

Inspection Reports

The Boarding Inspection conducted by the National Care Standards Commission on October 1 - 2, 2003

Brief Description of the Services Provided

Vinehall School is a partly selective, co-educational preparatory school, with a pre-preparatory department. There are approximately 400 pupils aged 2.5 to 13 years. The school occupies extensive grounds, just outside Robertsbridge village, on the A21 road between Hastings and Tunbridge Wells. The facilities include several playing fields, a sports hall and gymnasium, tennis courts, a theatre, an indoor swimming pool, a small children's chapel, a 9-hole golf course, a millennium library, and a music room.

The school seeks to provide children with a friendly family orientated community, and pastoral care is firmly based on Christian values and teaching. The aim of the school is to build a positive atmosphere of mutual respect and the motto is 'to do our best for the benefit of others'. A new Head Teacher, Mrs Julie Robinson, was appointed in August 2002 and she is clearly committed to ensuring that the boarding provision meets children's needs.

At the time of the inspection there were 49 boarders, aged 8 to 12 years. Boarding is 'full' rather than on a weekly basis, although there are regular exeat weekend breaks and boarders are allowed to go home for special occasions. The boys' and girls' dormitories are at opposite ends of the original Victorian school building, with Matron, the Sanatorium and the laundry department in the middle. The dormitories house between six and ten children, with the majority in single beds, with fewer bunk beds. There is a large common room in the main building and a separate one for Year 8 pupils.

The Inspectors would like to thank the Head Teacher and boarding house staff for the way in which they facilitated this inspection, particularly as it occurred immediately after a traumatic accident outside the school, which several staff had attended.

Summary of Inspection Findings

What the School Does Well in Boarding Welfare

The ethos of the boarding provision is very family oriented and nurturing to children and young people who are away from home. Boarders said that they felt well looked after, that they are listened to and that they got good support from house staff and from peers. The needs of individual children and young people are well known to staff and responded to appropriately. Staff showed sensitivity in their approach to the children and young people in their care, with good communication and positive expectations of behaviour. The house staff team are experienced, committed to high quality boarding practice and enabled to do their job effectively, with oversight by the Head Teacher. There is a clear sense of purpose in boarding provision and practice. There is a commitment to working in partnership with parents, and sharing relevant information about children appropriately. The role of matrons is clear, valued and they have job descriptions.

What the School Should do Better in Boarding Welfare

There is a need for boarders of both sexes to be made fully aware that they have a choice of seeing a female General Practitioner if they wish to.

Conclusions and Overview of Findings on Boarding Welfare

Inspectors concluded that Vinehall School is offering a good standard of boarding care to pupils, with an emphasis on providing the care and nurturing of a family environment, where there is mutual respect. High quality pastoral care is a key priority, and this ethos is apparent in all aspects of boarding provision. The newly appointed housemaster appears to be fitting in well to the existing team and pupils spoke positively about him. The Head Teacher is keen to develop boarding provision further and Inspectors are confident that house staff will work to achieve this, whilst maintaining high standards.