

Bruton School for Girls

Inspection report for Boarding School

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Inspector	Jennifer Reed
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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

Bruton School for Girls is an independent day and boarding school; it incorporates Sunny Hill Preparatory School. The school welcomes boarders from preparatory Year 4 onwards (from the age of eight years), and just over 100 of the school's pupils are currently boarders. The school offers full, weekly and flexi-boarding provision.

Boarding accommodation is provided within the three boarding houses sited on the school campus. Younger girls are accommodated in the Old Vicarage, Year 10 girls in Cumberlege House and Year 11 and sixth form girls in Highcroft House.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection to assess the school against the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

The overall standard of boarding provision is good, with some outstanding features. Boarders benefit from the excellent individual support and care they receive, and relationships between girls and staff are positive. Boarders are kept safe and the girls are happy and enjoy living in the three, well-organised and well-managed boarding houses. The school's boarding arrangements provide cohesive and age-appropriate provision for boarders. As the boarders make their transitions through the different houses, they are given increasing opportunities to develop their skills and independence as they grow towards adulthood.

Improvements since the last inspection

No recommendations were made at the previous inspection in 2008.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders' health and welfare benefit from the robust health promotion activities and interventions within the school's daily operation. Practice and support given to pupils are underpinned by a good range of policies and guidance available to staff and information and literature available to pupils. The registered sister takes an active role in helping boarders to understand their health needs and provides a knowledgeable and sympathetic response to the arising health issues of individual pupils. Boarders also have the opportunity to look at issues of good health through

the school's age-appropriate personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship programme. Furthermore, the school asks specialist health workers to come and speak to the girls about particular health issues, for example, drugs and substance abuse; the girls say these talks are helpful and very informative.

Prior to boarding, and thereafter on an annual basis, the school seeks relevant medical history for each boarder. This process identifies significant health and welfare issues and gains parental consent for the school to arrange medical treatment and give emergency first aid and over-the-counter medication to each boarder. All boarding staff and key personnel throughout the school are trained in first aid. This good practice ensures that each girl receives appropriate medical care and support and immunisations can be arranged and kept up to date. Sister guides boarding staff in the administration of any medication within the boarding provision and on a weekly basis, checks each boarding house's records of prescribed and non-prescribed medication held, providing good oversight and safety in the health care of each boarder. Medication kept is securely stored and girls are able to self-medicate if this is appropriate. In addition, sister takes responsibility for making sure that all first aid boxes kept within the school, boarding houses and taken on external trips are well supplied and items kept are in date. A written record is kept of all accidents and injuries sustained and these are closely monitored by senior staff to safeguard pupils' welfare.

The school draws up basic welfare plans for any boarder who is identified as having particular support needs to ensure that individual physical and emotional health needs are well met. However, welfare plans are not agreed by parents, as is recommended by best practice. Nevertheless, the school keeps in close contact with parents about their child's emerging health issues and staff vigilantly monitor each boarder's health and well-being. Boarders can easily access the sister in the school's medical centre, which provides four beds for boarders who may be unwell during the day. Generally, boarders return to their families or guardians if they are likely to continue to feel unwell for a longer period, or alternatively, for minor complaints, they are looked after at night within the boarding houses. The school is able to make arrangements for particularly unwell boarders to remain within the medical centre at night if this is necessary, with additional nursing care provided by either sister or the regularly used 'bank' nurse. All boarders are registered with the local doctor's surgery and a female doctor is contracted to hold a twice weekly surgery at the school. The school also makes the necessary arrangements for boarders to receive any dental and optical treatment they may need. Pupils can self-refer by text or email, or through discussion with staff, to access the school counsellor who works from the medical centre. Most boarders report that they are looked after very well by the school when they are ill or distressed. One boarder said, 'Boarding is a fun place to be and there is loads of comfort when you are upset.'

The school's catering arrangements provide excellent meals which are very well received by the boarders who have raised no complaints at all about the quality of the food they eat. Menus are varied and well balanced, providing boarders with a sufficient choice that caters for all tastes and takes account of individual dietary needs. Themed food days are regularly arranged, for example, celebrating German

Christmas, Spanish cuisine and Chinese New Year. Food is well presented and healthy eating options are available at each meal. Catering arrangements are very well managed, with effort being made to source locally produced food items to provide tasty and nutritious meals. All catering staff complete training in food hygiene. A suggestion book is kept which enables pupils to give their views about what they wish to eat and identifies which meals they prefer. The comments written are very positive and show that pupils really do enjoy their meals; for example, 'Your soup is the nicest I have ever tasted' and 'The food today was amazing, thank you, and can we have the cheese omelette again soon.' Meals are generally eaten in the dining room which provides a spacious eating area; there are no long queues of pupils waiting to be served and mealtimes are pleasant, well-ordered social occasions.

Boarders have access to drinking water and facilities to make hot drinks and snacks within boarding house common rooms. Highcroft boarding house also has an additional kitchen where sixth form girls can choose to cook their own meals if they prefer. Sixth form girls can opt to study to achieve a certificate in food hygiene.

Satisfactory laundry facilities are provided for boarders' clothing and bedding.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders' welfare is protected and safeguarded by the outstanding level of care and support girls receive while living at the school. For example, the school's anti-bullying policy is excellent and measures to prevent bullying are effective. Boarders are aware of the school's zero-tolerance approach to bullying with the issues being fully discussed in assemblies and PSHE lessons. The school recognises the different forms that bullying can take, including cyber-bullying. The school's information technology policies and user agreements, which are signed by both parents and boarders, allow the head of welfare and boarding to appropriately monitor boarders' internet usage which contributes to safeguarding their welfare. Only a very low number of boarders identify bullying as having been an issue in boarding. Staff have addressed these rare episodes of unacceptable behaviour promptly and efficiently to resolve the matter. Boarding housemistresses are extremely vigilant in monitoring the interactions between girls in the boarding houses and they make sure that any friction is quickly addressed. Girls say they are confident that bullying is not a problem in the boarding houses and say they feel safe in the school.

All staff complete induction and update training in child protection issues and staff demonstrate a clear understanding of child protection issues and safeguarding matters. Staff show competence in identifying any welfare concerns, however minor, and these matters are appropriately shared and responded to, ensuring that boarders' welfare is promoted and protected. The head of welfare and boarding is the school's designated child protection officer; she has completed a range of multi-agency child protection training and is knowledgeable about safeguarding matters, working in partnership and working within local reporting protocols. She is supported

in her role by the headteacher's oversight of all welfare concerns and the designated deputy child protection officer. Good liaison has been established with the Local Authority Designated Officer and safeguarding concerns are shared in accordance with Local Safeguarding Children Board guidance, ensuring pupils are protected. Pupils benefit from instruction in how to safely use the internet and social networking sites; internet usage is vigilantly monitored to ensure girls are safeguarded. The school has a missing person's policy and staff know what to do should a boarder go missing; there is no record of such an occurrence in the last three years.

Boarders' behaviour is generally excellent within boarding houses and sanctions are rarely given. Boarders receive praise and encouragement for their achievements and their progress and where necessary, staff will speak with individuals about any unacceptable behaviour. This is usually sufficient to help boarders make changes to improve the situation. Most boarders believe that discipline is fairly given in their houses and should any misdemeanour occur in school hours, this matter is dealt with by teaching staff and the matter is not taken to the boarding house, giving boarders parity with day pupils. The school has a policy which guides staff in the use of physical intervention and restraint; at the time of the inspection, it had not been necessary to employ these techniques to manage discipline.

The school has a clear complaints policy and process; the formal complaints process has not been instigated since one matter dealt with by the headteacher in 2008. Any representations or complaints made by either parents or boarders about boarding practices have been satisfactorily resolved at an informal level. Housemistresses deal promptly with any complaint and communication between boarding staff and parents and staff and the girls is excellent. Issues raised are taken seriously and all are recorded and monitored to make sure that the process is transparent, fully dealt with and resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

Fire safety measures taken within the school are excellent and boarders are well protected from the risk of fire. Regular fire drills are carried out at the beginning of each term to ensure that staff and any new boarders know how to safely evacuate the building in an emergency situation. Fire safety checks and the school's fire risk assessment are rigorous and comprehensive. A good number of staff are trained to fire warden level and all staff undertake fire awareness training.

All health and safety matters within the school and boarding houses are robustly monitored and managed by the school's well qualified and experienced bursar and estates bursar. Risk assessments for the school's premises, grounds, activities and trips are exceptionally well completed, showing due regard for both individual children and group needs. For example, junior boarders accommodated in Old Vicarage are always escorted by staff between the boarding house and the main school site, and when crossing the road to a sports area. Pupils know that high risk areas, such as the school kitchens and swimming pool area, are out of bounds unless supervised by an adult.

Swipe card security locks are fitted throughout the school's buildings to keep pupils safe on the open school campus. Additionally, all staff carry photo identity cards to

enable them to identify themselves to pupils. These measures taken ensure that the boarding houses are secure from public intrusion and no visitor can enter the house without the housemistress's permission. Visitors are appropriately supervised when in boarding accommodation to ensure girls are protected. Boarding houses are fitted with good quality blinds and curtains at windows which provide the girls with privacy from outside. Older boarders report that they have sufficient privacy in boarding houses and say that staff are respectful of their right to privacy; staff take care to knock and seek permission to enter girls' bedrooms. Several of the younger boarders said that they felt there was not always enough privacy for changing in the shared larger rooms; however, they are able to change in the bathrooms.

Pupils are safeguarded by the school's robust approach to recruitment and selection procedures. The school adheres to and implements safer recruitment practices. The school's single central register and staff files are very well managed and clearly show that all of the required safety checks have been carried out on all new employees prior to the commencement of their duties. Particular diligence is shown in the recruitment of the overseas gap students who work within the boarding houses, to make sure that thorough checks are made as quickly as possible and adequate induction and supervision arrangements are put in place, ensuring boarders' welfare is safeguarded. There is a written agreement between the school and any adult not employed by the school but living in the same building as boarding accommodation, for example, a spouse, which specifies their guidance on contact with boarders and their responsibility to supervise their visitors.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders receive an outstanding level of personal support from the committed boarding staff team who work hard to make sure boarders are well looked after. The girls are also able to seek the advice and support of any member of the school's staff. Most boarders say that their housemistresses know them well and they can always find someone to talk to about their concerns or problems. The boarders sometimes choose to talk with the gap students who are nearer their own age, about minor issues, or sometimes prefer to speak with the sister in the medical centre. The school employs a counsellor who the girls can contact themselves through text or electronic mail messages to set up an appointment; this maintains their independence and ensures confidentiality. Alternatively, members of staff or parents may also make appointments for pupils to meet with the counsellor to discuss particular concerns. In addition, the school has an independent listener, who lives locally and visits the school regularly; she is known to the girls and her contact details are easily accessible to boarders.

The school's policies and practices demonstrate commitment to equal opportunities and the celebration of diversity. Boarders do not report any inappropriate discrimination within the school and there are many good examples of how the excellent care of boarders reflects the school's sensitivity to differing needs. For instance, a group of girls from Hong Kong have written a school information booklet

in their own language, and in one boarding house, each overseas boarder is paired with an English boarder, their 'chum' and they all have tea together as a group each week. The school celebrates diversity and marks special cultural events with special meals and activities. These practices help new overseas boarders settle into the school and boarding environment. Within the teaching staff, a number of persons provide individual boarders with particular help and support to help them fit in. For example, tutors, the English as an additional language teacher, the skills development department and the PSHE teaching staff.

All staff and visiting workers have undergone full recruitment and selection checks to ensure that they are suitable to work with children and they have all completed training in child protection. Staff know how to appropriately share any concern shared with them that may be perceived as a safeguarding matter, ensuring that pupils are protected. One girl summed up the excellent support available by saying, 'The staff are always on your side and you always have someone to turn to. It is the best school ever!'

The school provides a good range of activities outside of teaching hours which the boarders enjoy. Girls have choice in what they do and they have sufficient free time each day to relax or spend time with their friends in the boarding houses. A younger girl shared her view about her leisure time by saying, 'Everyone is happy and there are activities planned for us; this is a great place to live.' Older girls have the privilege of spending free time in the local community without staff supervision.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are able to formally express their opinions about the daily operation of their boarding house at the regularly held house meetings. Girls share their ideas about how they would like to spend their leisure time within the boarding house, make arrangements to celebrate different cultural events and make comments about boarding provision and how this could be improved. For example, some girls say that they do not wish to attend Sunday prayers or services even though this practice is clearly documented within the school literature and known to boarders and their parents on admission. The minutes of these meetings are available and distributed to the senior management team. Girls have also been asked to share their views about the suitability of prospective staff, following meeting with them. The school council does not offer an effective forum for boarders to share their views; it has not been convened in this academic year and many boarders did not know about its function.

Boarders are able to maintain contact with their family and friends. Many boarders have their own mobile phones or they can use the boarding house phone to speak with their families. Electronic mail messages are a favoured option for communicating with friends and family. The use of social networking sites for girls who are aged over 13 years, is closely monitored by the school to ensure boarders are safeguarded. The boarding staff make sure that they inform parents of any significant welfare concerns relating to their child at school and communication with

parents is good. External contact numbers and appropriate helpline telephone numbers are prominently displayed in boarding houses, ensuring that every boarder has the opportunity to speak with someone outside of the boarding house about any problem which they do not want to discuss within the school.

The induction of new boarders is thoughtfully carried out. Prospective boarders can come to the boarding house to spend a 'taster' night, to see if they would like to become a boarding pupil. Furthermore, day pupils are given the option of flexible or casual boarding, where they can spend occasional nights in boarding accommodation. On arrival, new boarders are given a 'buddy' who supports them during their initial period in boarding until they form their own friendships. Boarding staff vigilantly monitor how well new boarders are settling in and sensitively deal with any episodes of homesickness.

Sound relationships exist between the boarding staff and the girls and most boarders say they can easily speak to their boarding staff. There is no favouritism in boarding; girls say they are treated fairly and are well supported and looked after.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders are provided with lockable storage facilities where they keep their possessions and valuables safe. Older boarders accommodated within two boarding houses report that their personal belongings are safe and are not interfered with. However, some younger boarders say that their belongings are not always safe although this was not confirmed as an identified problem within this particular boarding house. All boarding houses are kept secure from public intrusion by the fitted swipe card security system. The school has a sound system in place for the keeping and distribution of boarders' pocket money; girls sign the record kept of their transactions.

The school provides three boarding houses for girls; Old Vicarage, Cumberlege and Highcroft. Old Vicarage accommodates girls in the preparatory school and in senior school forms one, two and three (Years 4 to 9). Here, the bedrooms vary by year group with the youngest girls sharing rooms with small groups of friends and the older girls having their own personal space within a shared room. Cumberlege provides boarding accommodation for senior girls in form four (Year 10) and girls share double rooms or have single rooms. Highcroft is divided into two separate areas, accommodating the fifth form (Year 11) students and the sixth form students (Years 12 and 13). Every girl has her own room.

Boarders have sufficient storage in their rooms and they enjoy being able to personalise their rooms with their posters and personal belongings. The common rooms are known as 'cosies' and they provide a comfortable area where the girls can relax, socialise and watch their favourite television programmes together. Each has a kitchenette with facilities for the girls to make snacks and hot drinks. Highcroft has two common rooms, plus a separate kitchen, dining room and social area where girls

can invite their guests. Cleaning standards within each boarding house are high. The school campus and grounds provide plenty of well-maintained outside space for boarders to enjoy in good weather.

The school's boarding arrangements provide cohesive and age-appropriate provision for boarders. As the boarders make their transitions through the different houses, they are given increasing opportunities to develop their skills and independence as they grow towards adulthood. Boarders appreciate the distinct ethos and organisation of each boarding house and say that the houses are being run 'just right' to meet the needs of the boarders living there. All houses are well furnished and decorated and the Highcroft and Cumberlege boarders say they enjoy living in their boarding accommodation. In comparison, several of the Old Vicarage boarders thought their accommodation would benefit from some improvement. The main issue raised by boarders about their accommodation was the poor condition and maintenance of some of the showers fitted in Old Vicarage and Highcroft. The school's maintenance plan shows that some of the Highcroft showers will be improved by the end of the Easter break; longer term plans for the refurbishment of Old Vicarage showers were in place at the time of this inspection.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Although the school is based on Christian principles, it is an inclusive school and boarders of other faiths are welcomed and diversity is celebrated. The school has effective and supportive systems for boarders whose first language is not English which meets the needs of boarders. Excellent individual support is provided to each boarder to help them fit in with due regard given to enabling each girl to develop her own unique character and abilities. The views of all boarders are considered equally and they are fairly treated.

The school provides a range of information and literature for prospective boarders and their parents about the school's boarding principles which is contained within various school documents, Boarding School Association booklets and on the school's website. The 'girls only' section of the website provides user-friendly information for new boarders which helps them to understand how the school operates.

Boarding arrangements are well organised and managed, with clear lines of responsibility and accountability. The organisation of boarding houses provides appropriate protection and separation of boarders by age and there are no major discrepancies or differences in boarding practice between the different houses. The boarding manual provides staff with clear guidance about their duties. The headteacher has systems in place to monitor welfare provision and trends within the school and the boarding houses and significant matters are reported to the school's governing body. The 'schoolbase' data system and staff usage of electronic mail messaging ensures timely communication across the whole school, and facilitates a holistic response to be made in meeting the arising needs of individual boarders.

Senior boarding staff undertake relevant training in the management and practice of boarding, ensuring that boarders' welfare is safeguarded and promoted. All staff complete comprehensive induction training and subsequent training in core areas, contributing to the provision of a very competent boarding staff team. The head of welfare and boarding meets with the housemistresses as a group on a weekly basis, providing a forum which enables practice discussion and supports a consistent approach to looking after the boarders. Boarders are adequately supervised both during the day and night-time hours by a small boarding staff team, who work very hard, demonstrating their dedication to provide an excellent level of support to each boarder.

The school has planned responses to a range of foreseeable major incidents. Plans in place work well, as demonstrated by the school's response to managing recent severe weather conditions, ensuring the promotion and safeguarding of boarders' welfare. Risk assessments are completed to an excellent standard and reasonable action is taken to reduce identified risks. The bursar oversees all risk assessment processes to identify any issues requiring action; this vigilance contributes to keeping boarders safe. The school's learning approach to continuous improvement in risk assessment processes leads to better risk assessment and ultimately, better outcomes for pupils.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

- ensure that welfare plans written for any boarder with special welfare needs, or significant emotional or behavioural difficulties, or who does not see her parent or legal guardian at least three times a year, are agreed with a parent (NMS 17.2)
- ensure that all showers in boarding houses are adequately maintained (NMS 40.1)

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards.