

Oxford International College

Oxford International College Ltd

Oxford International House, 1-5 London Place, Oxford OX4 1BD

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

The school is set over two teaching sites in the centre of Oxford.

It provides GCSE and A-level courses for students aged from 14 to 18 years, the majority of whom are international students.

The school has 400 boarding places across four halls of residence. At the time of the inspection, 372 students were on roll at the school, with 353 students using the boarding provision. The school uses the term 'students' to describe those attending the school.

Inspection dates: 16 to 18 April 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	inadequate
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	inadequate
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	inadequate
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There are serious and widespread failures, which mean that children and young people are not protected and their welfare is not promoted.

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Date of last inspection: 19 October 2021

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: inadequate

A poor safeguarding culture places children at risk of harm. Staff report feeling ill-equipped to support students in terms of their emotional health and mental health needs. Students and staff raise concerns that the regime and routines in the school and boarding are onerous and leave little opportunity for rest and recreation. In addition, there are insufficient staff to provide good care, supervision and support to boarding students.

Students make academic progress. However, staff expressed concerns that students are under excessive pressure to study for many hours a day, meaning that they often spend their one day of rest, sleeping in their bedrooms. Students say leisure opportunities are limited, and clubs and activities are an extension of their academic studies. This means students have little opportunity to rest and have fun outside of the school's curriculum.

Staff responsible for the welfare of students are proactive in providing and advocating in-house counselling, nursing and pastoral care for students. However, these internal services are extremely stretched, and access to external clinicians, including private assessments, is significantly delayed. For example, one student waited two years for a clinical assessment.

Staff do not help students to learn about sexual health, positive relationships or how to stay safe. This puts students, many of whom are from overseas and away from their families, at risk of exploitation. When students have asked for help, managers have appropriately supported them with external services, resources and advice. However, this help is often when students have already found themselves at risk, and there is a lack of proactive support and education to help students make safer choices and avoid situations that place them at risk of harm.

The quality and provision of staff training are poor. Most staff training is completed online and staff do not feel equipped to meet specific student needs such as mental health, depression and autism.

There is no independent person and students do not access any external advocacy services. This creates the opportunity for the development of a closed culture, where children have no means of raising worries or concerns with someone who is independent of the school. In addition, there is no student boarding council or similar forum to enable leaders and managers to understand or respond to the lived experiences of students in the boarding provision. Some students do feel listened to and they spoke positively about managers purchasing a new television and ping-pong table.

The majority of children spoken to and those who responded to the 'point in time' survey commented on the poor quality of the food provided. Many students order regularly from take-away facilities or cook basic food that lacks nutrition and variety. This was observed each evening by inspectors across the boarding houses.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: inadequate

Leaders and managers do not consistently place the well-being of students as their foremost consideration. There is a lack of transparency regarding safeguarding within the boarding school and staff feel that their training needs and capacity relating to students' mental health and welfare have not been adequately addressed. Leaders and managers have failed to share significant safeguarding concerns with the host authority. They have not appropriately responded to students' concerns about staff. The impact of this has meant that crucial safeguarding information in relation to students has not been shared with all external agencies. This may have indirectly facilitated ongoing and targeted harm against students.

There are significant shortfalls in safeguarding practices and policy. There have been occasions where leaders and managers have not referred significant child protection concerns to the relevant safeguarding agency within the host authority. Despite the fact that most students are from overseas, the leaders and managers do not safeguard these students effectively. For example, when students have raised safeguarding concerns relating to their circumstances abroad, leaders and managers have not been proactive in working together with relevant embassies for overseas students.

Students are at risk of exploitation. When students suffered significant harm as a result of exploitation, the leaders and managers in the school and boarding failed to take action to protect the students who were harmed. Neither have they taken any action to protect the wider school community from similar incidents.

The systems in place to respond to students' concerns are ineffective. There is a lack of clarity about who has the overarching designated safeguarding responsibilities within the boarding school. When students reported concerns about the conduct of a member of staff, this information was not acted on promptly and there were no alarm bells until another very serious allegation was made. This delay potentially placed children at increased risk of harm.

There are not enough staff to ensure that students are safe and that they receive the care and attention they need to promote their physical and emotional health. For example, when students are unwell and unable to attend school, they are not properly cared for. One student told inspectors that they were left isolated in their bedroom for three weeks without staff regularly checking on them when they were unwell.

The management of student medication is ineffective. There is one registered specialist school nurse responsible for all boarding students' medication. This is in

addition to being responsible for providing healthcare for students and staff training. There are no risk assessments or oversight for students who manage their own medication, no recorded stock levels or medication audits, and therefore no way to detect medication errors or mismanagement of medication. This places students at risk of preventable harm. This is a repeat recommendation from the last full inspection.

The management of CCTV is undertaken by an external provider. There are no safeguards in place to understand how CCTV footage is viewed, stored or used safely. This presents a risk in terms of the security and rights to privacy of the students.

Recruitment practice is inconsistent and does not always follow safer recruitment principles. This means that not all staff are appropriately vetted before they start, which could impact on the safety of students.

Leaders and managers have taken appropriate action in response to one complaint. However, information requested in relation to further complaints from students was not provided during the inspection, meaning that inspectors could not evaluate the effectiveness of any actions taken.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: inadequate

Leaders and managers have not promoted a healthy safeguarding culture that prioritises the safety of students and boarders. They have failed to identify or take action to safeguard students and boarders in relation to their particular vulnerabilities as a result of being away from their families and country of birth. There are strong characteristics of a 'closed culture' due to a failure to work effectively in partnership with external agencies to safeguard students. Additionally, leaders and managers do not have good systems in place to address boarders' complaints or concerns or to provide independent scrutiny or advocacy. This places students and boarders at risk of harm.

There are insufficient staff to meet the needs of the students and boarders and to keep them safe. Staff do not receive the training and support they need to be able to understand and meet the needs of students and boarders in relation to their physical and mental health needs.

Leaders and managers have not taken action to address shortfalls identified at the last inspection. These relate to the safe management of medications and implementing an effective policy for safeguarding students and boarders from overseas. Therefore, the recommendations from the previous inspection have been repeated.

Leaders and managers do not maintain effective oversight in relation to the care and safety of students and boarders. The policies and procedures that underpin practice in key areas are not fit for purpose. They do not contain all relevant information as

signposted in legislation and guidance. The safeguarding policy, for example, does not address risks to students, such as female genital mutilation, exploitation and radicalisation. Some policies, such as medication and the management of CCTV, were not made available during this inspection, despite several requests.

There is a lack of cohesive working within the leadership team to further develop the boarding provision. Leaders and managers have not identified significant shortfalls in care practice and, therefore, have been ineffective in prioritising, challenging and making improvements for students.

Staff receive a good induction, and this supports their understanding of the principles and standards of student boarding. However, staff do not have the support required from leaders and managers to develop and reflect on their own practice. This is a missed opportunity for staff to feel heard and to be part of a continuous learning culture. Staff say they feel supported by each other and can see some of the improvements leaders are trying to make.

Leaders and managers seek to build effective relationships with parents. However, not all students and families receive details on how safeguarding processes will be managed in England, including student allegations against staff. Furthermore, students and parents do not receive information on how to make a complaint. This has the potential to hinder good child protection practice.

The principal ensures that the physical environment is of a good standard, it is comfortable and meets the needs of students. Any damage or wear and tear is promptly repaired.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve? Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for boarding schools:

- 2.2 The school's leadership and management, including its governing body where appropriate, demonstrate good skills and knowledge, appropriate to their role and undertake appropriate training as required.
- 2.4 The school's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met.
- 2.5 The school's leadership and management and governance actively promote the well-being of pupils.
- 2.6 Senior boarding staff are knowledgeable and experienced and have undertaken appropriate training in the management and practice of boarding. They use this to ensure that boarders' welfare is safeguarded and promoted.
- 2.7 The school follows and maintains the policies and documents described in Appendix A.
- 2.8 The records specified in Appendix B are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate.
- 4.8 Any use of biometric data/technology or surveillance equipment (e.g. CCTV cameras) or patrolling of school buildings or grounds for security purposes does not intrude unreasonably on boarders' privacy. Any schools which use biometric technology and/or CCTV should set out the rationale for its use in the school's security policy. In addition, schools using CCTV must be registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and comply with relevant data protection legislation including the UK General Data Protection Regulations, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.
- 7.2 Boarders are supported and educated to understand their health needs, how to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle and to make informed decisions about their own health.
- 7.3 Effective arrangements are made to care for boarding pupils who are sick or injured.
- 7.6 All medication is stored safely and securely, and accurate records are kept of its administration. Staff are properly trained to provide the support that pupils need when administering medicines. Prescribed medicines are given only to the boarders to whom they are prescribed. Boarders allowed to self-medicate are assessed as being sufficiently responsible to do so. Where applicable, schools have regard to government guidance.

- 8.1 The school should ensure that: arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 8.4 Keeping Children Safe in Education sets out that boarding schools have additional factors to consider with regard to safeguarding. As such it will be important that the boarding school's child protection policy (and/or other policies if appropriate) reflect: the school's policy on sexual relationships between children (and importance of boarders understanding this policy); the school's approach to child-on-child abuse, reflecting the unique nature of boarding accommodation and the risks associated with children sharing overnight accommodation, the approach to harmful online content and how boarders' devices are managed in terms of bringing a device into the school, and harmful content that may already be downloaded on to it, and the opportunity to download harmful content via 3,4 and 5G that will bypass the school's filtering and monitoring systems.
- 11.1 There is an appropriate process of induction and guidance for new boarders and that process includes information covering the standards 11.2 through 11.6.
- 11.4 The school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff, and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school, who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. This person may be known as the 'independent person.' Children know who this person is, know how to contact them and feel comfortable talking to them. The person is easily accessible.
- 11.6 Boarders are provided with appropriate advocacy support where necessary and are made aware of what advocacy services are available, how they may access such support and any entitlement they may have to advocacy provision, and that advocacy provision adheres to the National Standards.
- 14.3 The school's written record of complaints identifies those complaints relating to boarding provision, and action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld). The school should keep a record of complaints made but later withdrawn. The school should keep under review any emerging patterns arising from complaints.
- 17.1 Boarders are supported to develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff which are based on mutual trust and respect. Through regulations made under section 34 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, boarding schools are required to teach relationships education to primary school pupils and relationships and sex education to secondary school pupils.
- 17.3 Staff understand and help boarders to understand what makes a healthy, nurturing relationship. Staff are trained to think curiously about and recognise the signs of children at risk of or involved in damaging relationships with others, including teenage relationship abuse, criminal exploitation, sexual exploitation, and child-on-child abuse, and take appropriate action when they have a concern.
- 18.2 All boarders are able to access a good range and choice of activities outside teaching time, including sufficient and suitably timed free time each day. Suitable risk assessments are in place and followed for any activities which may put

boarders at risk of harm. These should not prevent children having experiences that provide challenge and adventure.

- 18.4 Schools where there are unusual or especially onerous demands on boarders ensure that these are appropriate to the boarders concerned and do not unacceptably affect boarders' welfare.
- 19.1 Schools operate safer recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to relevant guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 20.1 Any staff member or volunteer employed or volunteering in a position working with boarders has a job description reflecting their duties, receives induction training in boarding when newly appointed, and receives regular reviews of their boarding practice, with opportunities for training and continual professional development in boarding.
- 20.3 The staff supervising boarders outside teaching time are sufficient in number, training and experience for the age, number and individual needs of boarders, and the locations and activities involved.

Recommendations.

- Senior leaders should ensure that, where there is shared access to buildings by other schools or colleges, and students may come into contact with their staff, that those institutions have followed safer recruitment. This is a repeated point of improvement.
- Senior leaders should devise clear guidance on the process for referring allegations of abuse that have happened in countries other than England. This is a repeated point of improvement.
- Senior leaders should ensure that all boarders, including those with special dietary, medical or religious needs, are provided with good-quality, nutritionally balanced meals with choice and variety and of sufficient quantity.
- Senior leaders should secure the views of boarders and provide adequate information that enables them to understand how to raise a complaint.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Boarding school details

Social care unique reference number: 1257929

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Kim Terrar

Type of school: Boarding School

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