

Prior Park College

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC008202
Inspection date	4 December 2009
Inspector	Debbi Flint / Jim Palmer
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	18 September 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

Prior Park College is an independent, co-educational Catholic boarding and day school for students aged 11 to 13 years. The school was established in 1830 and has been co-educational for over 25 years. It is part of the Prior Park Educational Trust which consists of three schools. Prior Park College has a strong community ethos which is supported by its adherence to Catholic Christian principles. The school is set within its own attractive grounds on a hillside overlooking the city of Bath.

Summary

At this announced full inspection all key standards were inspected. This was an inspection of Prior Park College only and the two other schools within the trust were not inspected.

This is a co-educational boarding and day school with a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. The school's culture of mutual respect is evident in the sound relationships amongst students and also between students and staff. Boarders are offered a traditional boarding experience within an environment which is supportive and inclusive. International students are made very welcome and are fully integrated in to the school's community. The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding throughout the standards inspected. Staff ensure that all students from differing cultures and backgrounds are able to make an equal contribution to the school.

One recommendation was made at this inspection.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection all windows have been fitted with restrictors and are in good working order. Bathrooms and toilets have been upgraded and the standard of furniture in bedrooms and dormitories is good. The school has improved its procedures for the vetting and recruitment of staff and all referees are now contacted directly to verify references. Fire safety has improved and all fire equipment is now checked on a weekly basis.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health needs are supported by the provision of a medical centre which is open 11 hours a day. The medical centre is staffed by two registered nurses, one of whom lives on site. Students can self refer to the medical centre or they may be referred by staff. A female doctor holds a surgery once a week at the medical centre. Students can also see a male or female doctor on any day at a local surgery if they prefer. The medical centre has two isolation rooms, one of which is en suite and one of which has the use of a separate bathroom. Students are able to stay in the medical centre over night if they are ill due to the fact that one of the nurses lives on site. Nurses keep a day book which details the name of the student, the date of the visit and the details of any complaint or treatment given. An individual personal health record card is also kept for each student. Parental consents for first aid and prescribed medication have been signed for on each boarder's individual record card. Consents for homely remedies are also signed for on a separate form. All medication is administered in the medical centre by

the nurses unless a dose is required outside opening hours when it will be administered by house staff. Medication records in both locations are accurate. Boarders of 16 years of age or over can also administer their own medication subject to a satisfactory risk assessment. The school has a medical policy and there is also a minor ailments policy. There are very good links between the medical centre and the tutor responsible for English as an additional language. There are also very good links between the medical centre and staff responsible for the learning development programme which ensures good provision for students with additional needs. The medical centre has good links with external psychological services such as child and adolescent mental health services.

Boarders' health is promoted by the provision of a very comprehensive personal development programme which covers issues such as living in a community, prejudice, disabilities, bullying, sex and responsibility and parenthood. Outside speakers are invited to participate in the programme and a recent session was delivered by Alcoholics Anonymous. Boarders' health is also promoted by the provision of well-trained staff. One nurse has an asthma diploma and has also received specialist training in allergies and anaphylaxis. Another nurse has received specialist training in sexual health. Both nurses receive advanced first aid training each year. The school also trains other staff in first aid. There is a published list of designated staff who are first aid qualified which gives clear guidelines as to who can be contacted in an emergency.

The school has a health promotion policy which is followed in practice. There is an extensive programme of physical recreation which includes activities such as hockey, rugby, cricket, tennis, netball, aerobics, fencing, basketball, volleyball, football, golf and sailing. Healthy eating is also promoted. The school's dining room is comfortable and clean. The design of the dining room reflects the fact that the school was established in 1830 and there is an 'old-worldly' atmosphere. Dining times are staggered and meals are taken in a leisurely manner. There is a wide variety of choices available at mealtimes and these include vegetarian as well as salad and pasta bar. Special diets are always available at all mealtimes. Students are generally very positive about the food. One student said, 'I love the food', and another said, 'It's really very good'. However a small number of students state that supper is sometimes repetitive and could be more adventurous. Nevertheless the overall standard is very high and the school has received the healthy eating award from the local environmental health department. All staff working in the catering department have received at least basic food hygiene training. Senior staff have the advanced food hygiene award.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

There are very good policies and procedures in place to safeguard the young people and the school has a strong and efficient staff team which is vigilant in enforcing them. This team is led by the deputy headteacher who is also the school's designated child protection officer.

The school has a comprehensive countering bullying policy and a policy on cyber bullying and the use of electronic devices. Students are only allowed to access the internet at certain times of the day. As a result of general concerns about use of the internet, the school has introduced e-safety sessions for students, parents and staff. These sessions have been very well received. All students are also issued with a homework diary and record book when joining the school. This diary contains useful information on bullying and also on responsible use of electronic

media. Boarders spoken with do not report any bullying at all. One boarder said, 'In the four years that I have been here I have never seen any bullying at all.'

The school has a comprehensive child protection policy, a complaints procedure and a missing child policy. The designated child protection officer has received local authority safeguarding training and also has strong links with the Local Safeguarding Children's Board. All staff receive an initial child protection induction, followed by further training which is facilitated in house by the local authority. Sixth formers are also given basic guidance on safeguarding and child protection. There has been one referral to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board since the last inspection. Appropriate procedures were followed and appropriate action was taken. The school's complaints procedure is detailed in the community handbook. All formal complaints are recorded in a bound log which is kept by the deputy headteacher. Low level complaints are recorded in the house diary.

Students at this school are exceptionally well behaved and the school's ethos of mutual respect is very apparent to any visitor. Staff state that they foster a culture of concern and that students are encouraged 'to look out for one another'. All students were observed to be polite and courteous when engaging with visitors, staff and each other. The school's code of conduct, which is detailed in the homework diary and record book, is clearly followed in practice. There is a clear and effective rewards and sanctions policy which enables students to know exactly what is expected of them. A whole range of rewards are available for effort and achievement. Sanctions, which are rarely used, are generally appropriate. The deputy headteacher keeps a log of any major sanctions which have been imposed.

The school has good procedures in place to maintain a safe and secure environment. There are comprehensive fire risk assessments on file for all buildings and boarding houses. These risk assessments are adhered to in practice and there is evidence of weekly fire tests and regular termly fire drills. All environmental hazards and activities have also been risk assessed. Security is maintained through the use of finger punch locks on all buildings and boarding houses. There are closed circuit television cameras at all school entrances and all school windows are fitted with restrictors to prevent any unauthorised access. All visitors sign in to the school and are issued with a visitor's badge. There is vigorous selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with boarders. All staff files sampled include all the information required by standard 38 and any volunteers assisting at the school have been satisfactorily checked through the criminal records bureau.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school's pastoral structure is detailed in the community handbook. Students can approach the headteacher and deputy headteacher, housemaster and housemistress, nurses, house tutors and the designated student head of house. The school also has an independent listener. Students state that they can always find someone to help them if they have a problem and that they also help each other. The homework diary and record book provides students with a comprehensive list of agencies who can be contacted outside the school such as ChildLine, Quitline and Children's Services.

All staff have equality and diversity training and students state that while the school has a Catholic ethos, all people from all faiths and walks of life are welcomed, accepted and integrated. Staff responsible for teaching English as an additional language make great efforts to ensure

that foreign students are supported. They show students around the city of Bath and give them valuable information such as how to order food and how to use public transport. The school has an international student voice group for foreign students which enables them to enter an annual public speaking competition. There is also recognition of different cultural festivals in morning assemblies. One student said, 'This is far better than my last school. They are far better at integrating foreign students.' A Catholic mass is held daily in the chapel and attendance at this service is voluntary. The school holds both Catholic and Anglican confirmation services and will also facilitate attendance at a mosque for Muslim students if requested to do so.

The school is set in a large and attractive campus and has its own theatre, swimming pool, gym, pavilion and sports fields. Staff seek to enhance young people's development by offering them a wide variety of activities. There is a Saturday Active programme which offers 28 courses including cookery, rock climbing, archery, tennis, mountain biking, sailing and scuba diving. There are also Sunday trips to a wide variety of places such as the cinema, the zoo and the ice skating rink. Students can also join the Combined Cadet Force or undertake the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school has an induction programme for new boarders. A tour of the school is arranged prior to entry and this is followed by an induction in June. The community handbook, which gives boarders essential information about the school, is despatched in July. There is also an induction weekend for all students in Year 9. Students are put into 'family groups' within the school on arrival and the idea is that the older ones look out for the younger ones. Students state that the school is welcoming on arrival and 'easy to slot into'. They are able to keep in touch with their parents by telephone and email. All boarders are able to keep their own mobile phones and there are also public phone booths in all the houses.

Students at this school state that they have a strong voice and are very well heard. All students state that they feel very definitely involved in the school and are 'very much a part of it'. There is a school committee system. There are a total of 12 committees which students can join and these include catering, charities, library and chapel. Students in the charities committee find inventive ways of raising money, for example by making and selling sweets. All of the sixth formers are members of committees. Staff state that they feel this system is more inclusive than having a prefect system where certain sixth formers would be singled out. Within the boarding houses there are house management committees which meet half termly. These committees feed into the headteacher's committee meeting via the student heads of each house. One boarder said, 'We have regular house meetings and can discuss what we think is the problem and how it can be improved.' There are also suggestion boxes in all the houses and outside the dining hall.

Relationships between staff and students are relaxed, easy and mutually respectful. Staff give students a lot of recognition for their efforts and students praise the staff highly. There are no apparent tensions in relationships and boarders are very positive about their life at the school. Boarders also state that they feel part of the local community. They are able to walk to a local shop and can also access the city of Bath. Boarders must leave the school in groups and access is limited to certain times of the day.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school has three boarding houses and these are Allen House, Roche House and St Mary's House. Two of the houses accommodate boys and one house accommodates girls. Each house is led by a housemaster or housemistress and has a team of resident and non-resident tutors. The school has a rolling programme of refurbishment and there have been significant improvements since the last inspection. All of the houses have common rooms and television rooms which provide ample space for relaxation. There are also kitchens for the purposes of making snacks. The majority of older boarders have single rooms while younger boarders share or are accommodated in dormitories. All bedrooms and dormitories have a bed, wardrobe and lockable cupboard for each student. The majority of boarders have desks within their rooms although some younger boarders use study rooms near to their dormitories. Most of the furniture within boarders' rooms is modern and has been recently replaced although some furniture is still awaiting replacement. However the older furniture awaiting replacement remains in very good order. While the décor is generally good throughout all the boarding houses, some carpets in a small number of boys' rooms were stained and there were some loose tiles on the floor of a communal room in the girls' house. One downstairs common room in one of the boys' houses also had some plaster peeling off a ceiling. There are sufficient showers, toilets and washing facilities and these have been upgraded since the last inspection. Boarders generally expressed satisfaction with the standard of accommodation.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The deputy headteacher is responsible for the overall management of boarding, and staff praise his leadership and state that they feel very well supported. Staff state that they are particularly impressed with his knowledge of safeguarding and his commitment to this area of work as the designated child protection officer for the school. The deputy headteacher also monitors all complaints, risk assessments and punishments and demonstrates a good awareness of any current issues. The school has a statement of boarding principles and practice which emphasises the school's aims to provide Catholic Christian education of the highest quality for all students and to provide pastoral care of an encouraging, supportive and disciplined nature.

There are sufficient staff employed in all the houses and all staff receive a comprehensive induction of 13 weeks duration. Induction training includes child protection, health and safety, fire, first aid and epipen training. There is a mentoring programme for new boarding staff, and staff state that when they first started work they were shadowed by their housemaster or housemistress until they felt confident to work alone. All staff involved in boarding have job descriptions and are also provided with a comprehensive guide which provides up-to-date written guidance on the school's policies and practice. The housemasters and housemistress have also received training from the Boarding School Association. There are weekly staff meetings in each house and staff state that communication between the school and the houses is good. The school uses a peer review appraisal system.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Evidence supports a consistent commitment towards improving equality and diversity in practice. Young people's individual needs are well met and the school's inclusive approach is a major strength.

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):

- repair or replace damaged flooring in some boarding houses and continue to maintain living areas to a high standard. (NMS 40)