. Representatives of the school council attest to staff giving boarders a voice and listening to them when they use it.

The school's executives are aware of the deficits identified and the need for a more systematic and strategic approach to the development and ongoing improvement in boarding welfare arrangements. Commitment to improvement and development is genuine as shown in the reorganisation of the management team and substantial investment in facilities such as the plans for the new study centre. Although there have been substantial improvements since the last inspections there remain, as shown in the recommendations, a number of areas that require a greater level of attention to detail.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Numerous areas identified for improvement at the last boarding welfare inspection elicited some 35 recommendations. Of serious concern were those related to outcome areas being healthy, staying safe and organisation. Deficits in health arrangements included inadequate health promotion, insufficient provision to respond to home care of boarders in the event of them being ill and shortfalls in the management of medication. In response to these deficits the school has employed a matron charged with coordinating arrangements for maintaining boarders' good health, addressing any health needs with which they present and their effective care should they become ill. Substantial improvement has been made in this area and there are good arrangements for medical, dental and optical care. Matron, health centre staff and the personal, social and health education syllabus combine well to promote a healthy lifestyle to boarders. Boarders are in good health and express confidence in staff and the arrangements in place for them if they become unwell.

Shortfalls in the staying safe area have been sufficiently remedied, albeit with some matters still requiring further attention. In particular, the thorough vetting of staff during recruitment and documentation to evidence this has improved, as has the implementation of the complaints and representations systems. Fire safety and general health and safety have also seen significant development and this includes clear demonstration that safety, security and supervision of boarders is robust, without intruding unnecessarily into their privacy.

The management structure has been reconfigured and the management team has established satisfactory systems to monitor the running of the boarding houses so as to ensure expected standards of care are maintained and thus safeguard and promote boarders' welfare.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is good.

Boarders are well served by the school in the provisions it makes to promote and maintain their good health and respond to any health problems they present. Significant improvements have been made in gathering background information to inform planning to meet each boarder's health and general welfare needs. The school caters primarily for international students with boarders from over 20 different countries. Language and other factors sometimes present a challenge to obtaining all the relevant information, reasonable solutions are in place to overcome this. It is noted, however, that boarders' immunisation history is not routinely sought as part of the health planning process. This information is necessary for ensuring necessary precautions are taken in promoting and maintaining good health individually and collectively.

Arrangements for access by boarders to primary health services such as doctors, dentists and opticians are sound. These provisions are easily accessible and organised so that boarders benefit from a coordinated and effective approach. For example, a boarder may be escorted to a consultation at the doctor's surgery, but is able to choose if they wish to consult with the doctor in private. The school matron works in effective partnership with the school doctors and practice nurses to ensure the service is efficient. This also benefits boarders in terms of joint health promotion initiatives which are supported by guidance given to boarders in personal,

social and health education lessons. Topics dealt with in these lessons cover the adverse health and social effects of smoking and taking illegal drugs.

Boarders present as clean, and dressed comfortably and appropriately. They are provided with all the necessary sanitary facilities to maintain good personal and general hygiene. Acceptable provisions are made for boarders who are ill and not fit to attend lessons, to be cared for in their boarding houses by familiar staff working in partnership with the school matron who coordinates any home nursing required. Suitable arrangements are in place for a minority of boarders who share a bedroom, but may need to be isolated in the event of illness. The majority of boarders occupy single rooms with en suite facilities or are close to bathroom and toilets and would not necessarily have to be transferred elsewhere if they become ill.

Some boarders express exceptional confidence in staff caring abilities and are well satisfied with how they are looked after both in relation to their health and generally. One boarder said: 'This is the first school in which I have felt really comfortable. All the staff are kind and helpful; you can talk to any of them and they treat you like you are one of their family'. Overall, boarders present as in robust good health. They are provided regular, nutritious meals in sufficient quantities and variety and reasonable choice. For example, acceptable provisions are made for boarders who are vegetarians, those who may require a special diet for health or religious reasons and to accommodate those who on occasion may need to fast for parts of the day.

Care is taken to ensure boarders' medication is managed efficiently and safely. However, whilst no errors are recorded or reported, the current arrangements by which matron is responsible for administering medicines for all boarders is unsustainable. The boarding houses are widely spread and matron has other house parent's responsibilities for the specific boarding house in which she is in charge. The senior staff recognise the need for improvements and arrangements are being made for medicines to be stored safely in the boarding houses, training for boarding staff in the safe handling of medicines and a clear system for risk-assessing circumstances if boarders may take charge of their own medicines.

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

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders and staff are united in regarding the school as a welcoming, friendly and inclusive environment where, regardless of sex, religion, race and culture or abilities, boarders settle and thrive. It is clear that the school's executive has planned and been successful in establishing this ethos underpinned by sound values such as mutual respect among boarders and between them and staff. Boarders report no experience of being bullied or of observing any bullying. The effective anti-bullying strategy is driven by a policy of discouraging any hierarchy among boarders. There are no prefects and care is taken to ensure that there are no potentially abusive traditions or rituals. This contributes significantly to the school's positive and inclusive community. Should boarders or others have any concerns, the complaints procedure provides effective means for them to express them formally. Additionally the school now makes boarders aware that they may also approach Ofsted with their concerns.

Feelings of safety and being well looked after are common views expressed by boarders. This reflects there being no current child protection issues and the school's satisfactory procedures for safeguarding boarders from abuse, harm and unfavourable treatment. All staff have completed relevant training which equips them sufficiently to understand the nature of abuse

and to respond appropriately to any allegations or suspicion. However, the updating of safeguarding procedures is unfinished and, as was the case at the last inspection, refers to organisations such as the National Care Standards Commission and Area Child Protection Committee which no longer exist. Although this does not diminish the procedures in a way that is likely to have any immediate impact on boarders, the unfinished state of the procedures and inclusion of out-of-date information is confusing.

An outstanding feature of the school is the general good behaviour, courtesy and helpfulness of its students, the vast majority of who are boarders. Boarders who offered a view believe that there are almost no discipline problems and that the rules are fair. School rules are clearly set out in the boarders' handbook and the parents information pack. Boarders are encouraged to behave acceptably. The staff response to misconduct is by helping boarders to modify their behaviour rather than intervening with an over-punitive approach. However, recording of misconduct and sanctions is not sufficiently robust. It was not possible from the records to get a clear understanding of misconduct across all boarding houses, how they were dealt with and by whom. For example, in addition to the record of serious punishment which is maintained by the principal, another folder of disciplinary matters is also held by another senior member of staff.

Staff give a high priority to boarders' safety and security. This is reflected in guidance that boarders are given in relation to maintaining their own safety and the consideration expected of them so that they do not jeopardise the safety of others. The school has a clear and detailed health and safety policy, which effectively addresses areas of potential risk such as food safety, fire, hazards and security. Risk assessments of all these matters have been conducted and where necessary reasonable measures are taken to eliminate or control potential dangers. For instance, there are regular fire drills and testing of fire alarm, detection and fire fighting equipment. In addition to there being sufficient staff to provide appropriate supervision of boarders, good security measures are in place to protect boarders from intruders and control visitor access to the school generally and the boarding houses in particular. This is done without unnecessarily restricting boarders' free access to all areas of the living quarters and without any compromise of their privacy. It is noted, however, that opening restrictors are not fitted to some upper floor windows in some boarding houses. Senior staff are aware of this and have made arrangements for these to be replaced. Some of the restrictors, reportedly, have been removed by boarders not realising they are fitted for reasons of safety.

Senior staff recognises the importance of rigorous vetting of staff to ensure their suitability to be involved in the care and education of boarders. Recruitment records include an accurate account of all staff employed by the school and details such as verified references and satisfactory Criminal Records Bureau disclosures attest to their suitability. Boarders express no concerns about staff and are positive about the caring and appropriate relationships they have established. The school provides staff with clear professional codes of conduct and acts decisively where there are any concerns.

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

The provision is good.

Boarders express a high level of satisfaction with the arrangements that the school makes to safeguard and promote their welfare. They comment positively on the personal tutor system in which they are provided with a teacher to whom they may turn with any concerns. Boarders

are also aware of the arrangements for their access to an independent listener and other helpful children support organisations should they have personal or other difficulties, which they may not wish to share with staff. However, they believe all the staff, boarding, academic and ancillary, are approachable and most helpful. Common difficulties such as schoolwork, parental expectations and accommodation are usually resolved satisfactorily. Some international students compare most favourably, the quality of their relationships with the school staff and the academic and welfare support they are given, with their previous educational experience. Boarders seem also to derive much comfort and reassurance from the friendly, welcoming and supportive behaviour of their peers.

This is a school which actively promotes equality and diversity in both its principles and its deeds. It justifiably prides itself on providing boarding education for girls and boys of varying abilities, of different races and from many different countries. Boarders relish this diversity recognising it as a unique opportunity to live alongside and learn something of the lives and cultures of people from other nations. Above all, boarders say that this creates an inclusive situation which helps them to settle. The school does much to help boarders to prepare for life at the school and within the community in which it is located. Boarders live in integrated groups, but have easy access to others of the same nationality, a factor which staff handle sensitively, particularly when a boarder is not fluent in English. Staff demonstrate a good awareness of boarders' needs as may arise from their sex, specific learning difficulties, race, religion and culture. For example, arrangements are in place to source and provide food which might be required for religious reasons and also to vary the usual schedule to support boarders who may need to fast occasionally. In essence, the school provides opportunities for a diverse group of boarders to benefit from the education and welfare provisions in a supportive environment that frees them to enjoy and achieve both academically and in their overall development.

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

The provision is good.

Staff give boarders a voice and encourage them to use it to influence their care and raise any concerns they may have. Formally, there is an elected school council, on which boarders are well represented. Senior staff use this group to consult and hear representations of boarders' views and suggestions. Boarders are satisfied with the effectiveness of the school council in influencing both boarding and school arrangements. A range of examples is cited such as boarders' leisure activities programme, the menus and the plans underway to create a new study centre. Generally, boarders who commented say that staff are approachable and they feel confident to raise directly with them any concerns they have. For instance, boarders were observed raising routine domestic issues with staff, which were taken seriously and pursued.

Boarders are entirely satisfied with existing arrangements that the school makes to enable them to maintain contact with their parents. Payphones are provided in areas where it is possible for calls to be made and received in private though most boarders say that they have use of their own mobile telephones. Also conveniently posted are details of useful organisations and services that boarders may need to turn to for information or support. Staff recognise that international boarders, particularly, may go for long periods without face-to-face contact with their parents. Flexible arrangements are therefore made to accommodate parents or guardians who wish to visit their children at the school. Similarly, boarders are able to visit siblings and friends who are in a different boarding house thus ensuring no boarder is isolated.

## Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders are provided with an overall satisfactory standard of accommodation. The younger boarders are accommodated in residential facilities on the principal school site and other boarders are housed in ordinary dwellings in neighbourhoods within half a mile of the school and the town centre. Most boarders are accommodated in their own bedrooms with en suite facilities or share a double room. There is only one instance of three boarders sharing a room, which is indicative of the school's efforts to promote boarder's privacy and comfort. The school exceeds the national minimum standards in the ratio of bathrooms and toilet facilities, but the overall standard of accommodation is variable. In some boarding houses students have ample communal space and in others space is more limited, including lack of a proper sitting room in one house. All the boarding houses provide boarders with gardens or some outdoor space.

Standards of cleanliness throughout are good, but some bedrooms are unacceptably untidy to the point where clothing, other items and trailing electric flexes constitute potential trip hazards. Boarders are satisfied with the comfort of their beds and bed linen is changed regularly. Heating, ventilation and natural and artificial light in the boarding houses are satisfactory. However, whilst floor and window coverings, furniture and other fittings are acceptable, some boarding houses present as bland and decoratively tired. This is particularly pronounced in some of the boarding houses accommodating male students. There is a maintenance programme, but in one of the boarding houses, the cover to an electric light fitting is missing exposing the wires.

## Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The welfare of boarders at the school is informed by a statement of boarding principles and practice which is promoted to parents, boarders and staff. However, the sound principles have not been effectively developed to create a sufficiently robust rationale. Accordingly, whilst there are pockets of excellent practice such as in the area of equality and diversity, there are weaknesses in other areas of practice as reflected in the recommendations. The school's management team has made noticeable efforts to respond to deficits previously identified. In doing so, significant investments have been made in resources and in organisational change to achieve more effective leadership and management and safer care for boarders. Nevertheless, the lack of a coherent set of working principles that systematically links together the purpose of boarding, its objectives and methods of care, seems to have led to somewhat reactive and piecemeal development.

Boarding accommodation is organised to provide an overall acceptable standard of comfort for boarders in keeping with their needs as determined by their sex and age. Monitoring by senior staff, of health and safety and complaints, is much improved. Boarders express feelings of safety in boarding and are satisfied with the level of their supervision and the availability of staff, including access to senior staff. The management team exercises care to ensure that boarders' welfare is safeguarded through clear agreement with resident staff and their spouses about their conduct on school premises.

The significant investment in boarding since the last inspection includes an increase in boarding staff numbers. However, there is no ongoing training and development programme for them beyond initial induction and basic child protection and health and safety training.

Use of lodgings approved by the school to accommodate boarders is limited to a small number of households, the adult members of which are subject to vetting by the school. However, some crucial aspects of record keeping in this area are poor. There are no records of the initial assessments that determined the suitability of these house households or of staff discussions with pupils accommodated in lodgings about their experience.

## 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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### Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to

- ensure that the individual records of boarders' health and welfare contain sufficient detail, such as immunisation history (NMS 7.2)
- ensure boarders who are assessed as competent to manage their own medication are provided with a secure facility in which to store it (NMS 15.10)
- ensure suitable facilities are available in each boarding house for secure storage of prescribed and non-prescribed medicines (NMS 15.10)
- ensure that the school has a complete and up-to-date policy and associated procedures on child protection consistent with those of Local Safeguarding Children Board, and that it is known to staff (NMS 3.1)
- ensure that any sanctions are recorded in writing in a suitable book or log with the date, name of the boarder, reason for the sanction and the person administering it (NMS 4.6)
- ensure that windows accessible to boarders above ground level and presenting a risk to safety are fitted with suitable opening restrictors or alternative safety measures (NMS 47.3)
- ensure all boarding houses are adequately maintained; in with particular provide a satisfactory standard of decoration and repairs of fixtures and fittings, including electric light fittings (NMS 40.1, 40.4 )
- ensure all boarders, and in particular those accommodated in the boarding house without a sitting room, are provided with a satisfactory range and choice of common rooms (NMS 46.2)
- ensure that sleeping areas are free from trip hazards such as items strewn, and electric flexes trailing, on floors (NMS 47.2)
- ensure that there is an on going programme of training, including child protection, for all staff (NMS 34.7)
- ensure that any lodgings arranged by the school to accommodate pupils are checked before use, are monitored during use and a record maintained that demonstrates whether the

lodgings are suitable and provides the facilities and services specified in NMS 51.3 (NMS 51.1, 51.3)

- ensure that where pupils are placed in lodgings arranged by the school, at least once per term a member of staff discusses with each pupil their experience and assessment of the accommodation which must be recorded and, where necessary, action taken to address any concerns or complaint. (NMS 51.8)