

Terra Nova School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Elizabeth Taylor
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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 independent co-educational preparatory school which caters for up to 300 pupils between the ages of three to 13 years of age. It is a mixed school offering weekly or flexible boarding provision, during term time only, for up to 44 young people. The number of boarders currently varies from four to 44 on any night throughout the week.

The residential accommodation is located in the main school building. The school is set in extensive grounds which offer a range of soft and hard play areas and include a tennis court, covered swimming pool and adventure playground.

Summary

At this announced inspection all the key national minimum standards were assessed. The boarding provision is outstanding in ensuring pupils feel safe and their welfare is promoted. Staff work hard to ensure pupils boarding experiences are positive and enjoyable. Pupils are supported to have a healthy life style, with nutritious food and opportunities to participate in a wide range of physical and mental activities. Excellent arrangements are in place to promote their health needs. Effective communication between the whole staff team ensure they work consistently to provide pupils with the support they need to be happy, well-rounded individuals. Relationships between pupils and the staff are positive and mutually respectful. All boarding pupils identified one or more adults in the school who they could talk to about any problems. Pupils' views are sought about the general running of the school and are seen to influence decision making. This promotes their confidence and makes them feel valued. Improvements have been effected in the redecoration and refurbishment of the boarding provision though some areas remain in need of updating.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Five recommendations were made as a result of the last inspection. The school was asked to ensure persons responsible for administering medication to pupils received appropriate training to do so. Matrons have been identified as responsible persons and they have received training to equip them to administer medication. Their practice is also assessed by the school doctor to ensure they carry out this duty diligently and competently. This ensures pupils receive treatment safely and in accordance with instructions.

Risk assessments were not routinely carried out in respect of the boarding provision. The school has taken action to engage external consultants to carry out comprehensive risk assessments in the premises and grounds. Health and safety matters are given high priority and staff are aware of their responsibility to report any concerns. This ensures pupils live in an environment which is safe.

The process for staff recruitment and selection was not robust. A high standard of checks and verification has been implemented for all persons who have access to pupils regardless of whether they work full-time, part-time or are volunteers. This promotes pupils safety.

Formal support for staff involved in looking after boarding pupils was not previously in place. All staff, including gap students, now receive a formal induction programme. Staff also have regular supervision, informal and formal. This ensures they are fully supported to carry out their roles.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There is a strong emphasis throughout the school on the promotion of a healthy life style for pupils. This is achieved through the provision of a varied and wholesome diet combined with excellent facilities for pupils to participate in a wide range of recreational and sporting activities.

Positive steps have been taken to improve the standard of catering in the last twelve months. This is acknowledged by boarding pupils who unreservedly say they now enjoy the food. Pupils are consulted about menu content and are offered a wide choice of hot and cold dishes at meal times. The menu routinely includes fresh meat, vegetables and fruits. Healthy snacks and drinks are also provided in between meal times. 'Tuck' is provided each evening and is identified as one of the two best things about boarding; the other is activities. Pupils are encouraged to try different foods and cultural and medical diets are catered for, when required. Staff have their meals with pupils and these are sociable and orderly occasions.

The school has extensive grounds and these are well used by pupils both for relaxation and play. A programme of activities is offered each evening though pupils have a choice of whether they participate or not. Most choose to do so as staff make the activities fun events. This encourages pupils to be involved in physical activities which supports their good health.

The school offers flexible and weekly boarding arrangements. Only a small number of pupils board for the maximum period of six nights per week. Consequently, the primary responsibility for the medical welfare of pupils remains with their parents or guardians. However, staff involved in caring for boarders are knowledgeable about their health needs. Robust systems and practice ensure pupil's health needs are met consistently on a day-to-day basis.

Medical information is collated as part of the admission process for all pupils. The school's doctor visits once a week to hold a 'surgery' for boarding pupils and operates a twenty-four hour on call system. The matrons are well trained in first aid and sports injury care. Clear guidance is in place in respect of managing conditions such as allergies and asthma. These arrangements ensure that the young people have access to suitably trained and informed staff at all times. Records of health care are well maintained and are regularly audited by the doctor. Good attention is given to ensuring pupils are well informed about health and social matters. These are addressed through the school's personal, social and health education programme. Pupils are also confident to discuss personal issues with other staff involved in boarding.

A robust system is in place in respect of the safe storage, administration and disposal of medicines. The matrons are trained in the administration of medication and their competency is routinely assessed by the school doctor. Individual records of administered medication for each pupil are maintained and provide a clear audit trail. These measures ensure pupils receive appropriate treatment in accordance with their needs.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Staff respect pupils' right to privacy and ensure their confidentiality is upheld. The general supervision of boarding pupils is carried out with sensitivity and in a non-intrusive manner. Information on pupils is kept safe and secure.

The school promotes a clear and consistent message that bullying is not acceptable. Pupils say that minor verbal disagreements occur between them at times but all reported there is no bullying in the school. The school's personal, social and health education programme is used to raise pupils' awareness about bullying and to reinforce the message that they should tell an adult about any concerns.

The headteacher provides clear leadership in respect of taking appropriate and decisive action to safeguard pupils. In his role as the school's designated person for child protection, the headteacher has forged positive links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board. He maintains up to date knowledge in respect of changes in legislation and ensures good practice recommendations in safeguarding are implemented in practice in the school. Training in safeguarding for the board of governors and the whole staff team has been prioritised, and delivered, since the appointment of the headteacher in September 2009. Safeguarding is now a set agenda item at all governors meetings. These arrangements ensure pupils' safety remain at the forefront of thinking and practice in the school.

Pupils' behaviour is managed effectively through praise and the awarding of marks for effort and achievement. Pupils are fully aware of what level of behaviour is expected from them and the possible consequences if their behaviour is unacceptable. There is a clear distinction between school and boarding so that boarders do not feel they are treated unfairly compared to day pupils. Pupils think the boarding rules and sanctions are fair. Records show sanctions are rarely used and are proportionate. Staff practice is accountable; all misdemeanours are recorded in a central computer system. Entries are monitored by the deputy head to ensure staff are consistent and equitable in their management of pupils.

Staff provide positive role models for pupils. Pupils' behaviour throughout the inspection was exemplary. They were polite and respectful while relaxed and confident to express their opinions. Relationships between staff and young people are warm and easy.

The school council, which includes pupil representation from each year including boarders, is used as the main forum for pupils to raise any issues. However, a new system of a 'suggestions box' has been implemented in the boarding provision. This offers pupils an additional opportunity to raise a matter. Most pupils are aware of its purpose but say they have not had any reason to use it. Posters are displayed throughout the school advising pupils about different agencies and individuals they can talk to about any problems. There is an expectation, which is borne out in practice that most issues or concerns can be dealt with informally. The informal process works well as pupils either state that 'they do not have anything to complain about', or 'we just tell staff and they do something about it'.

The school takes positive steps to keep pupils, staff and visitors safe from fire and other hazards. Systems are in place for the regular checking and servicing of fire safety and detection equipment. Practice evacuations involving boarders and staff are conducted during the day time and night. This ensures pupils know what to do in the event of an emergency. A fire risk assessment is in place. A visit by a Fire Officer to the school in 2009 identified that smoke seals around doors on the ground floor were in need of replacement. Work continues to replace the

seals. Staff receive on-going training in fire safety and instruction to ensure they know the correct procedure to follow.

Annual checks are carried out in respect of oil, gas and electrical installations to promote a safe environment for pupils. Comprehensive risk assessments of the premises and grounds are undertaken by external consultants. They also attend the schools' health and safety meetings which take place once a term. This supports effective communication and monitoring of health and safety matters.

Additional safety measures such as keypads on external doors and fencing have further improved safety for pupils. Pupils themselves say they feel safe in school and the boarding provision. They are aware of, and happy with, the security measures that are in place. Positive steps are taken to raise pupil's awareness about personal safety. For example, external performers were brought in to talk to pupils about 'stranger danger'.

A robust staff recruitment and vetting process has been implemented and is consistently applied to full-time and part-time staff as well as volunteers. Records show any gaps in employment are followed up, full checks are carried out and references are validated. All visitors to the school are carefully vetted and their presence recorded. Pupils are aware that only staff can let visitors in to the main building. These measures further contribute to safeguarding pupils.

The boarding provision is sited on the first floor and above. Whilst the matron's office is cited on the first floor and day pupils can access this room, the latter can not access the dormitories. Additional security measures mean people entering the premises are closely vetted and recorded. The robust arrangements ensure pupils safety, security and privacy is promoted.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils cite activities as one of the two best things about boarding; the other being 'tuck'. They enjoy a broad and extensive range of activities and clubs which are available on site. These vary from term to term but include playing chess, pistol shooting, swimming, design and technology challenges, art and choir. Sporting activities such as quick cricket, tennis and rounders are also regular features on the weekly list of options. Some evening and Saturday trips take place off-site which includes the cinema, shopping centres and play zones. The range of opportunities ensure pupils make good use of their leisure time in a constructive and enjoyable way.

Pupils receive excellent support to enable them to develop and achieve. Pupils feel safe, are well-cared for and have a good sense of self-esteem. Staff work well together and communicate effectively to ensure the individual needs of boarders are well known and catered for. The school provides specialist advice and educational support to help pupils achieve their potential. Boarding pupils have good access to a range of recreational and leisure facilities beyond the school day to promote their continued learning. External support is available to pupils in the form of the school doctor, nurse and independent listener. Although the independent listener is not as well known to the pupils as previously, action has been taken to appoint a school counsellor as a supportive measure. All of the boarders identify at least one adult within the school who they feel comfortable to talk to about any concerns.

Staff promote equality in all aspects of school life. Girls and boys enjoy the same educational and recreational opportunities and no distinction is made between boarding and day pupils.

All are provided with the same options beyond the school day. Younger pupils in particular reflect a diverse population and the school ensure all are fully integrated in to school life. The school provides an environment where difference is celebrated and seen as an opportunity to learn about different cultures and religions.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school is welcoming and friendly. Staff value pupils, listen to them and seek their views. Pupils are relaxed and confident, with a positive outlook on life. There is a genuine atmosphere of openness and honesty and there are particularly sound relationships between staff and boarders. Boarders are positive about their residential experiences and say that staff are 'kind' and that the school 'is a happy one to board in'.

Pupils are supported to voice their opinions in an appropriate manner and contribute to improving and raising standards in the school. Their views are sought via formal and informal methods such as 'suggestion boxes', daily discussion with staff and in regular school council meetings. Separate meetings to discuss boarding matters were discontinued earlier last year prior to a change in headship. Boarders said they would like the separate meetings to be reconvened and this suggestion was readily accepted by the new headteacher.

The school's flexible boarding arrangements mean that most pupils have regular personal contact with their family or carer during the week and each weekend. Pupils are happy with arrangements for them to make telephone calls to their parents, family and friends. The majority of pupils have their own mobile phone which they can use after school up to changing for bed. As many of the phones have a camera facility, pupils are not allowed to take them to their dormitory but have to hand their phones in to staff for safe keeping overnight. This policy is well understood by pupils and all felt this was a reasonable measure. Alternatively, boarding pupils can use a landline phone in the matron's office, free of charge, to ring their parents. Pupils can also email their family and friends in after school computer sessions which are supervised by an adult.

Prospective boarders are encouraged to stay for tea and to engage in the activities and clubs on offer prior to having an overnight stay. New boarders are supported well by peers and staff when they first arrive. In particular, the headteacher's wife is active in supporting new boarders and their parents. An informal 'buddying' system operates whereby older pupils show new boarders around the accommodation and explain the daily routine. These arrangements enable new boarders to settle in quickly and promotes boarding as a positive experience for them.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders have sufficient space to store their possessions in the dormitories. Secure provision is not automatically provided for individual boarders as the school promotes respect for each others' personal belongings. This is effective in practice as none of the pupils identified loss of property as an issue. The school operates an 'account' system for boarders whereby parents are charged for planned visits, events and extras such as 'tuck'. This means pupils do not usually need to have money in their possession. Parents are advised to provide only small amounts of money for pupils to spend on trips to help their child learn to spend wisely and to budget.

The boarding provision provides sufficient space and facilities to meet the needs of pupils. The provision is sited on two upper floors, with separate areas for girls and boys. A joint common room is located on the first floor. This is furnished in accordance with domestic style living and provides a homely space where young people can relax and play together. The room is well equipped with a range of age appropriate equipment, books and games. New computer game consoles and other electronic games and music equipment have been purchased. Some of the furniture in the common room shows signs of wear and tear but is being replaced as part of a continuing programme of improvement in the physical environment.

Dormitories and washing facilities are located on the first and second floor, for boys and girls respectively. Improvements effected since the last inspection in the boarding accommodation have included corridors being repainted with child-friendly murals and the redecoration and refurbishment of some, though not all, dormitories. Dormitories range in size from four to seven beds. All are large rooms and each boarding pupil has good personal space. New integrated bed and storage units are strategically placed to provide older pupils with some privacy. Pupils are encouraged to personalise the space around their bed and all have their own bedding. This helps to create a sense of ownership in pupils and is effective as they take an interest in their surroundings and are keen to keep it looking nice.

Small communal rooms are also located alongside dorms and tend to be used for 'winding down' just prior to bedtime. These rooms are plain in appearance and have not yet been upgraded to the same good standard of accommodation achieved elsewhere in the boarding provision.

There are sufficient numbers of baths, toilets and showers for boarders although additional showers on another floor are used when a high number of boys reside. Improvements have been made to the ventilation system and water pressure in the boys' shower facilities. New flooring has also been fitted. Both the boys and girls facilities are now of a good standard. Appropriate locks are fitted to toilet doors and the rooms are clean and free from offensive odours.

The improvements to date have greatly enhanced the boarding environment and provide a colourful and comfortable place for pupils to stay in. While work remains to be completed in upgrading three out of the nine dormitories and some communal areas, pupils say the boarding provision is 'a lot more homely'.

The school has extensive grounds which are used for a variety of activities. Outdoor play equipment is sited in one area and some areas such as the woods are 'off limits' unless pupils are accompanied by a member of staff. This rule is well known to pupils and is respected by them.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All pupils are provided with opportunities that promote their development and full integration. Staff work closely with parents to ensure pupils individual needs relating to their race, religion, culture and language are promoted. The school encourages pupils to respect and value others. There is equal access to all activities and resources regardless of age or ability. The school is able to meet individual medical, dietary and cultural needs as required.

A prospectus explaining the schools aims, principles and practices is supplied to parents and guardians on request. The school also has a website which can be accessed for similar information to that contained within the prospectus. This enables interested persons to make informed decisions about the placement of a child. A handbook is also given to pupils who are considering boarding. This is produced in an illustrated and accessible format. The handbook explains the usual daily routine and house rules and provides sufficient details to inform pupils about how boarding operates.

The headteacher is very much involved in the oversight and management of the school whilst sharing and delegating responsibilities. A committed senior team has been established who constantly seek to improve practice. Members of the team are accessible and approachable to staff and pupils. Clear lines of accountability are in place and effective systems operate in relation to sharing important information about pupils. A system has been implemented for the monitoring of records maintained in respect of pupils' academic performance and their welfare. Records are routinely checked to assist in identifying whether pupils require any additional support. The process for risk assessing on and off-site activities is fully established. The deputy headteacher monitors all risk assessments to ensure suitable arrangements are in place to promote pupils safety.

Governors are supportive of the developments proposed and implemented to date by the new head. Investment in developing facilities for pupils is evident. Scrutiny by the board of governors in relation to the boarding function is increasing. A governor has been designated responsible for monitoring safeguarding matters and is developing the role to become a regular visitor to the boarding provision. This will enable governors to gain an independent view about the boarding provision and the welfare of boarding pupils.

The boarding provision operates six nights each week. Staffing levels during the day and night are sufficient to meet the needs of boarders. Staff of both genders and varying ages provides positive role models for pupils. All staff present as highly motivated and committed to ensuring pupils are safe and their welfare is promoted. The manner in which staffing is deployed provides a good level of consistency, continuity and predictability. Pupils have access to an adult at all times; notices are prominently displayed on both boarding floors to show which member of staff is on call through the night time and a call bell system operates on each floor whereby boarding pupils can alert staff on duty at night if they require assistance. This ensures pupils live in a supportive environment.

All staff, including gap students, receive a copy of the school handbook which contains all relevant policies and procedures. A formal induction programme and supervision for all staff involved in caring for boarding pupils, including gap students is integrated into the schools' practice. All staff have opportunities for relevant and ongoing training and for the regular review of their performance through annual appraisals.

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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Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure a consistent satisfactory standard of boarding accommodation is established. (Breach of NMS 42)