

St Bees School

Inspection report for boarding school

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| Unique reference number | SC040933 |
| Inspection date | 6 June 2011 |
| Inspector | Leonard Hird / Helen Walker |
| Type of Inspection | Key |

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| Date of last inspection | 29 February 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 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

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| 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 school was founded in 1583 and is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged from 11 to 18. It occupies a central site in St Bees, a large village on the west coast of Cumbria. The school is organised into five separate boarding houses which are Bega (girls aged 11-15 years); Abbots Court (boys aged 11-15 years); Lonsdale (girls aged 16-18 years); School House (boys aged 16-18 years); Grindal House (boys aged 16-18 years).

Summary

All of the key standards relating to boarding schools in the outcome areas of Every Child Matters were considered at this announced inspection. The recommendations made at last inspection have all been satisfactorily addressed by the school. The school's management team is providing good levels of support, management and leadership for the boarding school community and its staff. Boarders are benefiting from living in a safe and supportive environment that encourages them to develop their own personalities and individuality while at the same time taking account of the needs of others. The school is good in three of the outcome areas and is outstanding in the other three outcome areas. Two recommendations have been made at this inspection.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

All of the recommendations made at the last inspection relating to medication administration and staff training in the administration of medication have been addressed. There is a named person with responsibility for the management of the boarding community and members of staff have ensured that risk assessments are in place for boarders when taking part in outside activities, such as the 'Dandy walk' along the coast line. Boarders are aware of the school's anti-bullying policy through the pupils' handbook and staff are recruited appropriately. The school has ensured that boarders have more access to computers within the restrictions placed upon it by its rural location and its internet provider.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The systems in place for the promotion of the health and wellbeing of boarders are outstanding. Positive encouragement is given to the boarders to enable them to lead a healthy and active lifestyle, whilst living at the school. Boarders receive high levels of health, personal and medical care support from the staff involved with them. Health and personal social care is promoted sensitively through the schools well planned and age-appropriate Personal Social Health Education and Citizenship (PSHEC) curriculum. The school ensures that boarders' are aware of how to address matters such as, smoking, alcohol abuse, cyber bullying, relationships and substance misuse through this programme.

The health needs of this multicultural boarding community are very well planned and managed by the school's registered paediatric nurse. There are up-to-date health policies and procedures in place and these are regularly reviewed by the senior management team and the school nurse. However, there is a need to ensure that for, the safety of boarders a formal procedure be put

in place to address the issue of Chinese medication which is on occasion brought into the school by boarders.

Boarders, supported by the experienced health care team can readily access specialist and general health care needs through the local GP, local practice nurse and other health services such as, dentists. If boarders are unwell they are cared for in the medical centre and where appropriate by members of the boarding staff in the boarding accommodation. Boarders made positive comments on the ease of access to the health team as well as to the provision of information and the different agencies brought into the school to promote their health and well being. Clear procedures are followed by members of staff who are involved in the management, administration, recording and disposal of medication. Members of staff who work with the boarding community have undertaken a recognised qualification in first aid and those members of the boarding house staff who administer medication have been assessed by the school nurse as competent to do so. All accidents, minor ailments and emergency treatments are fully documented and securely maintained on the individual pupil's electronic health file, by the school nurse.

The boarders' meals are prepared and cooked daily in a well equipped kitchen which has the local environmental health departments' four star award. All of the meals are taken in two well appointed dining halls. Excellent choices of hot and cold nutritional meals are available each day and any specialist diets or requirements are well catered for. During the school year there are themed cultural events organised mainly by the catering team. The dining halls and houses are suitably decorated to reflect the event being celebrated such as the Chinese New Year or even Elvis Presley's birthday. There is a commitment to the provision of high quality locally sourced produce wherever possible by the school. The catering manager meets regularly with boarders individually and collectively to ensure they are fully involved in the development of the daily menus. This high level of commitment by an experienced catering team helps to ensure that healthy meals are provided to the boarders throughout the school year. Boarders spoke very positively about the quality and choice of meals, particularly the weekend brunch. Boarders acknowledge the significant choice of meals available to them during the week. However, some felt there could be a wider choice of meals made available at the weekend.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders commented positively about feeling safe at the school and a senior overseas boarder commented that they found, 'the boarding community a friendly, safe, supportive and an all embracing environment to live in'. The school has effective anti-bullying, complaints and child protection policies and procedures in place. There is, however, a need to ensure that the content of the child protection procedures is up dated to be reflective of its reporting concerns flow diagram, where concerns may be raised about staff. These documents are available to parents, boarders and staff via the school's website, the staff and boarders handbooks or in a hardcopy format from the school. Boarders are aware that the school has a zero tolerance policy towards bullying and will respond quickly to deal with any incident of bullying behaviour. The view expressed amongst boarders is that being a small community, they would quickly know if anyone was subject to bullying and would report this to staff who would deal with it accordingly.

The school's designated officer for child protection and safeguarding matters is the school nurse. Support is also available from three other members of academic staff who have the

appropriate level of child protection training and qualification. Good working relationships have been established with the Local Safeguarding Children Board as well as the Local Authorities Designated Officer, by the school's designated officer. There is good provision made for the regular training of staff and governors in the different aspects of safeguarding including, child protection, safer recruitment and the countering of cyber bullying. All members of staff are aware of the reporting and recording procedure and of their duty to report matters of concern immediately. Any information relating to child protection issues is kept confidentially and securely in the designated person's office. A number of international boarders spend out of 'term time' with a guardian and this is arranged by the boarder's parents through a specialist company. The school has no responsibility for monitoring the well being of these boarders.

Boarders' welfare is protected through a robust complaints procedure. There is a clear understanding within the boarding house staff team that any concern or complaint raised by a boarder will be taken seriously and properly addressed. A number of different systems are in place for boarders to complain through, including an open door policy for boarders to speak to any member of staff including the senior management team, the school's welfare governor, as well external organisations, such as Childline. Members of staff confirm that any concern or complaint either informal or formal will be taken seriously and addressed. Boarders confirm they know how to raise a concern or complaint and they indicate that they feel they would be listened to and the issue dealt with and recorded appropriately.

There are good management and recording systems in place to ensure the health and safety of boarders. Regular checks of the premises and servicing of equipment, such as, portable electric appliance testing, ensures the equipment is maintained in good order and helps to ensure a safe living environment for boarders. All maintenance issues, when identified, are appropriately addressed by the school's maintenance team. Fire and safety equipment is regularly checked, with recorded fire drills being held at different times throughout the school year. Boarders confirm they understand the fire evacuation procedures and that regular fire drills are carried out. All of the boarding houses are protected by the use of coded key pads, locks and where appropriate window restrictors. Boarders confirm that they feel safe and secure in their boarding houses.

All staff working at the school are recruited in accordance with the relevant regulations and guidance. A comprehensive single central record of this process is securely maintained by the school and confirms that the relevant checks are in place prior to new staff, governors and volunteers commencing at the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The levels of support, guidance and encouragement given to this international boarding community by members of staff is of a high standard. The consistent level of support and guidance being offered enables boarders to access a wide range of different activities and educational support programmes. Boarders are very complimentary about the levels of support given to them but most especially about the support they receive from staff during the lead up to examinations. Boarders know that they can take a welfare or personal problem to any member of staff, and are confident that any concerns would be listened to. Information is available in the boarder's handbook about an independent listener and counsellor who can be contacted for support. The head of boarding and their enthusiastic house staff teams are

providing a vital link for boarders between the demands of academic and non academic life by enabling boarders to access different support systems, at any time. This is particularly important for those boarders who come from outside of the United Kingdom. International boarders indicate that they feel that they are made welcome and are treated with respect and understanding by the school and local community. The view of the boarders spoken with was that with the support and guidance they receive from the house staff, a strong sense of community is promoted and this provides the base for life long friendships.

There is a very strong commitment by the school to promote equal opportunities for all and this is helping to enhance the lives of boarders whilst attending the school. Excellent support arrangements such as, specialist language teachers and support staff, are in place to assist the international boarders for who English is not their first language. The integration of the many different types of background and diverse cultures to be found in the boarding community is well supported and promoted by staff throughout the school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarding pupils confirm they are able to influence the decisions made regarding boarding life and indicate that the school keeps them informed of what is happening throughout the school year. Boarders can contribute their views to the operation of boarding in the school. House meetings, school council meetings and individual consultation give boarders many opportunities to make their views known. These formal and informal consultative forums work well and are supported by boarders.

Telephones are available in the boarding houses, allowing boarders to keep in contact with family and friends. Internet access is available at the school for boarders to keep in contact with their family and friends but due to the limited local access to broadband there are often problems in its use. Boarders can use their own personal mobile phones or if they are really stuck 'snail mail' to keep in contact with relatives and friends. The school is also investigating the use of Skype or social networking sites to enable boarders to keep in safe contact with their families and friends. Parents can easily contact the school if they have any concerns and members of staff are also able to quickly contact parents if they have any concerns about a boarder's welfare.

Members of the boarding house staff team ensure that the new boarders receive a friendly welcome and are fully supported in settling into their new life. Boarding staff ensure that homesickness, if it occurs, is addressed. Members of staff are providing positive and supportive professional working relationships for the boarding community. These excellent staff and boarders' relationships are based on mutual respect. Boarders are actively encouraged to treat each other with respect and understanding while at the same time being enabling them to develop their own personality and individuality.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders are living in boarding houses that are clean, safe, homely and comfortable. The school has refurbished many of the boarding houses to a high standard and are in the process of completing this programme. The houses are well maintained, decorated and cleaned by the school's hardworking ancillary staff team. Boarders bedrooms are furnished and decorated to

a satisfactory standard with many of them being personalised to a pleasing standard. Boarder's possessions and money are protected by the provision of a lockable storage facility. If boarders have larger more valuable items to store they can give them to house staff for safekeeping and this is recorded and documented. There are good levels of security, privacy and bathing facilities in the boarding houses. There are good communal facilities available to the boarders in the different houses to enable them to relax by watching television, playing games such as snooker or just by sitting and talking amongst themselves.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding within the boarding community and school. There is a positive and enthusiastic approach by members of staff to ensure the school's culture encourages respect for differences and friendship among the boarding community. This is underpinned by excellent policies and procedures. The boarding community is multi-cultural and boarders indicate they are treated with care and respect. Boarder's rights are respected by a house staff team committed to ensuring that boarders have access to a wide range of personal, education, social and cultural support. Members of staff receive training in equality and diversity and actively encourage boarders to be supportive of each other. The school operates an 'open door' policy so that boarders can speak to any member of staff about anything that may be of significance to them. Boarders indicate that house staff are very good at listening to them and this allows them many opportunities to express their opinions. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of boarders is addressed through the school's personal, health and social care programme. Boarders commented that, 'The best part of boarding is the friendships I have made, I thought it might be hard to fit in but everyone was friendly.' Other boarders commented that, 'It's all embracing', 'we're kept safe and yes I feel safe here'.

The senior management team and head of boarding supported by the governing body provide effective leadership to ensure there are positive outcomes for the boarding community. Boarders, parents and staff can easily access the school's statement of boarding principles. Detailed information is provided to all new boarders about life at the school. Members of staff are provided with a handbook that clearly details the school's policies and procedures and this document is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is reflective of the school's policies, procedures, guidance and practice. Complaints, sanctions and accident records are monitored by designated senior staff to ensure that if trends are discovered to be occurring in these or other areas, such as bullying, they can be quickly addressed.

The management of the boys and girls boarding houses is well organised and is healthy to ensure that the boarders are living in a safe environment. Staffing levels are such as to meet the current needs of the boarding community and boarders confirm that there are always enough members of staff on duty for them to access, when required. All members of staff have a job description and a subject to regular appraisal by their managers.

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 the school's child protection policy and practice explicitly require staff to report to a designated senior member of staff of the school, or to the Local Authority Designated Officer, any concerns or allegation about school practices or the behaviour of colleagues which are likely to put pupils at risk of abuse or serious harm (NMS3)
- ensure the school has secured, and follows, qualified medical and nursing advice in a written protocol of the provision of non-prescription Chinese medicines to boarders (NMS15)