

Reading School

Reading School, Main House, Erleigh Road, Reading, RG1 5LW

Inspection dates	31/01/2017 to 02/02/2017	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Outstanding	1
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The boarding provision is outstanding because

- The overwhelming majority of parents who completed Parent View hold the school in high regard and express their appreciation and satisfaction with all that the boarding provision has to offer.
- The school is extremely well led and well managed. All staff work together effectively to promote young people's welfare. They routinely reflect on and evaluate their practice in order to continually improve it.
- The needs of the young people are exceptionally well met by the highly trained and experienced staff who look after them.
- The positive relationships between staff and young people form the base on which young people develop as individuals safe in the knowledge that they are secure, and that they are valued and respected as individuals.
- Boarding is an integral part of the school. It is highlighted as an area of excellence by staff and young people. Young people are proud of their progress, which they attribute directly to their boarding experiences.
- The excellent progress young people make is, in part, due to the highly inclusive, supportive and nurturing environment created in the boarding provision.
- The members of the senior leadership team strive to be the best and young people are willing and happy to go on this journey with them. Everyone is passionate about meeting and exceeding their own expectations and those of others.
- Young people are encouraged and empowered to put forward suggestions for the development of the boarding community.
- The arrangements for safeguarding young people are outstanding. Young people say they feel safe and that one of the main reasons that they feel this way is the security provided by the staff team. Young people can and do talk to staff members about anything and the staff are always there for them.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure a secure audit trail from receipt of complaint to the record of the complainant's satisfaction with the outcome.
- Incorporate young people's views into sanction records.

Information about this inspection

The notice given to schools is a minimum of one hour before the inspection team arrives. Ofsted carried out this inspection with one and a half hours' notice. Inspection activities included: observation of boarding practice over two evenings; informal and formal group and individual meetings with boarders; informal discussion during shared meals; meetings and discussions with the headteacher and two housemasters, boarding staff, one member of the governing body (the chair with a safeguarding lead), the three matrons, school business manager and other staff with specific responsibilities. In addition, discussions were held with parents; there was contact with the local statutory safeguarding authority; a tour of the accommodation was conducted; a wide range of documentation was scrutinised; and responses on Parent View were reviewed.

Inspection team

Emeline Evans	lead social care inspector
Maire Atherton	social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Reading School is a selective maintained school with academy status for boys aged 11 to 18. There are 961 pupils in the school as a whole, of whom 75 are boarders. Boarders are accommodated 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.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

'I truly believe the boarding option is exceptional and has helped develop my son into an independent, caring and responsible young man, which is a true testament to everyone in boarding.' This is just one of many similar comments from parents. The impact of the boarding provision – in terms of the way in which it supports young people's progress emotionally, socially and academically – is clearly evidenced. Boarding is an integral part of the school. It is highlighted as an area of excellence by staff and young people. Young people are proud of their progress, which they feel is a result of their boarding experiences.

Young people who were spoken with during the inspection process were able to describe the positive impact that boarding has had on them as individuals. They stated that boarding has helped them to: build empathy; be more tolerant; have more confidence; be independent; and, above all, to have fun. The highly inclusive, supportive and nurturing environment enables them to make exceptional progress. Young people in their final year of boarding stated that the one thing they will really miss when they leave the school is the boarding because, as one young person said, 'It's like a family and there is always someone to talk to.' One young person stated that when he started, his behaviour was not good; he now understands the impact that this had on others, and he remains calm and thinks more carefully. Young people were seen to genuinely care for and look out for each other in their boarding community. Young people are less afraid of failure and are willing to try new things. A common theme in young people's feedback is that boarding teaches them about and prepares them for independence.

Staff have excellent knowledge of the young people. They are quickly able to recognise when young people are upset and may require additional support. Staff place young people at the heart of everything they do. One parent stated, 'There is no doubt that all the boarding staff are exceptionally professional and dedicated to the well-being of the boys.' The extremely positive relationships between staff and young people have nurtured a strong culture of respect. As a result, young people value the boarding provision. Other statements from parents included: 'The boarding arrangements are excellent, with caring staff and good facilities'; 'It is like a second home for my son. He is eager to return to school after the end of term break, which is evidence of how much he loves the school'; 'The house masters and matrons are professional and help the boarders to develop themselves to be responsible and independent adults.'

The school also looks beyond what it can offer young people in terms of developing their skills and equipping them for life after boarding. There is engagement in community projects, which enhances each young person's personal development and broadens their outlook on life. All young people are Dementia Friends and some volunteer in a local care home; others have been involved in the sustainability project and have applied their learning in a practical way. The forward-thinking culture created in the school ensures that young people have the experience and confidence to succeed when they leave boarding. There is a true sense of partnership working between young people, parents and the staff to ensure that young people flourish. Other comments from parents reiterate the high regard in which the boarding provision is held. These comments

included: 'I greatly appreciate the management's emphasis on more than exam results: mental health, leadership, social responsibility, global responsibility'; 'Our son has thrived in boarding, and overall his experience has exceeded expectations. I would thoroughly recommend the school, and boarding in particular, to other prospective parents. Thank you to everyone who makes this possible'; and, 'There is academic excellence, but [the school] goes way beyond that with character building and resilience.'

Boarding is very well organised. Young people are aware of the expectations of the staff. Young people feel very happy to board in the school and feel that safeguarding is central to all decisions made. The members of the senior leadership team do not sit still and they all strive to be the best. They have successfully engaged young people to willingly go on this journey with them; everyone is passionate about meeting and exceeding their own expectations and those of others, which ensures that goals are achieved and surpassed in practice.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The boarding provision is seen as a community by young people, staff and parents. As a result of the commitment of the boarding staff, the boarding provision is integral to the way that the school operates. A parent commented: 'The school talk of the boarding "family". It really is a family in the true sense of the word; a safe supporting environment which seeks to build and bring out the best in the boys.' This parent's response indicates the strong sense of belonging that the school engenders, which is something that also comes across in the feedback from young people. Within the school's self-evaluation summary, it states that, 'Boarding staff want boarding to be the jewel in the school's crown and this aspiration is shared by the headmaster and the governing body.' It is evident that staff are passionate about their work and this is reflected in the high regard in which young people hold them. The extremely positive relationships between staff and young people enable young people to develop as individuals, safe in the knowledge that they are secure, valued and respected.

Induction arrangements are a real strength of the school. Young people and parents are very well prepared for this new venture. All young people have opportunities for sleepovers before they start boarding and one parent described this approach as being instrumental in helping her son to make the decision to board. Staff ensure that young people are ready and they support young people during difficult times or with homesickness. The matrons are seen as being instrumental in providing emotional support and help. They provide strategies which empower young people and are successful in resolving their anxieties. Parents really appreciate the support that they receive during this sometimes emotional time; they value the ways in which staff manage to reassure them and their children.

Health and well-being is well promoted. The three matrons work well together; they ensure that the provision of care is consistent and that any additional needs are addressed. Excellent links have been made with external professionals, such as the community school nurse and the child and adolescent mental health service. This enables young people to receive bespoke support promptly. The matrons constantly seek to ensure that young people are helped and given advice from external resources, but

also make sure that they are available to provide guidance and assistance. Young people stated that they can ask the matrons about anything and that the matrons give them emotional and practical support. Parents are fully involved and informed. There is an inclusive approach which values everyone's contribution.

Staff are very proactive in initiating and implementing welfare plans when required. They do not wait for concerns to escalate, but implement strategies in response to low-level concerns. These plans fully involve the young people and their parents; young people's views and desired outcomes are fully explored. These plans are regularly updated and reviewed to find out if they are still appropriate. This demonstrates the staff team's ability to be proactive rather than reactive in its approach to caring for the young people.

The boarding accommodation is of a high standard. It is well maintained and comfortable. Young people are able to access a range of areas in which they can socialise or spend time on their own. The school ensures that all young people are able to stay in contact with parents at all times and facilitates the use of Skype for this purpose. Sixth-form kitchens are now available to enable students to be more independent. These facilities are well used and staff are creative in terms of how the spaces are utilised. For example, staff have started a cooking club. Menus are balanced and varied; food is of very good standard and healthy choices are available. Young people's views on food are actively sought and are listened to via the 'student voice' committee. The catering manager regularly meets with the boys and will make changes to menus as a result of the feedback from young people.

A huge range of purposeful activities are on offer to young people in order to broaden their horizons. Young people are encouraged to be involved in activities and to try new ones. One young person stated that he didn't really want to try some of the sports at first, but now he loves them and has realised sport is something that he is good at. This encouragement and engagement develops young people's confidence. Some young people who stated 'I can't do that' now say 'I'm going to do this', which demonstrates that their emotional resilience has improved. Young people are able to access activities both on-site and off-site, and continue to be involved in their own personal interests and activities. This is well supported by staff.

Young people are encouraged and empowered to put forward suggestions for the development of the boarding community. The student voice committee is a new development that has taken place since the last inspection. Its aims – which are to solve problems, to listen to worries and suggestions, and to act on ideas – are fully achieved. The young people who are involved in the committee gain the views of other young people to bring to the meetings. The new approach is successful in engaging the young people. They feel that they are taken seriously and that their views are acted upon.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Provision and arrangements for safeguarding young people are outstanding. Young people say they feel safe and they say that one of the main reasons for this feeling of security is the accessibility of the staff; they can talk to staff members about anything and the staff are always there for them. Young people also look out for each other. An

atmosphere of mutual respect has successfully been created. The culture embedded in the school ensures that young people benefit from a robust and rigorous approach, which treats everyone's emotional and physical safety as paramount.

Safety is central to practice and the school ensures that young people are protected from harm. Designated senior staff take responsibility for child protection and they have undertaken appropriate training. Staff are alert to potential risks and take prompt action in the light of any concerns. There is effective partnership working with other agencies and parents to ensure the safety of all young people and staff. The training provided to staff ensures that any allegations or suspicions that relate to harm will be appropriately managed. Training is constantly being reviewed and updated as a result of the safeguarding lead's regular attendance at conferences and liaison with other establishments. Staff seek out opportunities to learn and improve practice. There is an effective relationship with safeguarding professionals. The headteacher and the chair of governors sit on the local safeguarding board, to which they contribute well while also establishing a perspective from which to evaluate their own procedures.

The health, safety and welfare of young people is considered on a daily basis by the senior leadership team. This ensures that risks are minimised both inside and outside of school. Risks are very well understood prior to young people's arrival at the school. Staff work with everyone involved to reduce any potential difficulties. All young people who were spoken with feel safe. There have been no instances of young people going missing since the last inspection. A culture has been created in which safeguarding awareness is shared with young people. This encourages them to be able to keep themselves safe and empowers them to request support when they require it, either for themselves or for others. Bullying is not seen as a concern by the young people who were spoken with. They stated that bullying is not tolerated and they were confident that any concerns about bullying would be effectively resolved in a timely manner. Staff work with the young people to de-escalate any situations before they result in bullying behaviours. Young people state that boarding develops their empathy and they can therefore reflect on the impact of bullying. Parents stated that any rare instances of bullying behaviours are dealt with firmly and fairly.

Behaviour is excellent and staff know when particular year groups need additional coaching in respect of certain behaviours. Young people are very aware of the school's expectations and all young people who were spoken with reported that they know the circumstances under which sanctions are used. One young person stated that the first course of action is to talk to the individual and not to sanction. There is a focus on rewarding rather than sanctioning. A low number of major sanctions are used. Celebrating the success of young people is an integral and important aspect of life at the school. However, when sanctions have been used, young people are not asked about their views. This would enable them to reflect on the behaviour and find out if the sanction was effective in changing the behaviour, and could be used as an opportunity for learning.

Health and safety in the boarding houses is exceptionally well managed. Both responsive and routine maintenance are carried out promptly. Servicing of equipment is timely and records of this contain an excellent level of detail. The physical environment is safe, secure and helps to protect young people. Staff recruitment is thorough and safeguards

are put in place via risk assessment where necessary. All staff involved in recruitment have completed safer recruitment training.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The boarding provision is central to the operation of the school. Initiatives that were started in the boarding provision have been rolled out to the main school. Leaders are ambitious and they aspire to ensure that all young people reach their full potential. The senior leadership team ensures that it is always looking forward and promotes a culture of continuous improvement. All staff are fully invested in this approach and the housemasters in the two houses are central to its delivery. The housemasters are passionate and inspirational and are excellent role models for the boys. A parent stated that boarding never stands still. There is no complacency; the headteacher is constantly seeking to improve further and move forward. He challenges others because he wants the best possible outcomes for the young people. Leaders obtain learning from resources external from the school. Staff involved ensure that they constantly review all remits of the school to keep practice 'alive' and up to date. This is making an outstanding difference to the experiences for the young people.

Staff and young people are supported by an experienced and suitably qualified senior management team. The recent appointment of a deputy headteacher who was previously one of the housemasters is indicative of the centrality of boarding in relation to the whole school. The self-evaluation that is undertaken by the senior team informs the development plan, which sets clear actions. External scrutiny is performed by the governing body, the members of which are skilled in their roles and hold the leadership team accountable. The chair of governors has an excellent understanding of his role and shares the passion for ensuring that boarding is fully integrated into the school.

Since the last inspection, there have been many developments and improvements with regard to the way in which the school operates. The school looks to new ideas within the sector but also recognises and is able to showcase the areas in which it excels; young people are proud to be part of this. There were many positive comments from parents, which included: 'It was my son's dream to join this school and he loves it'; 'This is a brilliant school in all respects. I think it is the best choice of school I could have made, and neither I, nor my son, have any regrets'; and, 'Staff go over and above in their duty to ensure he feels supported/developed. They are invaluable in the raising of our child. We consider our son to be privileged to be a boarder for all it has to offer and we are proud to tell people he attends.'

The employment of a boarding and admissions administrator has enabled consistency in records and provides a clear oversight of all the boarding information and admissions. This is very well organised. The dynamics of each staff team ensure that young people's needs are communicated and acted upon efficiently and consistently. The staff team is competent, skilled and, above all, enthusiastic. The senior leadership team is fully committed to developing the staff further through excellent training packages. Performance management reviews are exceptionally well structured and contribute well to equipping staff for their roles.

The school has received some formal complaints since the last inspection. Staff are in regular contact with parents, and matters of a minor nature are dealt with efficiently and promptly. The complaints process is comprehensive and is available to parents, young people and significant others. Complaints are responded to promptly and with appropriate action; information is available, but is not always easily accessible. There is not a secure audit trail in operation to establish that there has been satisfaction with the outcome of a complaint.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected, or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded, or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	110097
Social care unique reference number	SC054201
DfE registration number	

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	Boarding School
Number of boarders on roll	961
Gender of boarders	Boys
Age range of boarders	11 to 18
Headteacher	Mr Ashley Robson
Date of previous boarding inspection	03/03/2014
Telephone number	0118 9015600
Email address	headspa@reading-school.co.uk

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