

Riddlesworth Hall School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Joe Staines
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Nominated person	
Date of last inspection	9 October 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

Riddlesworth Hall School is an independent boarding and day school situated in the Norfolk countryside on the outskirts of Thetford. The school is located primarily in Riddlesworth Hall and a number of adjacent buildings.

The school accepts boys as day pupils from the age of two to 11 years of age and girls as day pupils from the age of two to 13 years of age. The school has recently begun accepting male boarders, but is still predominantly for girls. Boarding facilities are for children aged from six years. All boarding accommodation is located in Riddlesworth Hall.

The school specifically caters for a number of Spanish pupils who spend varying lengths of time as boarders at the school.

Summary

This key inspection took place over two days and included both early morning and evening visits. All of the key National Minimum Standards (NMS) were assessed in the every child matters outcome groups. No inadequate judgements were made and the school was found to have made significant progress since the last inspection. All of the matters identified as requiring improvement have been addressed and the new head has had a positive impact on the school.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school has fully responded to the recommendations made when the school was last inspected. Areas of improvement include child protection training, production of a pastoral plan, clarification of the role of the spouse of the head, improvements to the storage of items, risk assessments, fire safety checks, staffing levels and supervision of staff. The new head has had a positive impact on the developments taking place at the school and has already taken measures to achieve a higher level of compliance with the NMS than identified at previous inspections.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders' health needs are promoted and safeguarded by robust health promotion policies and records showing health needs are addressed. The school ensures that boarders receive advice and support regarding personal, social and health matters. Boarders receive good support and care from boarding staff if they are ill or need first aid treatment. The school has developed a new system of enabling boarders to summon assistance with an internal call system, ensuring no boarders are isolated. Boarders support each other, are considerate and caring towards those who are unwell. Boarders are supervised and looked after when unwell, either in their own rooms or in the school's sick bay, which is adequate but would benefit from redecoration. The school provides a varied, nutritious diet for boarders, with healthy snacks available outside main mealtimes.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders' safety is clearly of paramount importance to the school. Safeguarding procedures, which are known to staff, are in place to ensure a robust and consistent approach to any allegations or suspicions of abuse. Staff ensure boarders are protected from bullying by implementing a clear policy of non-acceptance. However, it is the relationships formed between care staff and boarders, along with those amongst the boarders themselves, which provides the best defence against bullying by ensuring it is unlikely to happen in the first place. Boarders enjoy warm relationships with staff, who are on duty in sufficient numbers to ensure adequate supervision and boarders look out for each other, ensuring the creation of a positive atmosphere.

Staff recruitment policies are evidenced by good records and demonstrate a robust approach to ensuring all staff appointed have been thoroughly vetted and previously employment checked.

Boarders understand the rules of the school, which they feel are fair, and do not experience much in the way of punishments, because behaviour is generally very good.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The school has a well thought through approach to providing its boarders with a wide range of support and opportunities that encourage them to achieve educationally, socially and to their fullest potential. There is a wide range of activities outside of class time and trips are routinely arranged for boarders. Staff are active in encouraging boarders to take part in these activities and in introducing them to sport, recreational and hobby activities that are new to them.

Boarders are very clear that there is a wide range of staff they can go to for personal support and the school has very clear guidance for staff and boarders about how such support is provided. All boarders have ready access to the school's independent visitor and are aware of their role.

There is a wide range of indoor and outdoor recreation areas for the use of boarders at all appropriate times of day. These allow for different groups to meet up safely and also provide safe spaces for a boarder to be alone if they wish.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have a range of meaningful ways they can engage with the school about its boarding operation. Boarders meet with the head of the school at least weekly and more frequent, informal contact is normal. Recent developments to the accommodation, activities and catering have been led by boarders' feedback and changes have been warmly received. There is a school council with representation from the boarders where suggestions can be made and issues discussed. The boarders feel well listened to and cared about by the whole staff team, led by the head and his wife, who have a very 'hands-on' role with boarders.

Boarders have access to mobile phones for self-managed contact, however telephones are available for boarders to use if they wish. Boarders are also given information about outside contact numbers to ring if they are in distress. E-mail contact is available to all boarders, with

appropriate arrangements made for boarders whose parents are overseas. The school has recently developed improved contact with parents by mail and e-mail.

The school has recently developed a very good boarding student handbook, written in a welcoming and child-friendly style. Prospective boarders are also now encouraged to visit and stay for a night before starting life as a boarder.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Boarders' accommodation is satisfactory. Bedrooms contain suitable items of furniture and are appropriately heated, lit and ventilated by a combination of natural and artificial methods. Boarding areas are kept in a good state of cleanliness and furnishings are generally free from breakages. Standards of decoration in bedrooms are satisfactory and boarders are able to personalise their dorms with posters and personal items. The school has a plan for refurbishment to ensure routine redevelopment of what is an old building, but timescales are not in place, potentially reducing the effectiveness of the plan.

Boarders have access to common rooms, however the Year 8 common room is inappropriately furnished and the junior common room areas are not suitable due to the poor lighting, damp and cold environment. There is also insufficient separation for different age groups.

Boarders have access to adequate private toilet and washing facilities, situated close to the sleeping areas. Boarders do not have to queue excessively for washing facilities, which are all lockable and private.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Boarders and parents are provided with good information on the boarding provision. Boarders receive a recently reviewed handbook to boarding, which is written in a welcoming, child-friendly style. The student handbook contains useful information on the routines of the school and identifies the means by which boarders can gain access to independent people to talk to, if they feel unable or unwilling to speak to those working at the school. Both the statement for parents and the handbook for boarders emphasise the ethos of the school in relation to aim to create a caring environment, where boarders feel supported and safe.

The new head has taken a strong leadership role within boarding and has produced a clear pastoral plan, showing the areas of work identified to ensure boarding standards are maintained and improved where possible.

Boarders are appropriately supervised by competent staff. Staff have job descriptions and receive regular review of their boarding practice through an appraisal system recently introduced to the school. Staffing levels have been increased and a minimum of three staff are on duty at all times. Staff are supported by the head, who maintains a visible presence in boarding and regularly meets with the staff team. Staff training is available but has not been taken up consistently. The school does not have a programme of training in place that provides opportunities for training and updating in boarding practice in areas relevant to residential care. For example, communication, bereavement counselling, behaviour management, attachment and equalities and diversity within the residential setting.

The school has undertaken a good retrospective piece of work to ensure that all staff have access to the staff handbook, which gives good advice and guidance to staff and covers the school's approach to boarding and the safeguarding and promotion of boarders' welfare. New staff have all signed to say they have seen and read the handbook and have a copy.

Boarders' safety is promoted by the school's system for completing written risk assessments for outings, activities and the accommodation (including grounds) where a risk is identified. The head monitors risk assessments, along with records of complaints, serious punishments and accidents, in order to identify any worrying trends or patterns.

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 plans for refurbishment and redecoration of communal areas include the timescales for completion of the work (NMS 40)
- ensure the indoor recreational areas used by boarders are suitably decorated, furnished and maintained to a satisfactory level of repair (NMS 46)
- provide opportunities for staff to attend training and updating in boarding practice, including new and experienced staff, commensurate with the roles, experience and rate of staff turnover and any spontaneous changes, planned changes or developments in boarding at the school (NMS 34).