

Windermere School

Inspection report for boarding school

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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

Windermere School is an independent co-educational boarding and day school. It was founded in 1863 and is situated on the outskirts of the town of Windermere in the heart of the Lake District, overlooking Lake Windermere. The boarding accommodation is arranged in three houses. Westmorland House accommodates sixth form pupils, both male and female, Langdale House accommodates all other male boarders, and Browhead accommodates all other female boarders. Westmorland and Langdale are both detached, fully self-contained boarding houses, whilst Browhead is situated in the main school building. Boarders of many differing nationalities currently board at the school.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This inspection had a short lead-in time. It assessed every outcome heading covering all the key boarding school national minimum standards. Progress against recommendations made during the last inspection was also evaluated.

There is good use of risk assessments to support boarders' welfare. Safeguarding support is established on many levels. The school liaises well with different departments to ensure the whole school community remains safe. Hazard identification is excellent. Boarding pupils do not identify bullying as a concern. They are clear about the complaints procedures.

Boarders' views are captured and these contribute to the development of boarding practice. Most boarders confirm that they are satisfied with their whole boarding experience. Parents felt that the residential experience makes a positive contribution to their child's personal development. There is an experienced pastoral manager providing good leadership. Staff are well supported and there is access to suitable training. There is an individualised approach taken with each boarder.

The school has a strategic development plan to drive forward improvements. Practice is reflective of guidance issued by central government. The school's boarding operation is monitored closely as part of the quality assurance systems operated. There is strong commitment to ensuring equality for all. The quality of services being provided enables boarders to develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence.

Boarders have access to a range of safe recreational facilities. They have options open to them on how they can spend their free time. Health support is coordinated well through the school nurse.

This report highlights some recommendations to support practice developments. Boarders confirm that it is easy to voice opinions but some felt that they receive a slow response to questions posed and views expressed. Older boarders felt that they had unreasonable restrictions placed on them regarding the times that they could access local facilities within the nearby town centre and this was impacting on them developing life and independence skills. The location and layout out of the provision for boarders when ill is not ideal.

Improvements since the last inspection

Four recommendations made at the last inspection had been suitably addressed. Appropriate food handling and hygiene training has been provided. A staff member with responsibility for health and safety has attended a range of courses to broaden his knowledge base. A visitors book was introduced into each boarding house and this complements vetting procedures at the main school reception. Boarders have a secure place to keep personal possessions and valuables. There are plans to move the location of some 'personal safes'.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The promotion of health is taken seriously and there is a capable and competent response being taken to promote boarders' health. There is policy and written guidance, which is implemented very well in practice, for administering, recording, storing and disposal of medication.

A high percentage of boarders (80%) felt that they are looked after well if they are ill. The role provided by school nurse, providing cover 24 hours per day during term times, is instrumental in managing boarders' health arrangements. There is an excellent working knowledge of individual boarder's health needs as good information is obtained during students' enrolment and induction. Parental permissions for emergency or operative treatment are gained to prevent any undue delay in seeking appropriate medical treatment. House parents remain vigilant to students returning with any new medicines following half-term breaks.

Medication is appropriately managed to ensure safe practice. There is a clear statement on the management of prescription and household remedies, and a policy which addresses pupils' self-administration of medicines. Medication administration records are accurate which facilitate a clear audit trail. Staff receive first aid training and support the nurse in responding to minor first aid or health matters. Good advice is given to boarders experiencing minor sporting injuries. Boarders are registered at a local health centre where they can gain access to male and female doctors and suitable arrangements are made for optical and dental treatment. Local emergency services are also accessed when necessary. No boarders had major injuries between inspections. The location and size of the school medical room is not ideal. This room has a dual purpose and is situated within the nurses' office.

Health promotion work covering matters such as sexual relationships, smoking cessation, drug misuse, fitness and diet, and healthy living is provided. Many of these areas are covered within the educational curriculum and the development of skills and knowledge through the personal, social, health, education and citizenship programme. There are clear links between boarding and education programmes and many learning and developmental opportunities are presented.

Although far from being fully satisfied, boarders did confirm that there was good choice at mealtimes with a sufficient quantity and quality of food being provided. There are ongoing efforts being made by the catering management to consult with boarders on their catering requirements. Catering management are receptive to new ideas and willing to change menus. Establishing menus suitable for all boarders remains the subject of ongoing discussion. Pupils individual requirements linked to their health and dietary needs are responded to.

The inspection team observed an extensive choice of food at each mealtime. The options available for the evening meal are not as great but still provide at least three main choices. The main school dining facilities are managed very well. An international theme is evident within the dining area and this creates a welcoming and relaxed environment. Cultural diversity is welcomed under the school ethos. Different themed meals are prepared. There is sufficient time available between lessons and before evening preparatory time for boarders to eat their food. No unreasonable queuing was observed. There is sensitive monitoring of individual eating habits. There are clear links being made between diet, exercise and healthy lifestyles. Boarders have access to drinking water and chilled drinks. The boarding houses have well appointed food preparation areas that can be used to make snacks. A recent environmental health report highlighted no areas of concern. The school achieved a five star catering award between inspections.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school maintains a safe boarding house environment. The arrangements for complaints, safeguarding boarders, bullying and behaviour management are handled well and ensure that pupils feel listened to and protected. No major concerns were highlighted before or during this inspection. The Ofsted boarders' survey revealed that a very high percentage of the pupils feel that they are properly protected from harm by the adults who look after them. Parents unanimously concluded that the school keeps their child safe.

The headteacher and pastoral lead maintains accurate records when incidents occur. Importantly, there is transparent communication with boarders and their parents to address concerns as they arise. Recording and reporting systems are to a high standard and these clearly capture the boarding experience. Information is regularly monitored and evaluated and this allows discernable patterns and trends to be identified. There are many opportunities for pupils to contribute to their boarding experience.

The school's policy on behaviour, discipline and the use of punishments is outlined within handbooks. Boarders are made aware of school rules and the expected code of conduct. Rules are established by negotiation through various boarders' council meetings. There are few rules, with boarders 'self-regulating' their behaviour extremely well. Some interesting discussions took place with boarders on whether rules should be 'hard and fast' or flexible. Being able to take each individual's particular circumstances into consideration appeared to be the boarders' favoured approach.

Boarding is being managed well. Competent house parents ensure suitable physical safety and security. Practice respects boarders' privacy, as is consistent with good parenting. Boarders have their own accommodation which is secure from public intrusion. There is a clear school policy to prevent access by members of the public. Security locks are fitted and potentially vulnerable areas within the school are monitored and risk assessed. The school grounds have good external lighting and this contributes to boarders safety.

There is a clear school policy and procedure for responding to allegations or suspicions of abuse. All staff receive regular safeguarding and child protection training and are capable of responding to concerns if they arise. There are no safeguarding matters directly related to boarders. Contact is established with the local authority safeguarding team and the local authority designated officer. The school is committed to establishing a wider collaborative network to support boarders' welfare. Staff are clear on the arrangements for sharing information for safeguarding purposes. Information held on pupils is handled safely in line with policy.

Written information available throughout the school enables boarders and their parents to form a complaint if they wish. Complaints procedures have been publicised. Information is regularly reviewed and updated. The contact details of Ofsted, the present regulatory body responsible for inspection of boarding is included in school information. Boarders are confident that complaints would be taken seriously and their views and opinions listened to. Boarders occasionally commented that some concerns take too much time to be addressed. All levels of complaints are taken seriously and there are good records on the resolution of complaints and grumbles.

This school makes every effort to reduce the impact of bullying on pupils. Pupils indicate they have no concerns about bullying and they feel safe at the school. Pupils unanimously state that they would have someone to talk to if they were bullied and they are confident that staff would respond to any matters highlighted by them.

The response to health, safety and security is extremely well coordinated. Maintaining a safe whole school environment is managed very well by the senior management team. The school has a health and safety committee that regularly sits. Detailed minutes of each meetings are produced. There are trained representatives within the school and efficient monitoring of safety reports by the school

management team and governors. Recommendations are addressed without delay. No observable risks to boarders' safety are evident.

A wide range of risk assessments support practice and the safe management and operation of the school. These assessments are regularly reviewed and updated. A crisis management policy is established. Fire and rescue services visit the school ensuring fire precautions remain safe. Servicing contracts for electrical, gas and fire safety are established. Boilers are regularly serviced. Portable appliance testing is undertaken to ensure all electrical equipment is safe. Qualified instructors are used for high risk activities. Risks associated with challenging activities are clearly being minimised.

The arrangements for the vetting, recruitment and selection of staff at this school are extremely well coordinated. There are efficient management systems. Comprehensive computerised and hard copy records show that robust procedures are being followed. Records confirm that no staff start work before being in receipt of an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. A clear audit is produced at every stage of the recruitment process. The school is responsive towards any new government or education directives. Staff responsible for recruitment have attended suitable training. There is a well established system to manage visitors to the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarding pupils have access to different activities to develop skills and individual potential through new experiences. Boarding staff in conjunction with activity coordinators ensure excellent participation in events during evenings and weekends. There is a wide range and choice of activities, trips and excursions outside teaching time. Many boarders commented on how they like to spend their free time. While some boarders like to relax, or with permission, go into the surrounding towns, others prefer to 'sign up' to organised school outings. There is consultation with boarders to get the balance right between free time and planned activities.

Team sporting events are played and these present opportunities to develop sporting excellence. The end of term inter-house competition was taking place during this inspection. There was excellent participation from all age groups. The school operates lots of different clubs that engage pupils with extra-curricula pursuits. Boarders in the main (78%) felt that there was enough 'going on' for them. It can be difficult to plan for everyone's interests but the school does provide a choice of safe recreational areas, both indoor and outdoor.

Weekday evening times are also taken up with preparatory studies. Boarders' study areas are good. There is access to the internet and this had recently been extended for boarders at the weekend. Suitable safeguards are afforded to prevent access to unsuitable sites. Boarders' thoughts on extending the network of sites open to them was passed onto the headteacher. Boarders confirm that the school timetable does not place onerous demands on them.

School documents and guidance demonstrate a commitment to equal opportunities. The boarding house mission statement, with the aim to provide 'a safe and caring extended family environment' provides a good indication of the commitment to stamp out all forms of discrimination. There are no identifiable minority groups within the school. There is a good percentage of pupils from overseas. Pupils learn to live and work as a member of a multi-cultural society, accepting its discipline and responsibilities and respecting the rights and needs of others. Inclusion of all boarders is key to the school's ethos.

Equality and diversity is recognised and valued and this allows boarding pupils to form good relationships and gain experiences that allow them to develop, achieve and prepare for their futures. It is clear that a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum is being provided. Boarding pupils acquire knowledge, skills and understanding of different cultures. They are being prepared with skills relevant to adult life, university and the world of work. Boarders commented that, 'most people get on with everyone most of the time'. Resources at the school allow customs, faiths and beliefs to be followed. Cultural events and festivals are celebrated.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Different committees and forums are run at the school and these provide genuine consultation opportunities for boarders who wish to contribute towards the management and operation of boarding at the school. The quality of the boarding experience is constantly being improved from listening to comments.

Many positive comments and key themes highlighted within boarder questionnaires and through discussions were brought to the attention of the senior management team. Boarders did confirm that it was easy to voice opinions to staff but some felt that there had been a slow response to some of the questions that they posed. Older boarders felt that they had unreasonable restrictions placed on them regarding the times that they could go into the local town centre. They felt that this prevented them from taking control of their futures and restricted the development of life and independence skills. This was especially significant to boarders who are due to leave the school and take up university places. Another example cited by the boarders was no access to social networking sites and this was felt to limit communication with friends and family members. Boarders recognised that these sites need to be used sensibly. The senior management team is in the process of addressing both these matters. Policy had been drafted and safety briefings planned. The whole school environment is managed extremely well utilising risk assessments. These will remain key to any future change in practice. The boarding houses operate signing-in and out books and this helps to monitor boarders movements.

Boarding staff members display tremendous interest and enthusiasm for their work and many staff provide a greater commitment to their work than what is outlined within their job description. House parents are knowledgeable and staff and boarder

relationships are excellent. Boarders are relaxed within their accommodation and comfortable to talk to their house parents, school nurse, members of the senior management team and teaching staff.

There is reasonable access to school resources to enable contact to be maintained. Information technology allows boarding pupils to remain in contact with friends and family although communication across different continents has some restrictions due to the different time zones. There are few restrictions on the use of mobile telephones outside of lessons. Young people and parents know that some telephone networks have limited coverage in and around the lake district.

The induction process enables boarders to settle quickly. Boarders confirm that they are well supported when they arrive at the school; relevant information is provided and rules and routines are explained. The boarders' handbook and the school website has good information. House parents provide verbal support to ensure boarders comprehend key information. Welfare issues such as complaints and child protection procedures are outlined. The house parents and some boarding pupils provided some good illustrations on how they support new pupils when they are feeling homesick.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The boarding provision is clearly fit for purpose. The school mission statement highlights the need to provide an extended family environment where boarding pupils can flourish academically, socially and personally; this is clearly met. Boarders and parents confirm that they are satisfied with the quality of boarding experience that is provided. The mixed sixth form boarding house works particularly well. Students gain good experiences within the self-contained flats to prepare them for university life.

There is a continual improvement programme of accommodation and facilities. Developments are prioritised via the school development plan. High standards of accommodation continue to be maintained. All areas of the boarding accommodation are safe. The vast majority of boarders report that they feel properly protected and think that their boarding house is secure. Suitable levels of privacy is afforded within boarding houses.

There is good attention to detail within the boarding houses. Art and photographic displays add further value to the excellent appearance of the boarding houses and this supports the relaxed environment. The school management team and governors have been supportive in improving common rooms and these provide focal points for all boarders. Many improvements are noted between inspections. All areas of boarding are exceptionally clean and tidy. The design and appearance of bedrooms are good and quality furnishings have stood up to the rigour of student usage. Boarders have lockable cabinets to store personal items and valuables. Maintenance

of the whole school site is coordinated well. Boarding pupils value their surroundings. The boarding ethos is securing positive outcomes for pupils.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Clear management arrangements and good leadership have established a very stable environment for boarders. Effective planning allows boarders to be looked after safely. Boarders confirm they receive good welfare support and are satisfied with the boarding experience. All parents felt that the boarding experience is making a positive contribution to their child's personal development.

Staff working within the boarding house are confident, enthusiastic and competent, and morale is good. Developments to school policy, procedures and practice are clearly aligned with the boarding school national minimum standards and the Every Child Matters framework, which are designed to improve boarders' experiences while living away from home. The school is responsive to changes in legislation and this ensures practice is continually being reviewed. A proactive response is being taken by the school to prepare for a change of inspectorate from September 2011.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The boarding experience is individualised. Parents are satisfied that the boarding experience meets their child's particular needs and they are clear that they are being treated fairly and with respect. School policy and guidance have been produced. A broad, balanced and relevant curriculum provides support for the boarders in acquiring knowledge, skills and understanding. There is a culture of high expectation that allows pupils' self-esteem and confidence to grow. Boarding pupils learn about discipline, take responsibility and respect the rights and needs of others. The school is very welcoming and international students integrate extremely well.

Staff have relevant written guidance, policies and procedures to support their practice. School documents are regularly reviewed. Guidance is up to date and provides a good operational framework to support the diverse needs of boarders. Permanent, accurate records are maintained on the operation of boarding houses. There is good monitoring of records and suitable actions are taken to reduce any risks identified.

There is a good development plan outlining how the school's operation will be maintained. The school liaises with other professionals, agencies and departments to inform improvement plans and address any service shortfalls. There have been few recommendations made by different departments. Practice clearly meets with the requirements of boarding school standards.

Deployment of staff is good. Boarders know who the responsible adult is if they have any concerns and confirm that they can contact them when needed. Staff are clear about their roles, balancing their work so that the individual and collective needs of the pupils are met while ensuring that the necessary administrative tasks are

undertaken. Records show a clarity of purpose in how staff are being managed. It is evident that suitable training is being provided. Training, support and supervision are good and clearly linked to staff development.

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...

- review the provision for boarders when ill and consider relocation (NMS 48.1)
- ensure all students views are taken into account in the development of boarding practice (NMS 12.1 and 12.2)
- ensure boarding students have reasonable access to local facilities which is appropriate to their age. (NMS 30.1)