

The Junior School, St Lawrence College

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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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

The Junior School of St. Lawrence College is situated on a 250 acre site in a residential area of Ramsgate and provides co-educational day and boarding facilities for children aged seven to 11 years. At present the Junior School does not have its own separate boarding house. Junior boarders are accommodated in Kirby House, the Middle School building. In Kirby House, two dormitories are reserved for the exclusive use of junior boys and one for the girls. Each dormitory has its own en-suite facilities. Other facilities, such as the dining hall, swimming pool and chapel are shared with the Middle and Senior School pupils. The site includes netball and tennis courts as well as a sports hall, sports fields catering for hockey, rugby and football. Whilst the Head of the Junior School is ultimately responsible for the welfare of the junior boarders, the overall management of Kirby House is the responsibility of the boarding housemaster, under the direction of the headmaster of the Senior School.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

The school's boarding provision is judged good overall; three outcome groups, enjoying and achieving, positive contribution and economic wellbeing are outstanding. Specific areas including aspects of safeguarding and the calibre and commitment of the boarding team are also outstanding. Boarders are cared for by a motivated staff team, whose primary concern is to provide a safe, nurturing environment. Individual and specific needs are readily identified and provided for. Boarders receive the help and guidance they need in order to thrive personally and socially, as well as academically. The school celebrates its rich mix of different cultures and nationalities and encourages boarders to be curious and accepting. They enjoy very positive and appropriate relationships with staff across all departments and this factor enables them to feel ready and prepared to move up into the middle and senior school.

Five recommendations are made and relate to complaints guidance, staff recruitment, health and safety and monitoring processes.

Improvements since the last inspection

Five recommendations were made from the previous inspection of 10 March 2008. Four were concerned with catering provision and a specific training need with regards to health and safety awareness was also highlighted. The school has reviewed the effectiveness of the food committee and junior boarders report more positively about meal provision at this visit. Staff receive improved guidance with regards to health and safety matters but shortfalls during this visit are identified with regards to some areas of risk assessment and monitoring.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders receive a good quality nursing service from a qualified team, based in the medical centre. Boarders can readily access a male or female doctor and they speak very positively about the care and support they receive. 'The nurses really look after you when you are unwell' and 'it's good being looked after in the medical centre'. The medical centre is open throughout the whole school week and appropriate on-call cover is in place on Sundays. The nursing team is effectively supported by the local GP surgery and the school is very close to a local hospital.

Medical records and equipment are secure; thus confidentiality is assured. Important health and medical needs are sensitively shared with staff who need to know, in the best interests of protecting the well-being of the boarders, for example, allergies and special dietary requirements.

Boarders receive clear and appropriate guidance in terms of a suitable personal, social and health education programme. The headteacher retains an overall responsibility for its delivery and subjects are delivered in an informative and age-appropriate manner. Boarders are actively encouraged to understand the wider world and to think about their own personal beliefs, morals and safety.

Boarders benefit from a thorough and coordinated approach with regards to welfare issues. Those individuals who are undergoing times of particular stress or difficulties receive the support and understanding they need. Written welfare plans are comprehensive, clear and subject to good monitoring and review.

The majority of boarders say they enjoy the food provided by the school; breakfast is considered to be the best. Meals are wholesome and nutritious, and a variety of hot, cold and vegetarian options are offered. A number of boarders describe the food committee to be effective, others say there is always enough to eat but it is not always of their liking. Boarding staff strike a good balance in terms of providing snacks and treats; fresh fruit is readily available within the boarding house every day.

Boarders confirm that their clothing and bedding is regularly laundered and looked after. This provision has significantly improved due to much recent financial investment and overhaul.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders feel safe at school. They report very few minor incidents of bullying and are confident the staff deal with these efficiently. Staff are sensitive to friendship issues and incidental episodes. Through general school rules and day-to-day contact,

boarders are reminded to think of others and to look after each other. Sound monitoring processes are in place to look for potential patterns and trends.

Additional safety is assured because the school implements very robust safeguarding procedures. Boarders are protected against possible sources of harm and abuse. Staff across all disciplines understand the procedure; they know who to report to and under which circumstances, in the event of becoming concerned about a boarder. Appropriate internal and external child protection training is routinely refreshed and the headteacher enjoys a positive and transparent relationship with the local safeguarding team. The school is described by the local authority as 'an example to others in terms of protecting young people'. The governing body is actively concerned about the welfare of the boarders; child protection issues are scrutinised at governors meetings and an individual member has a clear role to monitor this key area. Boarders enjoy being appropriately rewarded for positive conduct. They are actively encouraged to take pride in their work and to be considerate of their peers. Behavioural rules are simplistic and clear; boarders know what is expected and they overwhelmingly report sanctions as punishments, when they do misbehave to be evenly and fairly distributed. Boarders say they know how to complain if they need to. They talk very positively about informal mechanisms and trust that any concerns they report to staff members are effectively listened and responded to. Formal complaints, from either parents or boarders are rare. Written guidance is in place; however it does not currently give the details of how to contact either the local authority or Ofsted.

The school insists that parents living abroad make clear and specific guardianship arrangements for their child, in the best interests of securing their welfare. The school actively seeks to meet and maintain regular contact with all such individuals and is quick to report to parents if concerns become apparent.

The school enjoys a positive relationship with the local fire office. Boarders confirm they understand and regularly practise fire evacuation drills. They know what to do and make themselves safe under the supervision of the staff on duty. Fire fighting equipment and systems are maintained in good order, however minor omissions are noted with regards to the fire safety processes relating to the medical centre at specific times, for example, when the alarm is activated on Saturday evenings and when the security officer is completing his rounds.

Robust recruitment practice ensures that boarding and teaching staff do not come into contact with boarders until all of the required checks have been satisfactorily completed. Visitors are supervised and boarders are further kept safe due to good security systems. Some omissions with regards to the recruitment of ancillary workers show this aspect of recruitment to be less robust.

Boarders say they feel safe within their physical environment. Maintenance issues and repairs are swiftly dealt with and high risk activities are subject to robust risk assessments; boarders also know the areas which are out of bounds. Health and safety responsibilities are cascaded throughout the various departments of the school but there is no specific external training provided for such personnel and not all

areas have been risk assessed. The school does use an external health and safety consultant; however risks remain in place because the majority of its most recent report findings have not yet been implemented.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders thoroughly enjoy the wide range of extra curricular activities provided by the school. Boarders have access after the school day to the sports hall, tennis courts, swimming pool, cricket, football and hockey. Indoor provision includes table tennis, pool, television, DVD's, house drama, singing and plays. The recently installed rock climbing wall is very popular and boarders greatly enjoy relaxed Friday evenings, as well as the special efforts that staff place upon celebrating boarders' birthdays.

Boarders speak very positively about the range and number of staff who are available to them in times of need. Direct quotes include, 'there is always someone close by to help', 'the boarding staff really help you' and 'the Chaplain is lovely'. Boarders particularly commend their immediate boarding team and the school nurses. The independent listener is so popular that her role has essentially become that of a counsellor. The school recognises the value of reviewing this provision by way of ensuring that both a counsellor and independent listener are made available to the boarders.

The school remains acutely aware that it caters for boarders from a wide and diverse range of backgrounds; socially, economically and culturally. Effective support systems strive to ensure inclusion and encourage boarders to integrate, socialise and be accepting of each others' differences. Cultural diversity is actively celebrated through assemblies, themed food events and by marking religious festivals across all faiths and religions. Specific individual needs including learning difficulties, linguistic needs and health concerns are effectively assessed and provided for. Boarders are thriving and growing in confidence and ability.

Boarders are enabled to complete their homework in an appropriately structured manner. Dedicated prep rooms are very attractively furnished, comfortable and well-lit. Good resources, including computer access, combined with appropriate supervision ensures such arrangements provide an environment which is conducive for study.

Boarders enjoy appropriate freedom of movement within the school grounds. Common room areas are beautifully furnished and comfortable. Boarders are consulted with regards to the leisure equipment provided, which includes televisions, a games box, board games and books. Safe additional areas include the school library and sports hall. Boarders receive an appropriate balance in terms of supervision and their need for privacy in terms of their young age and potential vulnerability.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are empowered to effectively contribute towards decisions about the boarding and day school provision. An influential junior school council meets on a weekly basis and debates the suggestions and ideas put forward by each year group. Recent actions, determined through such meetings, include the tidying of the playground, the establishment of a working committee to improve library facilities and joining a national environmental scheme. Boarders are encouraged to place their ideas in a suggestions box, but they also say, 'you can tell anyone about your views and ideas'.

Boarders enjoy maintaining regular contact with their parents and families in private. The majority have their own mobile telephones. School telephones are readily accessible and a number of boarders choose to write letters. Staff are conscious of the time differences with regards to overseas families; hence contact calls are made at mutually convenient times. Staff routinely contact and update parents and guardians in the event of any current or ongoing welfare concerns in the spirit of being open and transparent.

The school strives to introduce new boarders in a sensitive and thoughtful manner. Prospective boarders are invited to stay for a 'taster' period and the time allocated for this is flexible, in an attempt to meet individual needs. Clear written information is provided and this is further verbally explained. All new boarders are allocated with a buddy to assist them to settle in.

The school provides appropriate access and information about events in the world outside of school. Boarders enjoy appropriate access to newspapers, television and the internet. They can also access the local town under the auspices of age-appropriate supervision.

Boarders describe their relationships with boarding house staff as 'excellent'. Additional positive comments are made about personal tutors, the Chaplain, educational support staff and the nursing team. Boarders are appropriately nurtured within a caring atmosphere, within which they also receive appropriate guidance and behavioural boundaries, in accordance with their age and understanding. Staff are acutely aware of the potential difficulties and issues concerned with the boarders' young ages combined with living away from home.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders say their valuables and personal possessions are kept safe. They all have their own individual lockable storage and effective school systems are used to safely look after and administer their pocket money.

The boarding house is very bright and cheerful. The use of space is imaginative, with a tower built within the ground floor atrium. The rooms and communal areas are spacious and comfortable and the furniture is suitable and in excellent condition. The building is light and airy and the décor is very good. All areas are cleaned and maintained to a very high standard.

Dormitories accommodate between five and six boarders. Individuals say it is fun to share with their friends. Such arrangements are also described as 'cosy' and 'safe'. Boarders confirm they are able to move rooms if they really want to. The sleeping areas are appropriately separated in terms of age and gender and are separate from staff accommodation, although resident staff are nearby in terms of providing safe levels of supervision.

Boarders value their own personal space and they like to bring in their own personal items, such as posters, bedding and comfort toys. They enjoy the privacy provided by ensuite bathing facilities and appreciate that their environment is cleaned and maintained to an excellent standard.

A school uniform and coffee shop enables boarders to easily purchase the personal items and equipment they need when staying at school. Boarding staff also supervise trips into the local town when necessary.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Boarders, parents and staff receive clear and appropriate written guidance pertaining to the operation and aims of the boarding provision. Such information is clear and descriptive and also available on the school's website.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Boarders from a wide range of different nationalities and cultures are effectively supported to readily settle into life at the school. Boarding and support staff recognise the difficulties that individuals may experience by joining the school, and indeed the country, in terms of language and cultural differences. To this end, the school strives to continually consult with such boarders in an attempt to recognise its own deficits and improve upon its provision year after year.

Crises management plans are detailed and thorough. The school thinks carefully about situations which may adversely affect the welfare of the boarders and has clear plans in place to prevent such occurrences.

The headteacher works closely with the head of boarding, head of senior school and the governing body. Lines of responsibility and accountability are clear. Boarders are effectively looked after by an experienced and motivated team who receive the support and ongoing training provision they need. Detailed daily records and handovers ensure team members remain fully aware of any new and ongoing concerns about boarders. Communication and liaison with other departments is

equally strong; emphasis is placed upon the safety, welfare and happiness of the boarders.

The layout of the boarding house ensures that boarders are appropriately separated in terms of age and gender. Resident staff are close by during the night and boarders say this makes them feel safe. They can readily summon assistance if they need to.

Monitoring systems are variable in terms of quality and regularity; those pertaining to punishments and complaints are robust. The headteacher and head of boarding rigorously review and monitor all of the areas within their remit; however, wider risk assessments and accidents which are beyond their immediate responsibilities are not being sufficiently monitored.

Boarding staff receive good levels of support, training and appraisal. Their roles and responsibilities are explicitly featured within their job descriptions, as well as the school's written policies and procedures. Boarding staff members are commended for their commitment to providing an optimum service for the boarders. They are motivated and committed to provide the best possible service in the very best interests of those they look after.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

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 written complaints procedures include the details of contacting the local authority and Ofsted (NMS 5.4)
- review the fire safety systems in respect of the medical centre, with particular regard to Saturday evenings and when the security officer is completing his rounds (NMS 26)
- ensure the recruitment of all staff is additionally subject to safe recruitment practices as detailed in Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education guidance. This recommendation is made within the context of the recruitment of ancillary staff and ensure that such staff receive a clear child protection brief as part of their induction (NMS 38.3)
- ensure that all areas of the school are suitably risk assessed and that the recommendations from the recent health and safety audit are acted upon (NMS 47)
- ensure that all of the areas listed under this standard receive the same good levels of monitoring. (NMS 23)