

Harrogate Ladies College

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Monica Hargreaves
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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

Harrogate Ladies College is an independent boarding and day school for girls aged 11 to 18 years. The school is situated within walking distance of the centre of Harrogate and is close to local shops and amenities.

There are four boarding houses. Three houses provide boarding to girls from all year groups and girls are accommodated in bedrooms according to age. The fourth house is specifically for sixth form girls in their last year of boarding. Each boarding house has common rooms and a well-equipped kitchen.

All the facilities in the school are campus-based and include rehearsal facilities, an indoor swimming pool, tennis courts and dining halls.

At the time of this inspection, there were 123 girls boarding, including flexi-boarders.

Summary

This was an announced inspection that involved an assessment of the school's performance in all outcome areas. The visit included a review of recommendations made at the previous inspection, the details of which are outlined in the section below.

Ofsted inspectors were accompanied by a boarding schools additional inspector. Views of boarders and their parents were obtained through written questionnaires and the inspectors also had opportunities to speak to many boarders and staff, individually and in small groups, during the inspection. Inspectors visited all of the boarding houses.

Overall, the school provides good quality boarding and has many areas of strength. The headmistress provides strong leadership in the school and is well supported by the governing body. There have been a number of recent improvements in boarding, which have been well received by both boarders and staff.

The health needs of boarders are met very well and they are protected and kept safe. Staff have a very good understanding of the boarders in their care and boarders say that they are supported very well. Boarders have many opportunities to make their views known and feel that their opinions are listened to. There is a strong commitment to valuing diversity and promoting equality of opportunity and fostering a sense of community and integration. Boarders, who are from diverse cultural backgrounds, achieve well.

None of the recommendations that have been made as a result of this inspection are serious welfare concerns.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

A number of recommendations arose from the last inspection and the school has taken action to address all the shortfalls identified at that visit.

Policies have been reviewed and updated so that the school now has a range of policies, that fully meet the standards.

All staff across the school are trained in safeguarding to a level that is appropriate for their work, so that they understand their responsibilities in relation to protecting the girls in the school. Staff also receive instruction in fire procedures so that they know how to evacuate girls safely from the school.

Staff have a good understanding of the need to protect the privacy of boarders and girls themselves say that their privacy is respected.

The school has a sound procedure to ensure that all staff recruited to the school are vetted and assessed as safe. Visitors are checked and provided with a badge to confirm this. A record of all visitors to the school is kept. These systems protect boarders.

Health and safety matters are managed well. There are clear risk assessments in place to ensure that hazards are eliminated or minimised; fire and electrical equipment is regularly tested and all rooms have been fitted with window restrictors. The crisis management plan is detailed and has been shown to be effective. Boarding houses are secure and well maintained. These measures protect boarders.

There is a school council that includes representatives from different year groups, including girls from the boarding community. This enables all the girls to make their views known.

There is a strong emphasis on valuing diversity in the school. The headmistress has developed specific policies to address these issues and the culture of the school promotes inclusion. Practice demonstrates that girls are valued as individuals and that cultural diversity is celebrated.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The health needs of boarders are promoted through established and effective systems.

Boarders are encouraged to develop a healthy lifestyle and are given age appropriate information and guidance through the school's personal, social, health and citizenship education programme. The school has policies in place on countering major risks to health, which are followed in practice. These covers matters such as alcohol and substance misuse and smoking. The school rules on these issues are clear to all the boarders.

Information about boarders' health is obtained from their parents before they come to the school and permission is sought from parents regarding the delivery of first aid, medication and medical care. The school has recently produced documents for parents of boarders from overseas in different languages, such as Cantonese, to ensure that the information that is held is accurate.

The school has a well-equipped health centre that is staffed by three registered nurses, who are available throughout the day and who provide an on-call service, so that boarders have access to health care when they need it. Health centre staff hold up-to-date and detailed records and, where appropriate, health care plans on boarders. They have oversight of all medicines that are brought into the school and monitor health records that are kept in boarding

houses, including accident records. Medicines are stored securely in locked facilities in boarding houses and records are in good order.

Boarding staff understand their responsibility to monitor the health and well-being of the boarders. They confirm that they work closely with the nursing staff, who are always available for advice and guidance on health issues. Where specific medical treatment is required for individual boarders, training has been provided by housemistresses; boarding house staff are also trained in first aid, so that they understand how to care for boarders in an emergency. Boarders are able to see one of two doctors, who are attached to a local GP surgery and who attend the school twice a week. Boarders comment that they are looked after very well if they are ill and that the nurses at school are 'really lovely'.

There are appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that boarders have access to additional health care services when a need is identified. For example, nursing staff have developed strong links with psychological services. Girls also have access to a counsellor who comes to the health centre every week.

Boarders are provided with good quality meals. The catering manager is very experienced and qualified and has an excellent understanding of how to provide a balanced and healthy diet. The latest report from the Environmental Health Service judged the school provision to be excellent. Boarders are provided with fresh fruit at every meal and also in their houses and can make drinks and snacks in the evenings in the boarding house. Boarding staff in all houses provide boarders with the opportunity to cook and boarders say that they enjoy baking and making pizzas. As part of their preparation for independence, girls in their last year in boarding have frequent opportunities to cook meals. They prepare their own breakfast in house and cook for their friends, which they enjoy very much. Mealtimes generally are pleasant social occasions, where friends have the opportunity to meet informally.

The majority of boarders spoken with commented that they think the meals are healthy and that they have greatly improved, particularly the lunches. However, they also felt that the choices at supper are limited and that they would appreciate more frequent opportunities to have meals that reflect their cultural background.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There is a sound understanding of safeguarding within the school. The safeguarding policy is robust and has recently been reviewed by the headmistress. She is the designated person responsible for coordinating child protection concerns and she has an excellent understanding of her responsibilities. All staff have received training in child protection issues at a level that is appropriate for their role in the school. Staff are aware of the process to follow in reporting any allegations or suspicions of abuse.

There are clear policies in place regarding the management of behaviour and discipline, including an effective policy on countering bullying. There are also clear written criteria for the use of sanctions and punishments. Boarders say that the rules are fair. They also report that bullying is not an issue and there is clear evidence to confirm this. Girls throughout the school behave very well; they are respectful of each other and staff and polite and welcoming to visitors.

Boarders are able to have private time alone and staff are aware of their responsibilities to respect their privacy when entering bedrooms. Boarders themselves confirm that their privacy is respected. There are clear procedures for dealing with formal complaints from parents or others involved with the school and for responding to issues raised by boarders. Boarders say that they would feel confident about taking a formal complaint to the headmistress, although they have not had to do so.

The arrangements for managing health and safety issues within the school are good. There is a robust schedule for ensuring that fire and electrical equipment is checked at regular intervals. All activities are risk assessed and the buildings and grounds within the school are regularly checked, so that potential hazards are eliminated or minimised. The school has a designated maintenance team, with a good range of skills and these staff ensure that the school campus is well maintained and secure. Boarders take part in regular fire drills and are clear about what to do in the event of an emergency at the school. Boarding houses are kept secure to prevent unauthorised individuals gaining access to them. Boarders say that they feel very safe.

The school has good staff recruitment and vetting procedures that protect boarders from the risk of contact with unsafe adults. There is good evidence that staff are properly vetted before they start work. However there are some shortfalls in the systems; there is no written confirmation of the telephone conversations that actually take place with referees to verify references and at the time of this visit, the records were not easily accessible, making information difficult to find. The headmistress, who is newly appointed to the school, confirmed she is currently reviewing the way that these records are maintained.

All visitors to the school are required to wear a badge and their identity is checked. Staff challenge individuals on the school grounds who are not known to them. The school has good links with the local community police who make routine visits to the school to confirm that there are no concerns about safety. These measures promote the safety of boarders.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders feel that they are supported very well by staff, both academically and personally. They identify a wide range of staff across the school who they can approach, for example housemistresses, tutors, the independent counsellor, nurses and the school chaplain. The staff have an in-depth knowledge of the boarders in their care, so they are able to identify any changes to behaviours that indicate stress or upset. Boarders feel confident about talking to staff. They say that staff are approachable and make many positive comments about them, for example, 'they know us as individuals', 'they take an interest in you' and they 'are happy to take the time to support you'.

There is a strong commitment across the school to promoting equality of opportunity and to fostering a sense of community and integration. Policies and practice reflect this ethos. There is a broad enrichment programme appropriate for each year group that is constantly updated. The school offers boarders an excellent range of additional activities, including sports, music and drama enabling them to develop their individual talents and interests.

Girls are encouraged to be involved in the wider community and to understand and value different cultures and religions. Staff are sensitive to the different and varied needs of the boarders and their different cultural backgrounds. The school provides excellent support to

students for whom English is an additional language. Information for parents is provided in additional languages, boarders are encouraged to pursue their own religion and different cultural festivals are celebrated. Boarders from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds are well integrated within each boarding house.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are good systems in place to provide boarders with the opportunity to contribute their views to the practice of boarding. For example, each house has a suggestion box, there are regular house meetings and there is a school council, which has representatives from different year groups, including the boarding community. The headmistress has weekly lunches with different groups of students and visits the boarding houses regularly. Boarders are very positive about these arrangements. Heads of houses have recently been appointed, so that older boarders can consult with younger boarders and help them to make their views known. Boarders are confident that they are listened to and give examples of things that have changed as a result of consultation, for example the re-introduction of the Sunday brunch.

Boarders are able to maintain regular contact with families and friends through the use of telephone, email and letter. There is a pay phone in every house that is situated so that boarders can use it in private and boarders are also able to use their mobile phones in private. Comments received from parents indicate that they feel that communication with the school is 'much improved'.

There is an induction programme to introduce new boarders to the school. Information about boarding generally and about the specific boarding houses, is given to girls so that they can understand the routine of the school and the boarding house. Boarders speak positively about the 'buddy system' set up to introduce them to boarding, but also say that 'we don't need this for long as all the house and school helps you to settle'.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarding accommodation is good. Houses are well maintained throughout and the standard of cleanliness is extremely high. The maintenance team have a rolling programme within the school to ensure that accommodation is kept in good order. Urgent repairs are attended to promptly. Bedrooms and communal areas are spacious, light and airy and the houses are comfortably furnished. Kitchens in all houses are well equipped; bath and shower rooms and toilets are sufficient in number for the needs of boarders. The boarding houses are different in character, but provide broadly similar facilities and are maintained to the same standard, so that there is no discrepancy of quality in the boarding provision. Boarders make positive comments about the quality of their accommodation.

There are suitable arrangements in place for all boarders to keep any personal possessions safe. Sixth formers have lockable cabinets and girls in lower years use lockable boxes. Although many of the older boarders have their own arrangements for pocket money, such as bank accounts and cash cards, there is an appropriate system for distributing pocket money for those boarders who do not. Boarding staff have secure cabinets where they can store boarders' valuable possessions, such as money and passports. Boarders themselves are confident that their

boarders in their houses are safe and say that they 'trust each other' and do not feel the need to lock things away.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school promotes equality of opportunity and fosters mutual respect and understanding between girls of all backgrounds, cultures and religions. Girls are encouraged to develop their individual talents. One parent commented that 'every child is treated individually and the best brought out of them, whatever that may be'. Boarders believe strongly that they are treated as individuals, that staff understand them and work hard to help them to achieve. There is clear evidence that the cultural diversity of girls is valued and celebrated and that they are encouraged to take an interest in their local community and in the wider world. Girls say that they generally get on very well and feel the school 'is a community, where people look after each other'.

The school's principles and practice in relation to boarding are described in a number of key documents that are made available to parents, boarders and staff. Key policies have been recently updated. There is clear evidence from this inspection that the information that is available about boarding accurately reflects the current practice in the school.

The headmistress has developed a robust management plan, which addresses a range of potential crises. This was tested during recent extreme weather conditions and was proved to be very effective.

The organisation of boarding makes a strong contribution to the welfare of boarders. There is a vertical boarding structure in three houses and boarders are accommodated in bedrooms according to age. This system was recently introduced by the new headmistress. Some of the older boarders said that at first they were unsure about how successful it would be. However, in practice the structure appears to be working very well and the majority of boarders made very positive comments about the new system. There is no evidence of inconsistencies between houses in implementing policies and guidelines.

The headmistress provides strong leadership in the school and is very well supported by the governing body. She communicates very well with the governors, staff and boarders, and regularly monitors all the required records to identify any issues that require action. This enables her to safeguard the well-being of boarders.

Staff with boarding duties are trained and have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. Their duties are clearly defined in their job descriptions and they have access to a boarding handbook and to the school's policies and procedures to support their work. Their performance in boarding is formally appraised by senior staff and they meet together regularly as a group. These meetings provide them with additional support. The headmistress is involved in boarding staff meetings and regularly visits boarding houses, to support staff and monitor the welfare of boarders.

Boarders are appropriately supervised at the school. Each boarding house has a designated housemistress and assistant housemistress. Boarders say that they are able to find a member of house staff when they need one and there is evidence that there are sufficient staff on duty for the number of girls accommodated. There have been recent staff changes within the boarding

teams leaving one house with one housemistress and no designated deputy. Although there are informal arrangements for support for this member of staff, there is no formal rota in place to provide cover at specified times. There is no evidence however, that this is compromising the welfare of boarders and the headmistress is addressing this situation.

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):

- review the meals that are provided to boarders at supper to ensure that there is sufficient choice and to enable boarders to have more frequent opportunities to have meals that reflect their cultural background (breach of national minimum standard 24.1)
- ensure that there is written evidence to confirm that references are verified and that staff recruitment records are maintained consistently (breach of national minimum standard 38.2)
- ensure that staff supervising boarders outside teaching time are sufficient in number and deployment for the age, number and needs of boarders. (breach of national minimum standard 31.1)