

d'Overbroeck's College

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC013033
Inspection date	26/05/2011
Inspector	Martha Nethaway / Christopher Garrett
Type of inspection	Social Care Inspection

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Date of last inspection	26/05/2011

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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

d'Overbroeck's College is a co-educational independent school accredited with the Independent Schools Council. The school is situated in North Oxford and is in three parts which are on separate sites: the Sixth Form, which has been in existence since 1977 and which provides for day and boarding students; the International Study Centre (ISC), which was opened in 2001 and provides for international students who are usually all boarders; and, since 2005, Years 7-11 at Leckford Place (day pupils only). The College welcomes international students, with the ISC providing a Pre-A Level Programme designed specifically to prepare overseas students for sixth form entry. Students who board are accommodated either by host families in the local area, or in one of three separate boarding houses located within the local community. Though the student population is predominantly British, the college has a very diverse student body with over 30 nationalities represented, and prides itself on providing high standards of education and pastoral care within a relatively informal environment where relationships are based on mutual respect and consideration.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection undertaken by two Ofsted inspectors. This inspection looked at the boarding school national minimum standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall quality of boarding is good. The college provides a lively close-knit yet relatively liberal community in which boarders feel happy and at ease with themselves and with their college environment. The college fosters in boarders a sense of self-confidence, initiative and individual responsibility so that they feel valued and secure. Boarding is a positive, yet disciplined environment in which boarders can work happily and effectively. Boarders are offered both boarding house or host family accommodation and make the decision about which option best suits their needs.

As a result of this inspection visit, three recommendations have been set. The college has been recommended to review the college's medication policy arising as result of the changes made to the national minimum standards. The college was recommended to provide training for host families to enhance awareness around the college's safeguarding policy and procedure. Finally, for the college to ensure that boarders at Hayfield House and '106' are able to maintain satisfactory contact with parents and families when using the internet.

Improvements since the last inspection

The college has completed all of the recommendations made at the last inspection in February 2009. The college was recommended to ensure that all boarding staff received training in first aid. This has been organised and achieved. The college has improved the arrangements for the dining area by extending the physical environment in the Hayfield boarding house and similarly with providing a new common room. The college has reviewed its policy and practice for staff selection and safe recruitment. The school has recently appointed human resource personnel to further strengthen this area of the college's work. The college has reviewed the staffing structure and increased the number of boarding assistants. Finally, the college now ensures that the performance of boarding staff is being monitored and evaluated.

All of these improvements demonstrate the college's continued commitment to meeting and promoting the welfare of boarders at all times.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders' health is well promoted. Boarders' development has benefited considerably from a greater range of activities and opportunities outside the classroom with the introduction of a new enrichment programme. This contributes effectively to how boarders grow and flourish at the college. Boarders develop shared values of respect, co-operation, self-discipline and friendship. Boarders are encouraged to be reflective about their decision-making and choices so that they can build confidence. Boarders are able to explore a number of issues. For example, key note speakers address topics ranging from drugs and alcohol to issues of scientific, social or political interest and provide extensive opportunities for learning.

Boarders have access to good quality medical treatment and first aid. All new boarders who are not already registered with a doctor in or near the town are required to register with the medical practice close by the college. This is promptly arranged at the beginning of each academic year. All boarding staff have recently received first aid training so this means that medical emergencies can be dealt with adequately. Similarly, boarding staff have attended training to handle and manage medication safely. The college has a number of policies that address healthcare but have yet to develop a clear policy on boarders administering their own medication.

Boarders living in the boarding houses enjoy meals organised and prepared by boarding staff. Breakfast is self-service and a cooked breakfast is available once a week. The evening meal is prepared and cooked from fresh ingredients. Boarders enjoy and like the variety of the home cooked meals. Menu planning is good and includes culturally appropriate food and new dishes. Good arrangements are in place to take account of boarders' choices. The dining areas are of a good standard and meet the needs of the boarders. Boarders who live with host families can have a

combination of having meals prepared or can opt for self-catering. All meals and snacks are based on a balanced and healthy diet including fresh fruit and vegetables.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders live in an environment where their welfare and well-being is fully supported. Boarders experience an environment that is caring and secure in which they feel safe, respected and valued. Boarders' welfare is protected and promoted through the extensive support provided by the boarding staff. The college understands its commitment to safeguard boarders and promotes this at all times. However host families do not currently receive safeguarding training.

The college takes a positive approach to anti-bullying and bullying in any form is fundamentally at odds with the ethos of the college. Staff are very clear that bullying is not tolerated and this is reflected in boarders' confidence in the college. Universally boarders responded through the questionnaires and during interviews, that bullying is not identified as a problem at the college. Boarders learn about how to use the internet safely and use e-communication with good affect. This is because the college has in place a good e-safety policy which is clearly communicated widely within the college environment. One member of staff summed this up: 'We deal promptly with any expression of discrimination, bullying or abuse involving our students in discussion and agreed responses where appropriate.' Staff are very good at heightening awareness of cyber bullying and they help boarders to use the internet and social networking sites safely and responsibly.

Boarders are provided with a safe and productive environment. Boarders' welfare is protected through good child protection and safeguarding policies, procedures and staff practices. Staff have a clear understanding about their responsibilities to keep boarders safe. The college have a relatively high number of staff with designated responsibility for safeguarding to cover the split site. There is close communication among these staff and any safeguarding issues that arise are dealt with promptly and correctly. All staff receive child protection and safeguarding training through a rolling programme.

The college encourages open and constructive communication with parents, boarders and stakeholders. All complaints are given a prompt and reasoned response. The college has a simple, straightforward complaints procedure and process.

Boarders and staff enjoy positive relationships, predicated on mutual respect and on a relative lack of formality. For example, first names are used for staff and boarders throughout the age range. The college has a tried and tested approach to maintaining good discipline. The general approach is to keep rules to the minimum which is a strong part of the ethos of the college. As boarders progress through the college they are given the space to grow and develop in a context in which they feel valued and secure. The rules at the college are easy to understand because they are fair and simple, and staff follow a consistent approach for boarders that do not

adhere to them. As a result, boarders' behaviour is polite, courteous, kind and thoughtful to each other and staff.

The management of health and safety is good because there is a coordinated approach and oversight by the college bursar. The college has a range of measures in place to provide security at its premises. Staff make a cooperative effort in which everyone understands that they have a part to play in maintaining a healthy and safe environment. Staff complete risk assessments that are monitored and assessed by senior staff. The planning and running of trips is good because of the careful assessment and preparation for such events. The college provides a wide range of activities beyond classroom teaching. Boarders are additionally protected from the risk of fire. Boarders learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they have regular opportunities to practise the evacuation of the boarding accommodation.

The school has an effective recruitment and appointments procedure which ensures that staff working in the boarding houses are suitable to work with young people.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders receive outstanding personal support from the college and staff. Boarders are clear which members of staff they can go to for personal support. All of the boarders identify a number of adults within the college that they would approach if they had a concern or problem. Boarders express confidence that their concerns are listened to and that staff take action to help and support them. Staff and the boarders enjoy informal and supportive relationships which are based on mutual respect and this encourages and facilitates excellent communication. Boarders benefit from the availability of an independent college counsellor and are able to self-refer. The college is fully committed to providing this type and level of individual support and there are no limitations imposed on the number of times that a boarder may access this service. The counsellor refers boarders to external agencies if a need is identified. Boarders have access to confidential help-line numbers enabling them to independently access these without reference to staff. The communication needs of overseas boarders are assessed and additional support in English is provided where necessary. Overseas student are fully supported in acclimatising to living in Britain.

Although the student population is predominantly British, the college is a multi-cultural community consisting of over 30 nationalities. Diversity is strongly welcomed and celebrated. The college has considerable experience in providing care and education for international students and has an exceptional understanding of the challenges that can be presented. Integration between all boarders is fully promoted in all aspects of college life while recognising the boarders' right to socialise within their own culture and also with people who share the same interests. Appropriate provision and arrangements are made for boarders' religious and cultural requirements. Staff are very experienced and adept at identifying individuals or groups who may be detached or isolated and are proactive and effective in managing

and addressing this.

The extra-curricular activities programme is an integrated part of the boarders' experience at the college. All boarders have access to a wide range of recreational, sport and leisure activities during the week. A reduced programme is available for some weekends in recognition that boarders generally wish to take responsibility for organising themselves at this time. The programme is very effectively planned, managed and coordinated and is drawn up in consultation with the boarders. There are excellent and innovative communication systems, including text messaging and use of the college's social network page, which ensure that all boarders are routinely provided with details of the programme. The activity programme is seen to assist boarders with their socialisation and helping international boarders to acclimatise to living in Britain. One boarder commented: 'The college activities are good opportunities to share experiences together and to get to know each other.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are supported to make a positive contribution to college life. Boarders have the opportunity to express their views and opinions about the boarding provision in a variety of ways. Formal opportunities include house meetings, the students' forum and through surveys circulated as part of the college's quality assurance system. Informal methods include speaking to the house staff, tutors and director of studies. Boarders' engagement with the consultation process is variable. There is evidence some groups are very proactive in putting forward their views, requests and opinions while others do not engage as fully. Generally, boarders feel that the process of consultation does bring about change. Boarders express their satisfaction with the college's response to a number of their requests, including new furniture in boarding houses, changes to menus and new showers.

The college is fully aware of the importance for boarders to be able to maintain regular contact with their parents and families and it takes positive steps to facilitate this. There is internet access in all of the houses which enables boarders to use their laptops to send and receive email and use e-communication to have face-to-face conversations with their families. Boarders say that the server is sometimes erratic and slow. The college has been proactive in trying to address this but the problems have not been fully rectified. Boarders have personal mobiles phones and regularly use these to send and receive calls and text messages. Boarders have access to a landline in the boarding house which is for their own use. In emergencies, boarders are able to access the boarding staff office phone. The college ensures that boarders living with host families have the same opportunities and facilities to make contact with their parent and families.

New boarders are fully supported when first arriving at the college. Arrangements include an induction week during which boarders are given practical advice and guidance about living in Oxford. Additional guidance is given to the overseas boarders on cultural differences and expectations while living in Britain. Whenever

practical, prospective boarders are given the opportunity to meet with current boarders and visit the boarding provision. Boarders are given a comprehensive handbook relevant to the boarding houses and living with a host family. Boarders say that the handbook accurately reflects the way that the boarding is organised.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders' possessions and money are protected. Boarders can wear their own clothing outside college time, can secure personal requisites when they need them and are helped to look after their own money. The majority of boarders are encouraged to have a bank account so that they have convenient access to their money. It also sets up the basis for boarders being more financially aware about how they are spending and managing their money. This equips them to develop good skills related to financial responsibility and managing their financial affairs.

The college provides two main boarding houses which accommodate up to 18 in one boarding house and 20 in the other boarding house. There is another small boarding house which accommodates up to six boarders. Boarders are encouraged to walk, cycle or take public transport to the college campus. The accommodation provided for boarders is comfortable, well heated, lit and reaches a good standard. The college has a clear programme of redecoration, refurbishment and improvement. This programme will enhance and improve accommodation further.

The college has thriving host family boarding accommodation. The college works closely with a number of local families. It is a common feature when living with a host family for boarders to have their own single study-bedroom. Older boarders can request to do self-catering with host families. The boarding office provides extensive support with matching to get the right host families. Parents and potential boarders make the decision about boarding options.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The organisation and management of the college is good. Boarders benefit from the enriched care and educational experience which is bolstered by the college's coherent philosophy, values and sound leadership. Boarding is a very important part of the college's provision and adds a vibrant aspect to college life. The college meets its aims of providing boarders of all ages and ability to achieve to the best of their potential, both academically and personally.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Valuing and respecting equality and diversity are deeply ingrained elements of the ethos and the everyday life of the college and its community of staff and boarders. One member of staff commented: 'Just one example of this is the college arts festival, an annual event in which the college celebrates through food, dance, music and drama the rich cultural

diversity that our international students bring to the college.'

Parents and boarders receive good quality information about the school's ethos and values via a range of written handbooks and other useful and purposeful publications. Information is also available through the college's website. The publications provide a detailed and comprehensive picture of life at the college and the practical guidelines also help boarders settle in to college life.

The principal is highly skilled with a wealth of experience and provides good leadership to the boarders and staff team. The principal has a very visible presence at the heart of college life and is actively involved in the day-to-day management and operation of the college. Boarders are making good progress because staffing in the college is well organised and effectively managed. Their welfare is effectively monitored with good internal communication by regular and frequent contact between staff in the boarding office, the boarding house staff, tutorial staff, directors of studies and conventional contact with the host families.

The college's organisation of boarding contributes positively to boarders' welfare. Boarders are looked after by staff following clear boarding policies and practice. Since the last inspection, two new boarding staff and new boarding house assistants have been appointed at the college. A programme of induction training including mandatory training has been completed. Some boarding staff have attended additional training through the Boarding Schools' Association conference programme. The boarding houses are run in a way that reflects the college's general approach to boarders, with a balance of structure, flexibility and a good degree of personal attention. Boarders are well looked after, at the same time, they are expected to take responsibility for being part of a boarding community. Relationships among the boarders and between the boarders and the boarding staff are good. This results in the boarding houses providing a strong sense of community and a comfortable, convivial and supportive environment which contributes positively to the boarders' personal development.

The principal ensures that effective monitoring of relevant records such as risk assessment, complaints, safeguarding, discipline measures and accidents is taking place. This ensures good scrutiny of all aspects of the boarders' welfare. Any shortfalls in these areas are identified and addressed. The governing body is kept well informed through periodical reports.

Boarders living with host families are well supported in their placements. The host family arrangements, run by the college, offer the flexibility to meet individual requests from boarders and parents, for example, a home with a piano in which to practise daily, or a private bathroom. The host families work tirelessly to provide a supportive, homely environment which, in particular for international boarders, offers a valuable opportunity to live in a family environment and to develop linguistic skills and cultural awareness at the same time.

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...

- ensure boarders keeping and administering their own medication are assessed by medical staff as sufficiently responsible to do so, and are able to store their medication safely and appropriately in accordance with the college's policy (NMS 15.11)
- ensure that host families have been given briefing or training on responding to suspicions or allegations of abuse and know what action they should take in response to such suspicions or allegations. Refresher training is undertaken every three years (NMS 3.5)
- ensure that boarders at Hayfield House and '106' are able to maintain satisfactory contact with parents and families using the internet. (NMS 19.2)