

Denstone College

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Jackie Callaghan / Katarina Djordjevic
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Setting address	Denstone College, Denstone, UTTOXETER, Staffordshire, ST14 5HN
Telephone number	01889 590484
Email	hmoffice@denstonecollege.org
Registered person	David Derbyshire
Head/Principal	David Derbyshire
Nominated person	
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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

Denstone College was founded in 1868. The college site of over 100 acres is located in the Staffordshire countryside and is well served by road, rail and air.

The college has an age related pastoral structure, with students arranged horizontally into three schools: 11 to 13, 14 to 16 and 16 to 18 years. The six houses run alongside this system, with boarders split vertically 11 to 18 years across six houses. Boarders are housed by age and gender in boarding houses across the campus. Currently there are 148 boarders, 100 boys and 48 girls. Each boarding house has its own common rooms where boarders can socialise. This arrangement allows boarders to socialise and develop within their own age group.

The college has many on site facilities including numerous cricket pitches, two sports halls, a swimming pool, golf course and two astro-turf areas. Each of the boarding provisions is suitably equipped for indoor games and hobbies. Arrangements are made for the boarders to have access to an excellent activity programme that runs in the evenings and at weekends.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This announced full inspection looked at the key boarding school national minimum standards under the Every Child Matters outcome groups.

The overall outcome judgement is outstanding. The individual outcome judgements are all judged to be outstanding with the exception of economic well-being which is judged as good. No recommendations have been set as a result of this visit.

The boarding provision is staffed by a discreet team of boarding staff some of whom have teaching responsibilities. These individuals are managed by the head of boarding who takes responsibility and oversight of boarding life at the college. The head of boarding is supported closely by the second master (internal). Rules in the boarding house are kept to a minimum and are based on the safety and welfare of the individual and the community. Boarders truly understand the expectations and routines of boarding and establish excellent routines and positive relationships as a result. There is an open, informal and deeply respectful culture throughout the college. Teaching and non-teaching staff relationships are friendly, respectful and supportive of the needs of boarders. The management of the boarding provision is very effective with skilled, experienced and dedicated boarding staff and as a result, the college is providing an outstanding service to its boarders. This is summed up by a parent who said 'of all the schools we considered, it was the boarding arrangements at Denstone that set it apart from the others. Quite simply, superb!'

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection all boarders are now explicitly aware that they can see a male or female doctor. All boarders, who are able, are successfully encouraged to store their medication in their lockable bedroom cupboards and all consent forms now include specific consent for first aid. As a result, boarders' welfare is being actively safeguarded. Any complaints made to the college now show clear outcomes and resolution. This demonstrates an open and transparent approach which uses the complaints process to positively improve outcomes for boarders.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' health and welfare needs are being actively promoted through established and effective services. Boarders have easy access to doctors and nurses and also specialist health services, if they are required. There is proactive communication between the medical centre and boarding staff. The medical centre provides 24-hour care during term time and is staffed by three full-time nurses and one part-time nurse. There are also two doctors surgeries each week held at the college. One boarder confirmed this view as they said, 'you get looked after well when you are feeling poorly and the nurses are great to talk to.'

Boarders are being supported through guidance, education and positive role models to lead healthy lifestyles. As a result, they are learning to make healthy choices. There is an established personal, social, health and education programme (PSHE) that is delivered through tutors, academic staff and external lecturers. Through the PSHE programme and the pastoral care system, help and advice are always readily available. The college keenly works with other agencies such as the local police and health agencies to deliver its commitment to drugs education.

The college has a thorough format for recording welfare issues pertaining to individual boarders, which is overseen by heads of houses and boarding staff. Welfare plans explicitly guide all staff to have an awareness of individual needs of each boarder enabling proactive care. All illnesses and accidents are recorded. These are monitored by the health and safety committee, medical centre and operations bursar. The college nurses have a written health background for all boarders, including inoculations. Records demonstrated that the nurses are vigorously keeping track of health issues that are current.

Boarders' religious and health related dietary needs are met by an excellent team of catering staff responsible for the provision and preparation of meals. All meals are taken in a central dining area and the range and quality of catering is particularly high. The college recognises that food is an area that remains prominent on the agenda and is a constant discussion point at house and college committee meetings. As a result, menus are continually re-visited with boarders in order to maintain levels of satisfaction. The college holds themed cultural activities such as a 'pirates of the

Caribbean' night. This incorporated traditional Caribbean food. This means that boarders are increasing their awareness of different cultures and respect for them. One boarder reported that the 'food has improved massively', while another stated the 'catering staff are great and they work really hard.'

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The systems in place to promote the safety and welfare of boarders are extremely comprehensive. The college integrates safeguarding into every aspect of boarders' lives through wide ranging policies, procedures and practice. This ensures that boarders are, and feel, safe. One boarder said 'it's a great place to be, you feel really safe and well cared for.' Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous. The local safeguarding children board and local education safeguarding advisors report confidence in the college's ability to work together to protect all students. All staff are trained, know about, and put policy and procedure into systematic practice to protect boarders.

Overall levels of privacy in the boarding houses are appropriate with some houses providing better levels than others; improvements are part of the substantial refurbishment programme that is ongoing. Staff respect boarders' privacy and are sensitive to the need for personal space at key times. Staff knock on bedroom and dormitory doors prior to entering and do not enter the bath or shower area without a valid reason. Some boarders expressed that now they are older they would like single bedroom accommodation. They acknowledge, however, that this is would be extremely difficult to achieve for all boarders due to the limitations on space within the boarding houses. All senior school boarders have twin or single rooms.

Recruitment and selection processes are vigorous and ensure that all adults are completely safe and suitable to have contact with students. The college also provides a high level of physical safety and security. Health and safety legislation and guidance is comprehensively implemented to reduce unnecessary risks from fire and other hazards. These important elements are so well established in the life of the college, that this actively demonstrates the value the college places on the right of all students to be safe and secure when away from their parents.

The college has comprehensive and robust measures in place to ensure that boarders are kept safe from harm. Bullying is an ongoing discussion topic for staff and boarders both formally in PSHE and tutorials, and informally in houses. Boarders confirm that any bullying is a very rare occurrence; however, any incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively. The college also educates and protects its boarders from cyber bullying. Proper supervision is given of boarders in order to create a safe technology and computer environment at the college.

Standards of behaviour are high and boarders are aware of college expectations and are very keen to live up to them. Boarders say 'staff listen to us and help guide us to stay on track.' All students are encouraged and helped to act in a positive and

considerate way and the results are clear. A constructive approach is taken to any shortfalls in behaviour so that boarders learn from their mistakes. Prefects play an important, clearly defined role in this procedure and complete it especially well. The overarching theme of the college's ethos is to promote self-esteem, self-discipline, proper regard for authority and positive relationships based on mutual respect. Consequently, there is an informal atmosphere where all are valued as individuals and encouraged to develop curiosity, competence, kindness and empathy.

Boarders are able to raise concerns and complaints. They are clear that the school listens to what they have to say and takes appropriate action. The school has a formal complaints procedure, available to parents, which has been reviewed and updated.

Boarders expressed confidence in the safety and security of the college. All-embracing environmental risk assessments are in place to ensure the college is fully informed about potential hazards and to enable it to reduce risks. There are clear guidelines and expectations for visitors to follow. All visitors must wear a badge when on the premises and sign the visitors' book. Additionally, they are supervised and escorted when on the premises. Security is enhanced by having coded locks to boarding houses.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' experience of enjoying and achieving is outstanding. All boarders are valued and supported by effective and sensitive pastoral care. This is provided by dedicated teams of highly professional and passionate house staff as well as an effective tutor system. This immediate network is further enhanced by other college departments. These include the school nurses, the learning support team, catering team and the clerical and administrative teams.

Boarders receive outstanding personal support from staff. The college believes that each boarder has the right to extend his or her intellectual growth in an atmosphere of positive encouragement and in conditions that are conducive to learning. The college tutor system also promotes integration. It enables pupils to examine their own values and experience and helps them to work and play as members of a cooperative group. A boarder commented that 'I feel really privileged to be a boarder here. Staff really care and are great at challenging us to make a difference in the world.' This evidences that the college is successful at empowering boarders to be morally aware.

Staff work in a very encouraging and supportive manner and consequently the care, social opportunities and activities are of a high standard. The college provides an environment where the value of equality and diversity is understood, promoted and celebrated. The college community represents the individual and diverse identities of boarders and this uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and understanding.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' contribution to the running of the college and boarding houses is outstanding. There is an excellent range of channels available to boarders to express their views and feelings. They feel they can make comments about the running of the house, give their ideas and as a result actively influence change. Boarders each have a team of house staff and a personal tutor who oversee and co-ordinate their care and education. The house staff play a key role, guiding the spiritual and moral development of each boarder while promoting strength, confidence and respect for others. Boarders comments include; 'staff are great you can talk to any of them when you have a worry or a concern and they really do listen.' 'Boarding is an enjoyable and friendly experience' and 'I really enjoy boarding.'

New boarders receive a sound induction to the college and boarding facilities. The college has a strong focus on promoting effective and supportive networks. This view is shared by parents who state. 'We are delighted with the boarding at Denstone. My daughter gains a great deal from the experience; she is happy, enthusiastic and asked to board.'

Boarders are actively encouraged to have appropriate contact with friends and family. All boarders have access to email, other on-line communication and in-house telephones as well as via their own mobiles. The college understands the value and importance of communication and contact with parents.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The standard of boarding accommodation across the college overall is good, however, there are many outstanding features. There are established strategic plans which ensure a rolling programme of maintenance and refurbishment. All the houses retain their own individuality and character. For example, some are modern built boarding houses, while others are within the grade 2 listed part of the main college building. Boarding ranges in quality; however, most areas provide excellent accommodation which exceeds national minimum standards. This includes all girls boarding accommodation and both junior and sixth form boys boarding. The middle school boys boarding accommodation as identified on the strategic plan for refurbishment is currently going through a transformation with the aim to create another boarding environment of equal high standards. One boarder said 'I could not be at a better school, we have a great time and there are fantastic facilities here. There is no better place to board than Denstone.'

All houses are cleaned and maintained to a high standard by dedicated teams of ancillary and maintenance staff. Boarders can choose to decorate their bedrooms, which can help to maintain a homely atmosphere. Many bedrooms are personalised,

which helps boarders take pride in their surroundings as well as helping them to develop ownership of the environment.

The college has acknowledged, through its development plan, that the bathroom and toilet areas within south wing and some of those within north wing are in need of some redecoration and refurbishment in order to match the outstanding level of provision witnessed throughout the rest of the college. The college, however, has an excellent maintenance provision, that is well organised and ensures that work is prioritised to primarily ensure that the health and safety of boarders is appropriately maintained. This maintenance team provides exceptionally high quality work. For example, they have completed the recent building work, like the new mezzanine floors within middle school dormitories, to an excellent standard of construction.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

There is strong and effective leadership both of the college and of boarding. Boarders' enriched care and educational experiences are underpinned by the college's coherent philosophy, values and sound leadership at all levels. Boarding is an integral part of the college and all the senior management team and the governing body take an active and informed interest in monitoring the welfare of boarders. Staffing ratios are good and enable staff to have an appropriate knowledge of boarders' individual needs and circumstances at all times. Most importantly these ratios appropriately enable staff to supervise and support boarders. Good communication between the headmaster and his senior management team ensures that any emerging trends from the monitoring of risk assessments, accidents and serious behavioural issues are highlighted and appropriately acted upon to safeguard boarders' welfare.

There are development plans in place to improve practice and a strong commitment to provide the very best for the boarders. Forward planning is detailed and thorough and includes challenging targets to be achieved. All staff receive a comprehensive induction both centrally and through the heads of boarding houses. Staff at all levels are actively encouraged to attend external training courses and the professional review system successfully identifies areas for professional development.

Boarding houses are organised and operated extremely well, they are focused on the needs of the boarders and are warm welcoming and nurturing. The current boarding arrangement contributes effectively to boarders' welfare, with all of the houses working closely together to ensure that experiences for all boarders are focused to their needs, abilities and capabilities. The college has a statement of boarding principles and practice. The handbooks are given to all parents and boarders. These are also available on the college website, alongside all the important college policies. This demonstrates that the college has an open and transparent working ethos.

The college has a well established crisis management plan that anticipates a wide range of foreseeable incidents or crises. The crisis management plan names

individuals undertaking specific roles and appropriately allocates responsibilities with specific timescales.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All of the college's recording systems take account of potential needs in relation to a boarder's diversity such as identity, race, culture and religion. The college provides an environment where the value of equality and diversity is understood, promoted and celebrated.

The boarding community is made up of students who live far and wide. However, there are many local students who choose to board because of the facilities and excellent opportunities that boarding provides. This view is confirmed by many parents with one parent stating. 'Fantastic school and facilities, we are only 35 minutes drive and our daughter is a boarder at Denstone.'