

Rochester Independent College

Inspection report for boarding school

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| Inspector | Sophie Wood |
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| Nominated person | Pauline Bailey |
| Date of last inspection | 15 December 2009 |

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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

| | |
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| 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

Rochester Independent College has been in existence since 1984 and is situated in the City of Rochester, within easy reach of local facilities. Boarding accommodation is provided over five separate houses and are run by the head of boarding (nominated person) and assistant head of boarding who oversee the boarding manager and male and female supervisors. The male supervisors are only resident when on duty but the female supervisor is in permanent residence.

Boarding students attend the college between the ages of 16 and 21 to study for a variety of courses, including GCSE and A Level examinations. Many students come from overseas and the college employs Cantonese and Mandarin speaking staff to cater for the needs of the Chinese students; eight other foreign languages are also spoken by members of the staff team. There is a School of English, housed in a separate building, which offers support for GCSE and A level students, as well as offering 50 places for full and part time students working towards language qualifications. There are also non - examination courses for those wishing to improve their communication skills.

The college specifically aims to support students to achieve their academic potential, often in a shorter than usual amount of time, and it is very common to find that those attending have not had positive experiences in their previous schools. All boarders at the college have two personal tutors and meet with them fortnightly to ensure that they receive academic and pastoral support.

Summary

This key inspection was conducted over two days by two inspectors. All key standards were inspected and four outcome groups were judged to be outstanding, with the remaining two judged as good.

There is clear leadership within the college and the boarding team is led by a creative, motivated head of boarding.

The development plan continues to strive for improvements across the whole site, with much financial investment aimed at improving boarding, leisure and extra curricular activities. Boarders receive excellent support, both academically and pastorally. They are looked after by a motivated team, who are in turn, very well supported by the senior management.

Four recommendations have been made from this visit, none of which directly impact upon boarders' safety.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Since its previous inspection, conducted under the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) in December 2006, the college has successfully implemented all of the recommendations made.

These included improved liaison with boarders concerning issues they had raised about food and laundry, to fully implement the nurse's action plan for improvement to health care and to review and update all staff personnel files.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders receive excellent health care services. Clear links exist with local practices and a part time qualified nurse is employed by the school, primarily to look after the boarders. Comprehensive health questionnaires and checks are updated following every school holiday and specific health conditions are known and effectively supported.

Boarding staff receive the training and guidance they need to competently safeguard the health of those in their care. Medicines are securely held and administered properly. A good number of boarders keep and administer their own medicines; this has been agreed in each instance through clear risk assessment processes.

The medical room is ideally situated and adequately furnished. Whilst there is only one sick bed available, this is primarily used for day pupils waiting to be collected. It is common practice for boarders to remain in their own bedrooms with staff assistance when they are unwell. Boarders prefer this.

Clear written health and welfare plans identify specific needs and detail the individual support to be given. This results in a consistent approach which benefits the individual. Boarders say they feel very well supported by the boarding manager, nurse and individual tutors.

The personal, health and social education (PHSE) programme is detailed and comprehensive. Boarders receive sound guidance with regards the core subjects, which are delivered in an age appropriate style and further enhanced through the use of relevant external speakers.

Boarders are provided with good quality food. Menus reflect healthy options and special diet requirements. Boarders have ample opportunities to obtain snacks and drinks in between meals and routinely liaise with the Chef.

Appropriate arrangements ensure bedding and clothing is suitably laundered and boarders have access to such facilities if they wish to do their own.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders are protected from potential sources of harm through the sound application of clear policies and procedures. Instances of bullying are extremely rare and boarders say they feel very well protected.

Child protection procedures are firmly embedded. All staff receive regular updated training and senior staff attend local authority courses which include 'safer recruitment'. Staff are knowledgeable about the required processes. They know who to contact, how and when; thus boarders remain safe and protected.

There are clear rules in place with regards behavioural expectations and these are communicated effectively to boarders and parents. Low level incidents are managed appropriately by boarding

staff and more serious issues are dealt with through the senior management team, ultimately the Principal.

Whilst an effective complaints policy is in place, boarders say they rarely need to use this formal route. Other systems including fortnightly tutor meetings and committees enable boarders to raise concerns and express dissatisfaction productively.

The college does not operate a prefect system and neither does it make guardianship arrangements on behalf of parents of overseas boarders.

Boarders are protected from the risk of fire because the college implements sound systems and procedures. Equipment is well maintained and routinely serviced. Risk assessments are in good order and there are no outstanding works to be completed, as is endorsed by the local fire officer. Boarders understand evacuation procedures and are able to accurately describe these. Written records show they are conducted regularly, however, in some instances there is insufficient detail, which hinders effective monitoring. Electrical appliances are in good order and subject to annual testing. The college implements a sound maintenance programme which ensures swift repairs and continued improvement.

Whilst boarders rarely engage in high risk activities, those which do occur, including using the gym equipment, coastal walks and accessing external clubs are subject to thorough risk assessment. In recent months the police and fire officer have given talks about general safety and such measures serve to protect boarders' wellbeing.

Boarders enjoy good privacy, which is further supported through the provision of single bedrooms and the minimal sharing of bathrooms. The college will continue to provide a small number of double rooms in the event that some boarders choose to share.

From its own recent audit of recruitment processes, the college has identified some minor omissions.

Appropriate remedial action is in place to ensure the continued safety and protection of the boarders. All staff have current enhanced CRB certificates and possess the qualifications and experience to undertake their roles.

All potentially hazardous areas within the college have been identified through comprehensive risk assessments. Boarders know which areas are out of bounds and receive clear guidance in terms of accessing the local area.

Sound systems are in place to protect the boarding premises and stringent rules are followed in terms of visitors.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders benefit from being provided with a good range of activities, both on site and through accessing external provision. Many enjoy using the college gymnasium and whilst a number report issues with some of the equipment, appropriate steps are being made to replace these items. Recreational areas within the college are safe and further enhanced through good supervision levels.

Boarders enjoy sound relationships with staff. The boarding manager is spoken of with particular fondness and is constantly referred to as a great source of support. Fortnightly tutor meetings also ensure boarders receive excellent support, both academically and personally. The independent listener makes herself known and contact details are displayed around the campus. The college is particularly good at recognising signs and symptoms of stress and actively ensures boarders are not compromised by onerous demands.

A clear equal opportunities policy is implemented in practice and boarders receive excellent personal support based upon their individual needs.

Additional academic support is provided outside of the classroom and boarders can receive this in small groups or individually. There are many areas around the campus where boarders can conduct additional study without distraction.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are given ample opportunities to contribute to the operation of the boarding provision. Student council meetings are held on a weekly basis and boarders give numerous examples of their ideas being actively implemented.

All bedrooms are equipped with telephone and internet access, which ensures boarders can maintain contact with their families in private. Contact details for appropriate external agencies are displayed throughout the campus in the event of a boarder requiring additional help.

Excellent systems ensure new boarders readily settle into the college. They say the induction process is informative and clear and overseas boarders commend the additional language support in place before the start of term.

Boarders are able to access the local and wider community, albeit appropriate rules are in place to ensure their safety.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are confident that their own personal items are suitably protected. They are able to lock their bedroom doors and in addition have a lockable safe box provided.

The boarding accommodation is comprised of five separate buildings. All are well heated, suitably furnished and decorated to an excellent standard. Boarders enjoy the privacy of single bedrooms and the number of toilets and bathrooms exceeds the requirements of the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

All bedrooms are well decorated and appropriately furnished with good storage and study materials. Boarders enjoy personalising their own rooms. The occupancy of the houses ensures the sleeping accommodation is suitably separated in terms of age group and gender.

Boarders feel safe at night because of excellent security measures and they can readily summons staff assistance if this becomes necessary.

Common rooms provide a range of activities and are well equipped with televisions, games consoles and stereo systems. A sound maintenance programme ensures the accommodation is safe, clean and very well decorated.

Boarders find it easy to obtain the personal requisites they may need during term time. They can readily access the High Street and the college also holds stocks of commonly required items for the boarders.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Boarders, parents and new staff understand the aims and objectives of the college because they are furnished with appropriate literature. This is delivered in a variety of formats in an effort to ensure everyone's understanding.

Lines of responsibility and accountability across the boarding provision and the college as a whole, are clear. The head of boarding and assistant head of boarding meet with the boarding manager every weekday morning to discuss and monitor this provision. They also chair a monthly meeting which is attended by the entire boarding team and the nurse to review practices and procedures, as well as to ensure the needs of the boarders continue to be met. Boarding staff receive sound induction training and meet with their manager every fortnight. The impact of this upon boarders is positive as it ensures the provision is under constant review.

An evolving crises plan offers sound guidance to ensure staff know the action to take in the event of emergencies and the overall development plan for the college includes major refurbishments to further enhance the college and boarding provision.

Risk assessments and general school records are in good order. Whilst these are subject to being routinely monitored, a formal approach to this task is lacking. This compromises the ability to readily identify patterns and trends with regards punishments, complaints and bullying.

Good staffing levels across the boarding provision ensures boarders are safely supervised. Older boarders have more freedom to go out in the evenings, as is appropriate to their age, albeit they are required to abide by clear rules to ensure their whereabouts is known.

Boarding staff job descriptions are clear and further guidance is contained within the boarding staff handbook. Key training, including child protection, medication, first aid and fire safety is routinely revisited; this ensures the continued safety and protection of boarders.

An appraisal system is in place and staff receive ongoing supervision, which identifies strengths, weaknesses and ongoing training needs. There is a lack of clear structure with supervision meetings, in terms of formal recording and this compromises the ability to readily monitor the continued professional development of individuals.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The multi-cultural mix of students is reflected in the staff team and the ethos of the college is inclusive. Cultural differences are actively celebrated through meals and PHSE provision. Individual customs and values are all given equal regard and additional support needs, arising from ethnic backgrounds and language barriers are actively provided for.

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):

- ensure the records of fire drills are fully completed in terms of length of time and action taken on each occasion (NMS 26)
- ensure the recruitment procedure is fully adhered to and retrospective action is completed with regards the shortfalls identified (NMS 38)
- ensure risk assessments and school records are robustly monitored by the senior management team (NMS 23)
- review the current structure and recording of staff supervision and appraisal meetings to ensure the content is accurately recorded in writing. (NMS 34)