

The Chorister School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Leonard Hird
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Address	The Chorister School The College DURHAM DH1 3EL
Telephone number	0191 3842935
Email	
Registered person	Ian Thomas Albert Hawksby
Head / Principal	Mrs Linda Lawrence (Acting)
Nominated person	
Date of last inspection	6 November 2006

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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 a long and historically established chorister and preparatory boarding school, set within a world heritage site and offering full boarding facilities for up to 59 boys and girls, between the ages of seven years old and 13 years old. The separate and safe boarding provision for boys and girls is to be found in the main school building over two floors. The school is part of the foundation of Durham Cathedral and is located in the small university city.

Summary

The purpose of the visit to the school was to carry out an inspection of all of the key National Minimum Standards relating to boarding schools in the different outcome areas of Every Child Matters. The quality of boarding provision at the school is good. The management structure and strong sense of community within the school are significantly contributing to the protection and promotion of the boarding pupils' and choristers' welfare. The school has undertaken a significant amount of work to address all of the recommendations made at the last inspection. Two of the outcome areas are outstanding and the other four outcome areas are good.

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 undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection have been fully addressed by the management of the school. The school has completed a thorough review of its policies and procedures and updated them where necessary. All of the requirements and recommendations made by the environmental health officer have been actioned and completed by the school and its catering contractors. The environmental standards found in the boarding houses have significantly improved since the last inspection and a rolling programme of refurbishment and re-decoration programme of the internal fabric of the building is being undertaken over the next year.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Members of the boarding house staff team are highly supportive of the school's personal, social and health education curriculum and are giving very considered advice to boarding pupils on these matters.

The school's excellent health policies and procedures are subject to regular review and updating. The health needs of boarding and chorister pupils are well managed by the house staff. Parental permission for the administration of medication and emergency health needs is maintained on the individual pupil's health and welfare files.

Prescribed and homely medications are securely kept in approved medication cabinets. All members of the house staff team are first aid trained to enable them to deal with minor injuries and ailments. Boarding house staff have successfully undertaken extra training courses in paediatric medication to enable them to correctly manage boarding pupils medication.

Boarding pupils are registered annually with the local health centre and where necessary with dentist/optician. The school's doctor, practice nurse and other health professionals work closely with the house staff and visit the school if required. Choristers can be quickly referred to the school's specialist ear, nose and throat consultant if there is a problem. If boarding pupils are unwell they are accommodated in the school's two well equipped sick bay rooms. Parents of unwell pupils are informed personally of their progress by house staff.

Boarding pupils take their meals in a large well maintained and decorated dining hall. Meals are nutritious in content, well-prepared and cooked on site by a well managed and qualified catering staff. The meals are based on a healthy eating programme which is linked into the school's programme for enjoyable exercise. Full account is taken of any specialist or cultural dietary needs of boarding pupils. Boarding pupils spoken with confirm the meals are really enjoyable and there is a good choice of food available including different types of salads, meats and desserts. Boarding pupils can influence the types of meal being taken at the school by working together with the schools catering manager, making written comments in the food comments book, the school council and house forum.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school's countering of bullying policy and procedure is easily understood and accessed by members of staff. An easy to read pamphlet on how to deal with bullying is given to all pupils at the beginning of each school year. Information is prominently displayed throughout the school and boarding house on how to contact external support agencies such as Child-line or the school's own independent listeners. Boarding pupils confirm they knew who they could talk to at the school and that they knew the names of the independent listeners and how to make contact with them. Boarding pupils confirm in their written responses contained in the pre- inspection questionnaires sent out by Ofsted that bullying is not an issue at the school and that they feel very safe.

Both the school and Cathedral Chapter have a safeguarding policy and procedure in place which is compatible with the local authority's safeguarding children board's policy and procedures. All members of the school's and Chapter staff team receive regular training and briefings in safeguarding. Both members of the boarding house staff team and Chapter staff team are fully aware of their role in ensuring the safety of the boarding and chorister pupils. Members of the boarding house staff team demonstrate a good understanding of the school's safeguarding procedures and how they would address any suspicion of abuse.

The school's designated safeguarding officer is the headmaster. All information relating to safeguarding issues is kept confidentially and securely in the designated governor and a member of the Chapter. There is contact with the local safeguarding children's board on a regular basis. The governing body of the school has a designated governor known as the 'Custos' to oversee safeguarding issues at the school and the Chapter.

The school has good policies and procedures in place for dealing with and recording any complaint made by a parent or boarding pupil. Boarding pupils spoken with confirm that they know how to complain as well as whom to complain to at the school. Members of the boarding house staff and the school operate an open door policy for boarding pupils to speak to any member of staff at any time about any issue.

The school has good policies and procedures in place for the employment of all staff at the school. Robust checks are undertaken on all new staff prior to their employment at the school. The school has recently introduced a three year rolling programme of enhanced criminal bureau checks to ensure that all staff including those members of teaching staff employed prior to 2002 are fully compliant with their safeguarding systems.

There are thorough and comprehensive systems in place to record, monitor and prevent risks to health and safety at the school and Cathedral. Boarding pupils confirm that there are regular fire drills taking place and they know the procedures they have to follow during these drills.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Members of the boarding house staff team work very closely with parents, educational and support staff to ensure that boarding pupils and choristers are given all the help and support they require.

There is a wide range of planned and unplanned leisure activities for both chorister and boarding pupils to take part in during normal as well as chorister term time. These activities are well supported by members of the school and Chapter staff. Full account is taken of the differing needs, abilities and backgrounds of the individual pupils when planning these events. The range of activities to choose from is large and includes activities that range from traditional sports activities to outdoor pursuits as well as choral singing in the Cathedral.

The school is fully practising a policy of equal opportunity for all pupils attending the school. Girl choristers are now able to play a full part as Cathedral choristers after six centuries. Choristers and boarders are fully supported by house staff and the other specialist support staff to enable them to thoroughly enjoy the very demanding life at the school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarding pupils are actively encouraged to take part in the day-to-day running of the boarding house. They can influence decisions made within the school in several ways such as the weekly school council or the Keep House forum which meets weekly. The school has an 'open door' policy for boarders to speak to any member of staff at any time. There are excellent arrangements in place at the school to consult with boarding pupils. Boarding pupils confirmed in writing and verbally during the inspection that they feel that they can influence decisions made in the school by their involvement in the school council and the 'Keep House' forum.

There are telephones available in the school for boarding pupils to keep in contact with their family and friends in private. Boarding pupils can if they wish make use of e-mail or the more traditional methods of letter writing to keep in contact with their family and friends.

Great care is given to supporting boarding pupils when they first come into the boarding house. The experienced boarding house staff team ensure there is a warm welcome to all boarders but more especially so with the admission this term of girl choristers. An understanding and sympathetic eye is kept on these new choristers so that 'homesickness' does not become a problem.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Boarding pupils keep their small possessions in a lockable cabinet in their dormitory and if necessary, larger valuable possessions can easily be stored in the boarding house.

The separate boarding and bathing areas for boys and girls are in excellent decorative order, with new bespoke furniture and fittings in both areas. The living, bathing and sleeping areas are very pleasant and provide a well designed and spacious environment for the boarding pupils to live in. All of the living areas and dormitories have been cleverly individualised and personalised by the school with the help of the boarding pupils. The refurbishment and re-decoration work in the boarding house has been completed on time and to a very high standard for the start of the new school year. Boarding pupils and parents are highly complimentary of the work which has been sympathetically undertaken in this very old and listed building. As well as the ongoing refurbishment and re-decoration programme, which is occurring at the school, all other minor repairs and re-decoration work required in the boarding house area is carried out quickly and efficiently, by the Chapter's maintenance team.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The school has robust policies and procedures in place for dealing with equality and diversity. Boarding pupils are very supportive of each other and many of them commented both verbally and in writing on this fact. Outreach choral work is regularly taking place in the local community with boarding pupils during the school year. Boarding pupils commented that they are treated with understanding, respect and dignity by staff.

The school produces an easy to understand Statement of its Principles and Practices on Boarding for all interested parties. Boarding pupils confirm that they receive an easy to understand boarders handbook for their use, as well. There are excellent systems of administration and risk assessment in place to ensure the health and safety of boarding pupils.

The acting headmistress and senior management team provide positive and effective levels of management support for the boarding house staff team. There are, however, only informal structures in place for the supervision and appraisal of boarding house staff and there is a need to develop a formal structure to assist boarding house staff in their personal and professional development. The boarding house staff team are well experienced in their individual roles and provide an extremely stable and caring environment for boarding pupils to live in. All of the boarders spoken with said that they feel well cared for by this staff team.

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 there is an appropriate process for the regular review of the performance of each member of staff with boarding duties by a more senior or experienced member of staff. (NMS BS 34)