

Reading School

Reading School, East Wing House, Erleigh Road, READING, RG1 5LJ

Inspection dates 03/03/2014 to 05/03/2014

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	51
Outcomes for boarders	Outstanding	1
Quality of boarding provision and care	Outstanding	1
Boarders' safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management of boarding	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The boarding provision is outstanding because

- The calibre of the boarding house staff is excellent. Their commitment, enthusiasm, motivation, morale and belief in the boarders are second to none. This means that boarders receive exceptionally high quality care that significantly enhances their personal development and well-being.
- Boarders' safety is at the heart of the boarding provision and is taken into account in all aspects of life, within a robust risk assessment framework. The effective implementation of robust procedures ensures boarders are cared for in a safe environment by people assessed as suitable.
- A continual drive and focus on improvement is embedded in the culture of the school. The headteacher ensures that boarders, parents, staff and the governing body are all engaged in the development of boarding.
- All staff involved with boarding work collaboratively for the benefit of boarders, for whom they have great aspirations. The boarding team put in place the support structures necessary to help them achieve their potential.
- Boarders feel at home and say they love boarding. A parent reported a conversation with her son: 'He said I need to get home, I replied you are home, you mean you want to get back to school!'

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools

Information about this inspection

This inspection was announced at 9.00 am on 3 March 2014 and commenced at noon that same day. Inspection activities included discussions with boarders, parents, the chair of the Boarding Parents Association, the headteacher, both house masters, boarding staff, matrons, a school governor, catering staff and the estates bursar. Key boarding documents and policies were reviewed, as was the self-evaluation document for boarding and information on the school website. Meals were taken with boarders, clubs and activities observed and a boarder guided tour of the boarding houses took place.

Inspection team

Maire Atherton

Lead social care inspector

Keith Riley

Social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Reading School is a selective maintained school with Academy status for boys aged 11-18. There are 914 pupils in the school as a whole, the two boarding houses on site accommodate 71 boarders in total in two separate boarding houses, South House and East Wing. The school does not offer weekend boarding.

The school is situated close to the centre of Reading, Berkshire and has good access to all facilities in the local area.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Incorporate more expressly boarders' views into their individual welfare plans.

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for boarders

Outstanding

Outcomes for boarders are outstanding. The excellent relationships that exist between the staff and the boarders and the boarders themselves, right across the age range, underpin the highly successful outcomes boarders achieve. Boarders thrive in a warm, friendly and open environment. They frequently say they feel 'part of a family' and 'it's like having 70 brothers'. Parents describe housemasters as 'slightly strict but fun uncles'.

Boarders look out for each other and provide mutual support and encouragement. They are sensitive to and develop an appreciation of, and respect for, difference. This creates a strong, inclusive atmosphere. Through exemplar role modelling by boarding house staff boarders become attuned to each other. They are aware when someone might need extra help and share their views and any concerns with boarding house staff so that additional support is available immediately. Boarders are extremely relaxed and comfortable in the boarding environment and around the school site.

Boarders and parents alike comment on how they have changed in their time in boarding, growing in confidence, self-esteem and independence in all areas of their lives. Parents report how the boarding experience has significantly enhanced their sons' personal development, for example in taking age-appropriate risks and trying new activities. Boarders relish their boarding experience. The very varied programme of clubs and activities is well balanced with study time. Through this they take on new challenges and develop new interests and skills as a result. Examples from boarders include water skiing and gliding alongside learning strategic approaches through board games. This supports the boarders development into well rounded and mature members of society.

Boarders behave exceptionally well, with mutual respect at the heart of the boarding. They are given numerous opportunities to demonstrate the trust house staff place in them. There are minimal rules and the boarders consider these fair, as they do the sanctions applied should there be a breach of trust or rules. Boarders take on responsibilities within the house and enjoy their active contribution to the running and development of boarding. Boarders have a strong voice in boarding, their views are actively sought and acted upon. For example they take particular pride in their involvement in choosing the catering contractor which has resulted in very high levels of satisfaction with the food provided.

Boarders cannot speak highly enough of the matrons and their role in providing excellent care and support in relation to their health needs. The boarders describe the two matrons as 'much more than a matron', 'half mum, half friend', a 'really good listener' and 'a sensitive ear'. Boarders' health and emotional well being is exceptionally well promoted. Boarders are eight per cent of the whole school but represent 20 per cent of the school sports teams.

Boarders are exceptionally well prepared for leaving school and the next steps. This begins in the first year as they practice independence skills little by little within a risk assessed framework. For example first trips to town are escorted, to ensure road safety is understood, then in small groups for short periods of time, building up to individual trips for longer as they progress through the school.

Quality of boarding provision and care

Outstanding

The quality of the boarding provision is outstanding. The fully integrated boarding house staff teams provide exceptionally well-rounded pastoral support. Staff with different roles work collaboratively, effectively providing a holistic approach to the care of boarders. As a result

boarders benefit from robust consistency that successfully supports and promotes their personal and academic development.

Boarders and parents speak positively about the thorough and enjoyable induction for new pupils. In particular the opportunities for sleepovers, which prospective boarders really enjoy and which serve to ease parental concerns. The induction process is flexible and tailored to meet individual needs. Through self-evaluation the school have identified that there is a small gap in the induction of new entrants in year 12 and plan to add a buddy system next year. The allocation of a 'buddy' and a sixth form mentor is already in place for those joining in years seven and nine. This has proved effective in creating links across the age range to the benefit of the whole house.

Teachers are part of the boarding house team and are academic tutors to boarders. There are frequent house meetings of all house staff. These serve to highlight any pastoral and academic concerns or areas for development that staff want to address so as to assist boarders in achieving their potential. Where there are concerns action plans are devised promptly with a clear time-frame for implementation and review.

There is a well publicised duty rota for each house. Staffing levels are robust, with tried and tested back up systems in place. Staff convey a genuine sense of the pleasure and enjoyment they get from working in boarding. They are very well experienced in boarding and provide strong role models for boys. The school ethic of respect is fully embedded in the boarding culture and accompanied by a strong sense of fun. A boarder said, 'I love boarding'.

Welfare plans, developed in the light of information received on admission or observation by staff at any time, are of an excellent standard. They provide a succinct account of individual needs, how these are to be addressed and by whom. The plans demonstrate a thoughtful and creative approach to problem solving and appropriate referrals to other professionals when required. They are regularly reviewed, updated and closed when the issue has been resolved satisfactorily. There is some evidence that these plans are devised in consultation with the boarders themselves but this is not expressly stated in the plans.

Staff provide numerous opportunities for a wide and varied range of activities that boarders can choose to engage in, both on and off site, after school and in the evening. Staff are responsive to boys requests, establishing smaller 'niche' groups for particular board games as well as regular sporting activities involving larger numbers. A recent trip to a musical in London with a Chinese meal was thoroughly enjoyed, and a visit to a local climbing centre is eagerly anticipated.

The two matrons are highly effective in promoting the health and well-being of boarders. They have very well established links with local universal healthcare practitioners. Boarders are confident in and comfortable with the matrons so that they regularly seek them out for advice and support in dealing with their full range of health concerns. The matrons are very observant and act on their observations, making appropriate referrals and liaising with parents so as to secure prompt treatment where necessary. They are also proactive in seeking additional training and information that will support them in caring for boarders' holistic health needs. There are robust arrangements in place for the safe storage and administration of medication. Some boarders may keep their own medication and self-administer following a thorough risk assessment, which they contribute to and sign.

Catering is of a very high standard. Since the last inspection a new refectory has been built. Its central position and welcoming atmosphere provides an additional well-used communal space. Boarders contribute formally to menu planning through the well-established food committee and voice their opinions daily through direct communication with the catering team. The boy awarded the title 'Boarder of the week' chooses an evening meal the following week. The evening chef has challenged the boarders to choose meals that then make it onto the regular menu, there has

been one success so far. Fresh fruit is always available and a choice of snacks are also provided. Boarders report high levels of satisfaction with the food.

Boarding accommodation is of a good standard and is subject to a rolling refurbishment programme. Junior boarders share rooms, with a maximum of three and year nine and above have single rooms. The building of the refectory has enabled significant improvements in communal accommodation in both houses, providing a range of warm and comfortable social spaces. The new IT suites, one up and running, the other scheduled for the week following this inspection, are the most appreciated by boarders, closely followed by the new showers. The accommodation is well looked after by support staff and boarders alike, with clear systems in place for reporting and repairing the minimal damage caused by daily wear and tear.

Boarders' safety

Outstanding

The quality of the school's arrangements to safeguard boarders is outstanding. The safety and well-being of boarders is central to practice at the school. There is excellent practice in child protection and effective inter-agency working. All staff are trained in child protection training, with regular updates. Prefects are also given a safeguarding briefing and are confident about the action to take should such issues come to their attention. Exceptional staff vigilance, observation and action serve to sensitively protect and support boarders.

Recruitment procedures are very robust and follow the relevant Department for Education guidance. The headteacher is involved in all staff interviews and all who are involved in the recruitment process have safer recruitment training. Policy and procedure is routinely reviewed and evaluated, with changes made to further improve practice. For example all interviews for any post at the school now have a question about boarding. As recommended at the last inspection the appointment of 'gap' students now includes all the checks required for any other member of staff recruited to work at the school. This ensures that boarders are cared for people deemed suitable.

All the required policies and procedures are in place. In line with the school ethos of continual improvement these are regularly reviewed and updated where necessary. They are successfully implemented so that boarders are unanimous in saying they feel safe and secure at school. For example they report that there is a zero tolerance of bullying, and can describe how the school promotes inclusion at every opportunity. They confidently state that any perceived bullying is dealt with swiftly and thoroughly and describe an open and trusting culture. This ensures that any instances of bullying are low level and infrequent. Boarders are confident in the desire and ability of staff to keep them safe in all aspects of their lives, balanced with their right to take age-appropriate risks. They are also very complimentary about how staff give them information about how to keep themselves safe. Most recently boarders had been particularly impressed by the talk on e-safety by a house master which has led to a significant number reviewing how they use social media.

The behaviour of boarders is exemplary; courtesy and respect are embedded in their interactions. The staff and prefects adopt an excellent approach to behaviour management, with a very strong emphasis on rewards. The merit system is well understood and boarders are keen to earn merits and enjoy the reward. As last half term's winners, year seven boarders celebrated with a trip to the cinema and a meal in town. This positive culture combined with an environment in which behavioural expectations and rules are clearly defined leads to a minimal use of sanctions.

The boarding environment is safe and appropriately secure. This is achieved by comprehensive and robust risk assessment processes, applied equally to trips off site as to the environment. The approach to health and safety is both proactive and responsive. Boarders participate in this by

highlighting any maintenance issues in the log book for the maintenance team. Routine checking, servicing and maintenance of utilities and equipment takes place as required. Fire prevention and detection systems are effective and boarders are very familiar with fire escape routes having all recently participated in a fire drill during boarding time.

Leadership and management of boarding

Outstanding

The headteacher, ably assisted by the housemasters, provides outstanding leadership and management of the boarding provision. Since last inspection the senior management team, supported by the governing body, have successfully established boarding at the heart of the school, a significant achievement as boarding pupils are a small percentage of the whole school population. There continues to be an increasing number of applications for boarding places and parents believe that boarding is well managed and organised effectively.

There is a strong commitment to continual improvement demonstrated by robust self-evaluation and concomitant action, for example the establishment of the deputy housemaster role. The headteacher is an active committee member of the State Boarding Schools Association and has developed partnerships with other schools, providing valuable opportunities for peer review and shared learning and development. The Boarding Parent Association is also involved in driving improvements for boarders. This body was involved in selecting a new catering contractor; boarders were also involved in the selection process. The two recommendations from the last inspection have been fully addressed. 'Gap' students are subject to robust vetting procedures, including an internet interview. There are robust written risk assessments undertaken for outings and trips in boarding time.

The statement of boarding principles is fully reflected in practice, where the ethos is translated into the every day life of the school. Staff are fully committed and determined that boarding should meet the individual needs of all those who board. The highly experienced governing body are fully involved in the life of the boarding community through a nominated governor who actively and regularly reviews boarding. Boarders are very familiar with the routines and procedures of daily life which operate in accordance with the published information. This ensures that consistency is achieved, providing an excellent framework for an orderly and safe community but with sensitivity to and implementation of an individual approach where this best meets boarders' needs.

The whole boarding house staff team are experienced, skilled and very knowledgeable about their roles. They demonstrate a keen ethic of continuous improvement, supported by appropriate training, both routine and specialist to meet the identified and emerging needs of boarders. Through the school's performance management system boarding staff set themselves targets so as to improve the experience of the boarders.

Parents are very complimentary about communication with the boarding team, with one parent describing it as 'proactive, reassuring parents if we have concerns'. This means that there are few complaints. When there are issues to be addressed this happens quickly and effectively. Boarders are equally confident and happy that any concerns they raise are fully addressed.

Equality and diversity are central to the running of the school. Parents reflect that 'the cosmopolitan inclusive atmosphere works very well, they learn that people are different and they learn to live with each other'. The staff team value boarders as individuals and celebrate difference. Boarders are encouraged to put this into practice and do, for example through acting as mentors in local primary schools and fundraising, (called 'Touraid') to support an overseas linked school to enjoy a rugby tour here.

What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	136449
Social care unique reference number	SC054201
DfE registration number	870/5401

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

Type of school	Academy
Number of boarders on roll	71
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	11 to 18
Headteacher	Mr Ashley Robson
Date of previous boarding inspection	20/05/2010
Telephone number	0118 9015600
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