

Aldenham School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Kay Mehrtens
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Address	Aldenham School Aldenham Road Elstree BOREHAMWOOD Hertfordshire WD6 3AJ
Telephone number	01923 858122
Email	head@aldenham.com
Registered person	James Fowler
Head of care	
Head / Principal	
Date of last inspection	8 March 2005

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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

Aldenham School is situated in a quiet area of Hertfordshire, although the large town of Watford, with its wide range of facilities is nearby. There are good transport links in the area, and fairly easy access to central London from the school. The school grounds are extensive and well kept, and provide a range of sporting activities for young people. Aldenham is a Christian foundation, and a full time Chaplain lives on site. The school offers boarding accommodation to pupils between 11 and 18 years, and this can be on a full or flexible basis. The boarding accommodation is based on four separate houses, one of which is for girls.

Summary

This visit is a Key inspection of the service looking at standards identified by Ofsted as key areas of care. The inspection took place over four days. Feedback was given to the Head and members of the senior management team. The overall judgment of outstanding is based on the outcomes of the standards inspected.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous recommendations from the last inspection with regard to medication systems, recruitment checks and the provision of window restrictors have all been addressed.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The young people are provided with advice and guidance on keeping safe and healthy. The school has clear policies with regard to alcohol and substance abuse and implements them in a way that engenders a responsible and educated attitude by the young people. The school has a positive and proactive approach to supporting and educating the young people in life skills. Health education is included in the school's life skills programme which is linked to the outcomes from 'Every Child Matters'. The young people like the fact that the programme reflects the ages, gender and different needs of the young people in boarding and in school. The staff are aware of the school's policies and procedures with regard to social and health education and support for the boarders. A local GP says that, 'Pastoral care is given a high priority with good communication between staff.' Parents are pleased with the health care provided. One parent says, 'Pastoral care is fantastic and we feel our children's physical and emotional care is in good hands.' The health centre is staffed by qualified nurses that are available during the day and provide an on-call duty system, for boarding staff out of school hours. A local GP attends the school every fortnight though the young people can also access the local surgery. In addition, a female doctor holds a surgery once a fortnight. The qualified nurses are supported in maintaining their training needs. The health centre staff were observed to attend to some young people, that were not feeling well, in a very gentle and caring manner. The young people are treated with respect and in a way that ensures their privacy and dignity. The systems for medication administration, audit, storage and stock control both in the health centre and the boarding house are excellent. The school has reviewed its medication policies and procedures to reflect the good practice guidance documents from the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The nursing staff support the house staff extremely well with medical

issues and monitor the storage and administration of medication in the houses. Communication systems between the medical centre and the school are excellent. The nurses have a very good understanding of the individual needs of the young people and has built good links with their families and the independent counsellor provided by the school. Health promotion, advice and support are well promoted and offered by the health centre staff. The young people's welfare records are kept secure both in the medical centre and boarding houses. Good arrangements are in place to ensure that young people are kept safe and to promote their health and general well-being. The standard of catering at the school was good. The young people are provided with well-balanced nutritious meals and snacks throughout the day. The dietary and cultural needs of the young people are considered by the catering manager when planning the menus. He has introduced 'tasting sessions' and competitions to encourage the young people to try different foods. The meals are well presented and mealtimes are pleasant, sociable affairs. The young people's comments regarding the meals provided were varied in content. The young people like the variety of food offered and enjoy the opportunity to prepare different snacks in the boarding house kitchens. The report by a visiting Environmental Health Officer confirmed that there were no outstanding matters concerning food safety.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The school has clear policies with regard to bullying and these are available for staff, parents and young people. The young people say that bullying is talked about in school through the life skills programme and in chapel services. They say that it rarely happens and if it does then it is dealt with by the staff. The young people are clear whom they could talk to if they were concerned about anything. They like the introduction of the 'bullying box' as a way of asking for help should they need to. There is a designated staff member for child protection issues. His awareness, understanding and positive approach to ensuring the safety of the young people is very good. The staff demonstrate a very good understanding of what constitutes a child protection referral and have a clear focus on the needs of the children in their care. The school has good links with the social services child protection school liaison officer. Their comments include, 'Aldenham is a good example of child protection being taken seriously, and in an appropriate way.' 'The response to and use of advice is robust, and what we would wish for to improve and maintain good outcomes on child protection issues.' All staff, including domestic and catering staff, are trained in child protection awareness through links with the local authority services. Induction training for new staff includes child protection training. The senior pupils and prefects also receive training in child protection procedures. The systems and training in place ensure the safety and protection of the young people. Staff spoken to during the inspection were very aware of child protection procedures and the role of the designated member of staff. The staff handbook contains information regarding child protection referral procedures. The young people are aware of sanctions for serious breaches of the school rules. Information is provided for parents and young people. The young people feel that the rules are fair. All sanctions are recorded and reviewed by house staff and the senior staff team. The staff are good at encouraging the young people to look at their actions and ways to effect positive changes. The staff approach towards discipline is to encourage and reward positive behaviours and support the young people to look at any inappropriate behaviours in a reflective and adult manner. The school uses a system of 'Honours' that the young people aim towards and are rewarded with a 'Honour Tie'. These are much sought after and valued by the young people. The boarders' handbook and prospectus includes information about how to make a complaint and the school complaints procedure contains clear information for parents about

how to contact Ofsted should they have any concerns. The young people are clear who they can talk to if they are unhappy. For example, one young person says, 'The house staff always listen and try to improve things if you complain about something'. Another says, 'If you are ever in danger or in trouble there is always someone you can go to for help and protection.' House meetings and suggestion boxes are also ways that the young people can share any concerns. The young people are aware of the procedures with regard to fire drills and said that they had done fire practise at the beginning of term. The school employs the service of an external company to carry out weekly visits and checks of the fire systems. They also undertake a detailed annual review and report on their findings to the senior management team. Fire drills and equipment checks are well recorded. Risk assessments are updated and reviewed annually. The procedures and systems in place ensure that the young people are well protected from the risk of fire. The young people are happy with their bedrooms. They are provided with keys to their rooms and their privacy is respected and protected. Staff practice ensures the privacy of the young people. They were observed to be discreet and respectful of the young people's personal space. There are clear policies and procedures in place to ensure that the young people are safe and supervised only by staff that had been satisfactorily checked. The staff recruitment files are well organised. The system for checking and monitoring recruitment links to the standards and is thorough and efficient. The system also addressed the requirements for correct information and checks for overseas staff. There were clear policies in place with regard to access to boarding accommodation. The young people say that they feel safe in the houses. For example, one says that, 'In the house I feel safe, particularly at night, because there are electronic locking systems.' The school employs a porter and he is good at challenging visitors to the school asking them to produce identification documents. Entry doors to the houses and school are secure. The local police contact comments include, 'The school and the police work closely together to achieve a balance of trust and commitment in making the school safer.' The school sports facilities are used by the public and the young people are supervised when attending. Risk assessments are in place with regard to public access to the school grounds and premises. Young people are cared for in a safe environment and are well protected by this service.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

There are activities for all ages and interests during the week and at weekends. The young people enjoy the variety offered. Their comments include, 'I think the atmosphere is fantastic, always happy and there is plenty to do.' 'Lots to get involved with.' The young people are aware of the study times and of the different activities available in their house and outside of school. Access to the internet is provided and safeguards are in place that protect the young people. Staff encourage the young people to join in activities as well as attend to their studies. Staff support and encourage the young people to have fun together as well as relax in the boarding houses. The inspector observed lovely interaction between the staff and the young people during chapel youth club, sixth form club, at supper time and during a house competition evening. The young people are polite and open in their comments to staff and each other. The boarders have access to local facilities. All outings are risk-assessed and supervision is dependant on the young persons' age and behaviour. The young people appreciate the development of their independence at the school. The older boarders recognise that they are treated with respect and respond to the responsibilities placed upon them appropriately. Parents are pleased with the activities and support provided. Their comments include, 'I think Aldenham has the balance right, the children are encouraged to work hard and play hard!' 'Aldenham school is a

very caring school.' 'They make the pupils feel valued and individual.' The school runs a youth club in the chapel and this activity is much enjoyed by the young people. The chaplain has introduced a 'chapel committee' as a forum for the young people to look at ways of developing the community ethos within the school. From observation and comments from the young people, it is evident that the school has achieved a strong sense of community that is expressed by the young people and the staff team. For example, a young person says, 'Aldenham is amazing and helped me find myself. The atmosphere made me more confident and happy, especially the close boarding community as you get to know people from all over the world and learn to understand each other.' Information is available for the young people about different independent support agencies for children. The school employs a personal counsellor offering individual and private appointments for the young people at their request. The system for appointments and the sessions with the counsellor ensure the confidentiality of the young people. The school has a secure and efficient system for maintaining files and for sharing information. The staff demonstrate a caring and insightful approach to dealing with sensitive issues and difficulties presented by some young people. The school provides excellent pastoral care for the young people. The chaplain works positively with the young people to promote the feeling of community that the young people recognise as part of their experience of being at the school. The Head and his staff team demonstrate a child centred approach to supporting and encouraging the young people to achieve positive experiences and outcomes from boarding at the school. Boarding is a positive experience for the young people. Their comments focus on feeling supported and nurtured. Young people say, for example, 'I really enjoy being at the school and have loved my time here. I love the house system and have made many friends.' 'They allow you to be yourself and focus on individual strengths.' The school offers boarding to overseas students. The majority of boarders currently accommodated are not from overseas. Their comments about feeling integrated and supported by the staff and other young people are very positive. The young people are clear that they are made welcome and do not feel isolated or discriminated against. For example, one says 'I am really happy to go to Aldenham school especially as a boarder from abroad. I have lots of friends.' The school is good at supporting language training needs for overseas students. There are plenty of opportunities for the young people to mix together and share their different cultural experiences. Weekend activities are planned for overseas students to develop their understanding of the English culture, history and activities. The staff have a very good awareness and understanding of the cultural needs of the young people.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school provides good opportunities for the young people to contribute to their experience of boarding. The senior pupils are given training in basic counselling, from the school counsellor, to help them in their role as 'peer group counsellors and listeners'. Young people are aware of the peer group support from senior pupils. The school council has boarding representatives and minutes evidence that young people bring a variety of issues for consideration and discussion. Suggestions from the young people are listened to and changes are made following their representation. For example, the girl's uniform is to be reviewed and sports choices offered to the girls are being developed. Each boarding house has regular meetings. There are suggestion boxes in the houses and a comments book in the dining hall. Young people say that they feel listened to. One young person says, 'Everyone likes to listen to new ideas and they really want you to feel good as a boarder.' There are private telephones for the young people though most have their own mobile phones. There are computers with internet access provided in each

house. The staff are aware of those young people that have difficulties in contacting parents. Parents are contacted by the staff with regard to any issues or incidents concerning their children. Each house has produced a booklet for potential boarders and one house has produced its own magazine. The house staff are committed to ensuring that the young people have 'a voice' and are involved in as many aspects of boarding as possible. Parents comments about the houses are very positive. One says, 'The house system makes the children feel part of a community.' Each house holds an induction weekend for new boarders. Plenty of information is made available to new boarders and their parents, by letter, booklets and on the school website. Additional booklets produced by the Boarding School Association, entitled 'being a boarder and parenting a boarder', are provided to parents and young people new to boarding.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The new girls house 'Paull's' is well furnished, decorated and equipped with various activities for the young people to enjoy. There is an ongoing programme for improvements to the décor and fittings in the other houses. One house, 'Kennedy', is to be completely refurbished for September. Every house is well-equipped with internet computers, Sky television, games and activities for the young people to use. The houses are friendly and welcoming places for the young people to live in. Parents are pleased with the boarding facilities. One parent comment includes, 'The boarding house is warm, clean and happy.' The bedrooms are clean, bright and well ventilated. The young people like their bedroom areas and are encouraged to personalise their space. There is plenty of evidence of young people's personal belongings and pictures in their bedrooms. The boarders are provided with adequate quiet study space as well as access to the school's library and computer facilities. There are common rooms equipped with soft furnishing and larger games equipment that are well used and appreciated by the boarders. There are sufficient bathroom facilities for the young people. The bathrooms are clean and ensure the young people's privacy.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school provides booklets and brochures with plenty of information for parents and boarders about the boarding provision at the school. The school also has a web site that is well presented and regularly updated. Parents have access to a password protected section of the website and this provides them with up to date information about school activities, policies, procedures and development. Agencies working with the school are pleased with their working relationship. For example, the local social services child protection officer says, 'the working relationship we have with the school is excellent and ongoing and we have every confidence in the leadership and use of process by the school.' Parents too expressed positive comments regarding the standards at the school. One parent says, 'I believe that our children are well looked after in a respectful and caring community.' The school has an experienced and effective senior management team. The young people receive training and advice in fire and health, and safety awareness as part of their induction days at the beginning of the school year. The senior management team monitor risk assessments, accidents and incidents. The systems in place ensure that the school is well organised and standards are monitored and shortfalls addressed. The school policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and amended accordingly. All actions ensure that the welfare and care of the young people is well met. The staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the number of boarders accommodated. The boarding staff operate as a

very supportive team and ensure that the young people are aware of activities, events and any changes in the staff cover. The 'gap students' feel well integrated into the boarding activities and staff team. There are procedures in place for visitors and school staff coming into the boarding house. The young people are aware of these procedures. The young people are aware of the signing in and out system that ensures staff are aware of their whereabouts at all times. There are systems in place that ensures the young people stay with approved guardians on their weekend 'exeats'. The new boarding staff and gap students described receiving induction training when taking on boarding responsibilities to help them understand their role. Evidence was seen of the staff induction training programme, which was comprehensive and covered all aspects of boarding responsibilities including guidance on child protection. The school supports staff attendance at training courses and conference relevant to boarding needs. Boarding staff are aware of their job descriptions and roles in the boarding house. They are provided with a detailed staff handbook. From observation and comment it is clear that the staff enjoy their role and the time spent with the young people. The school does not place boarders in lodgings so this standard was not inspected.

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):

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for boarding school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' health is promoted (NMS 6)
- safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and welfare are supported by appropriate records (NMS 7)
- boarders' receive first aid and health care as necessary (NMS 15)
- boarders are adequately supervised and looked after when ill (NMS 16)
- boarders are supported in relation to any health or personal problems (NMS 17)
- boarders receive good quality catering provision (NMS 24)
- boarders have access to food and drinking water in addition to main meals (NMS 25)
- boarders are suitably accommodated when ill (NMS 48)
- boarders' clothing and bedding are adequately laundered (NMS 49).

Ofsted considers 6 and 15 the key standards to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are protected from bullying (NMS 2)
- boarders are protected from abuse (NMS 3)
- use of discipline with boarders is fair and appropriate (NMS 4)
- boarders' complaints are responded to appropriately (NMS 5)
- the operation of any prefect system safeguards and promotes boarders' welfare (NMS 13)
- boarders' welfare is protected in any appointment of educational guardians by the school (NMS 22)
- boarders are protected from the risk of fire (NMS 26)
- the welfare of any children other than the school's pupils is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated by the school (NMS 28)
- boarders' safety and welfare are protected during high risk activities (NMS 29)
- boarders' personal privacy is respected (NMS 37)
- there is vigorous selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with boarders (NMS 38)
- boarders are protected from unsupervised contact at school with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures; all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises are supervised (NMS 39)
- boarders have their own accommodation, which is secure from public intrusion (NMS 41)
- boarders are protected from safety hazards (NMS 47)

Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5, 26, 37, 38, 39, 41 and 47 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders have access to a range and choice of activities (NMS 11)
- boarders do not experience inappropriate discrimination (NMS 18)
- boarders' welfare is not compromised by unusual or onerous demands (NMS 27)
- boarders have satisfactory provision to study (NMS 43)
- boarders have access to a range of safe recreational areas (NMS 46)

Ofsted considers 14 and 18 the key standards to be inspected.

Annex A

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school (NMS 12)
- boarders receive personal support from staff (NMS 14)
- boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families (NMS 19)
- new boarders are introduced to the school's procedures and operation, and are enabled to settle in (NMS 21)
- boarders have appropriate access to information and facilities outside the school (NMS 30)
- there are sound relationships between staff and boarders (NMS 36)

Ofsted considers 12 and 19 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' possessions and money are protected (NMS 20)
- boarders are provided with satisfactory accommodation (NMS 40)
- boarders have satisfactory sleeping accommodation (NMS 42)
- boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities (NMS 44)
- boarders have satisfactory provision for changing by day (NMS 45)
- boarders can obtain personal requisites while accommodated at school (NMS 50)

Ofsted considers 51 the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- a suitable statement of the school's principles and practice should be available to parents, boarders and staff (NMS 1)
- there is clear leadership of boarding in the school (NMS 8)
- crises affecting boarders' welfare are managed effectively (NMS 9)
- the school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare (NMS 10)
- risk assessment and school record-keeping contribute to boarders' welfare (NMS 23)
- boarders are supervised adequately by staff (NMS 31)
- staff exercise appropriate supervision of boarders leaving the school site (NMS 32)
- boarders are adequately supervised at night (NMS 33)
- boarders are looked after by staff which have specific boarding duties, and have received adequate induction and continued training (NMS 34)
- boarders are looked after by staff which follow clear boarding policies and practice (NMS 35)
- the welfare of boarders placed in lodgings is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 51)
- the welfare of boarders is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated away from the school site on short-term visits (NMS 52)

Ofsted considers 1, 23, 31 and 34 the key standards to be inspected.