

The Godolphin School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Wendy Anderson
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Date of last inspection	23/01/2008

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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 Godolphin School is an independent boarding school for girls aged 11 to 18 years. The school was founded in 1726 in the tradition of the Church of England; it now also welcomes those of other denominations and faiths. The school has three junior boarding houses and two senior boarding houses all of which have their own sitting room, games room and music practise rooms. The schools ethos combines an emphasis on traditional values with a commitment to innovative development. Consultation with pupils and parents is key to the developmental process at the school. The school encourages pupils to develop responsibility, initiative, independence, individuality, sensitivity and tolerance within a vibrant and supportive community. The pupils are offered an extensive academic curriculum and a wide range of activities.

The school is situated on the outskirts of a city which provides the pupils with a good range of local amenities and good transport links.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced full inspection which assessed all the key national minimum standards in all the Every Child Matters outcome areas. The school provides boarders with a good standard of care with outstanding features. Boarders are looked after by a very experienced staff team who continue to review and update their practice to ensure boarders are safe, happy and live in a nurturing and stimulating environment. Consultation with the young people is one of the main strengths of the school, coupled with excellent relationships between young people and staff based on mutual respect and respect for individual values and talents. Young people's behaviour is excellent and they are a credit to themselves and the school.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection the school nurse has developed a robust risk assessment process for boarders who wish to administer their own medication. The nurse now also has an overview of all medication across the school campus. All of the boarding houses now have a specific risk assessment which is reviewed and updated on at least an annual basis.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The personal, social and health education (known as PERSIL) within the school is excellent and is supported by a extensive range of policies and procedures, which are well known to all staff at the school. The programme is wide ranging covering all the required elements but it is also proactive and reactive to currents events and issues. The school involves staff from across the school in this programme including the nursing and catering staff. Boarders said they really enjoyed the PERSIL programme, finding it very helpful and stimulating. They also said that they are encouraged to put forward ideas for the programme. The medical centre also provides an excellent variety of informative leaflets on a range of health matters. External agencies have also provided sessions on a variety of topics.

Boarders' health is safeguarded and promoted by meticulously maintained records at the medical centre. Medical information on boarders is shared on a need to know basis so as to respect the boarders' right to confidentiality. Medication is stored securely both in the medical centre and the houses. Nursing staff at the medical centre all hold relevant qualifications and ensure that boarders are provided with high quality health care. Boarders said that the nurses are 'fantastic' and they would feel comfortable talking to them about anything. This view of the nursing staff was echoed by the parents and the staff. The medical centre itself is welcoming and decorated in a homely fashion. Boarders said they were always very well looked after by the nursing staff. There is a robust system of communication between the house and the medical centre which ensures that boarders receive medication and health care appropriately. The nurse has developed a through risk assessment for those boarders who wish to self medicate. There is also a clear audit process carried out by the nurse of medication dispensed to the boarding houses and of the first aid boxes. All boarders have the required consent from parents in place for first aid, emergency treatment and the dispensing of medication. Where a boarder has an identified concern regarding a health or medical issues a welfare plan is developed for that individual and they will be placed on the schools concerns list and reviewed at the regular intervals.

The catering department provide boarders with a nutritious, balanced and varied diet. All staff involved in the preparation and service of meals have received the required training. The catering department have up-to-date information on boarders' food allergies and intolerances. They also provide meals in lines with boarder's religion, for example, supporting boarders who observe Ramadan. There is a food committee operating within the school which boarders said is very effective. Boarders are very positive about the meals. Dining areas are well furnished and provide a welcoming social environment.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders are robustly protected from bullying by excellent policies and procedures which are well known to and practiced by all staff and pupils. Boarders said that bullying is not an issue at the school and if it did happen they would report it to staff who they were confident would act promptly. Anti-bullying work is undertaken through the PERSIL programme. The anti-bullying work at the school also contains excellent information and guidance on cyber bullying. Comprehensive records are kept of any bullying incident and subsequent actions taken.

The school has comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures which is supported by a programme of safeguarding training for all staff. Despite this gap the staff interviewed demonstrated a working knowledge of safeguarding procedures. There is a designated child protection officer (DCPO), a deputy DCPO, and a governor with child protection responsibility. The DCPO has robust links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. The school has a contractual agreement with Wiltshire County Council to provide training, training materials and guidance in all safeguarding matters. In addition, staff are supported to access 'online' training from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The DCPO maintains the required records.

The main focus of behaviour management at the school is positive reinforcement. This is evident throughout the schools policies, procedures and culture. The majority of boarders said very few punishments are given and these are fair. There is a central record of sanction plus a record in the individual houses, with the exception of one house. The school invests trust and personal responsibility in the boarders which is supported by staff having excellent relationships with boarders. The behaviour of all the young people observed throughout the inspection was exceptional.

The school has a robust complaints procedure which is known to all boarders and staff. Information on this process is on the school and house notice boards. Boarders said they would have no hesitation in talking to staff about any concern or worry. Records are kept of all complaints made and actions taken resulting from any investigation.

The prefect team are an impressive group of young women who are very committed and enthusiastic about their role in the school. They are elected by staff and pupils and act as role models and leaders, taking their responsibilities very seriously. There is a comprehensive induction programme which includes safeguarding and anti-bullying guidance. They meet regularly with the headteacher to provide feedback from pupils and discuss any issues or developments. Other leadership opportunities for boarders include involvement in the charities committee, student council, debating society and in the roles of 'Godmothers'. This is a mentoring role traditionally adopted to support new students to the school.

There is an effective fire policy and procedure in place. However there are gaps in the fire records which include the checks at the required intervals of fire fighting equipment, call points and means of escape. These are checked by an external contractor on an annual basis. The school has carried out fire drills but one house did not have a record of a fire drill in the spring term and there has not been an early morning or late night drill in all houses. Inspectors also saw a number of fire doors wedged open throughout the inspection. Boarders interviewed are very clear about what to do in the event of fire.

Boarders' privacy is respected by non-intrusive staff who are sensitive when entering dormitories or bathrooms.

The school has a robust recruitment and vetting policy in place. However in the staff files inspected there were some gaps in the information retained. This included a lack of written evidence to support the decision of accepting a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosure from a previous establishment within the current guidelines. Any adult not employed by the school but living in the same building as boarding accommodation has a suitable agreement specifying their terms of accommodation. The school ensures that the external taxi firm they use have CRB checked all their drivers.

The school has robust health and safety policies and procedures. Boarders are protected by effective checking of electrical appliances and gas installations, water checking and safe storage of all substances hazardous to health. Boarders' safety and welfare is well protected during high risk activities by an extremely robust risk assessment process. This includes risk assessments being reviewed and updated on a regular basis. This robust approach is also evident in the security measure taken by the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school offers boarders a good range and choice of activities. Boarders said that they are encouraged to put forward ideas for activities, trips and events. The development of formal consultation with boarders on activities is greatly appreciated by them.

Boarders receive excellent personal support from staff. This is due to the staff's in depth knowledge of the boarders they are caring for. In the questionnaires completed by the boarders they said that there is a large number of staff they could turn to for guidance and support. The key relationships they have with their tutors, the house parents and the school nurse are constructive. Where a need is identified external support is sought for boarders. This includes access to counsellors but the school does not have a counsellor as part of the staff team. The school does employ two independent listeners. Whose pictures and contact numbers are displayed on the notice boards across the school campus.

The school's commitment to anti-discrimination and equal opportunities is a theme that runs throughout the school's ethos and policies. They are sensitive to boarders' different needs and the diverse cultures, race and religions of boarders are welcomed, embraced and celebrated. For boarders whose first language is not English there are two dedicated members of staff specifically overseeing, supporting and promoting the integration of the international students. Individualised support provided to boarders is sensitive to specific cultural and personal welfare needs. Excellent provision is made, where feasible and desired, for boarders with any special dietary or religious observance requirements.

There are no onerous demands placed on boarders. Again, due to the thorough knowledge the staff have of individual boarders, they are pro active and quickly identify any potential signs of stress. Also the nurse teaches the boarders techniques for coping at stressful times such as exam time. This includes sixth form relaxation rooms and a regular programme of weekly relaxation sessions during mock and public examinations.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Consultation with boarders is a major strength of the school. There are a number of ways in which this happens which include the food council, the school council, house meetings, suggestion boxes and on an individual basis with staff. The school has also carried out surveys with the boarders the results of which have influenced various areas of development within the school. Boarders said they really felt listened to and that staff welcomed their input and suggestions. They could also cite a number of examples to support this view.

Parental contact is encouraged by the school. They feel it is vital that parents are fully involved in the life of the school. Parents were very positive about contact between them and the staff. All boarders have access to email and there is also the use of Skype although the reception depends upon where on the school campus it is being used. All of the boarding houses have pay phone for boarders' use, however the ones in Methuen and Hamilton houses only accept 999 calls. This was addressed during the inspection. The majority of boarders have their own mobile phones.

The induction of new boarders is excellent. There are various events arranged for new boarders during the summer term prior to their arrival. This is supported by excellent documentation. The boarders said that they particularly found the system of buddies and Godmother very helpful and that these friendships with other boarders are very important to them and usually become close friends.

Boarders have age appropriate access to the city and enjoy their trips there. In each of the houses and the library there are national and local newspapers and magazines.

The relationships between staff and boarders are exceptional and a real strength of the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders' personal possessions are protected as all boarders are provided with lockable storage. Where items have gone missing the school has taken robust action.

The boarding accommodation across the school campus ranges from outstanding to good. Boarding houses have a range of communal space which is well furnished, equipped and decorated. The boarders bedrooms are comfortable, have ample storage and boarders are encouraged to personalise their bed areas. The school has a comprehensive refurbishment programme and boarders said that they are consulted on both the refurbishment and redecoration of the houses. Within the houses there are suitable numbers of toilet and washing facilities. However some of the boarding houses have no separate bathing or toilet facilities for staff to use. Staff are therefore sharing the same facilities as the boarders. The current changing provision does not have washing facilities but this is included in the schools development plan. Also there are occasions when boarders are using the changing rooms at the swimming pool at the same time as members of the public who belong to the schools sports club.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The statement of the school boarding principles and practice is very good and reflects the current boarding practice. In addition the school provides a comprehensive and clear information book for students between the ages of 11 and 16. For students joining the school in the Sixth Form, students themselves have created a Sixth Form student information book. There are also welcome books for the individual houses. All publications give an excellent introduction and overview as to what to expect of the school and school life. Boarders said they found this information very useful and it helped them settle into life at the school.

A new headteacher has recently been appointed to the school and is providing excellent leadership of boarding at the school in conjunction with the senior management team. There are excellent plans in place for the development of the school and the staff team are enthused and have a positive view of the future of the school. There are robust systems in place for the monitoring of the school records. Information gained from this process is then used to improve the systems and the experience of boarders at the school. The senior boarding staff have an excellent level of experience which ensures that boarders' welfare is safeguarded and promoted.

Currently the boarding houses operate on the horizontal system in years one through

to five. This has been revised and at the start of September there will be a junior house for ages nine to 13 years. There will then be houses for the 14 to 16 years olds and the two Sixth Form houses will remain as they are. Boarders have been involved in this development and boarders interviewed said they feel that this new system will make boarding even better. Both boarders and their parents said that they felt boarding greatly enhanced the boarders welfare. Boarders said the school felt like a real community and some said it was like having another, bigger family. This sense of community and family is part of the school key ethos.

Staff supervision of boarders is very good both on the school campus and during off-site trips. Boarders said they always know who is on duty and how to contact staff during the night. The staff team is experienced, well trained and dedicated to the boarders in their care. There are various forums where staff meet to ensure there is a consistent approach and where they are encouraged and enabled to share their ideas for future development. Staff receive induction and are encouraged and supported to access further development opportunities. Each member of staff receives a regular appraisal. This process is supported by the excellent boarding staff handbook.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. It is evident throughout policies, documentation, operational conduct of the school and ethos of the school. The school respects, values and enables the individual to reach their potential while instilling in them the importance and value of community.

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 that all staff receive safeguarding training at least once every two years (NMS 3.6)
- ensure that all fire fighting and fire prevention equipment is checked at the required intervals, fire drills are carried out at the required intervals and at the required times of day (NMS 26.3, 26.4)
- ensure staff files contain all the required information (NMS 38)
- ensure the payphone in Methuen and Hamilton houses accept both in coming and out going calls (NMS19)
- ensure staff are provided with separate toilet and washing facilities in all houses (NMS 44.10)
- ensure that boarders do not share the changing facilities at the swimming pool with member of the public who belong to the sport club (NMS 45.2)
- consider the appointment of a school counsellor. (NMS 17)

