

Truro School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Chris Passmore
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Date of last inspection	10 October 2006

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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

Truro School was founded in 1880, has links with the Methodist Independent Schools and full membership of the Headmasters' and Mistresses' Conference. It is the biggest co-educational Independent School in the County. It is sited above the City of Truro and extends to several acres in size. There are numerous outdoor games pitches, including one hard court area and an Astroturf pitch. Additionally there are two indoor sports and gym facilities and a fully covered swimming pool. There is also a theatre complex and Language centre on site. Weekly, flexi and full boarding is offered by the school. There are two boarding houses, Malvern, the girls' boarding house is in the school grounds and Trennick, for boys, is part of the main school building. Each boarding house is managed by resident boarding staff who are also teachers.

Summary

The overall standard of boarding at Truro school is good with three areas judged as outstanding. There have been several changes to key personnel at the school since the last inspection. The number of boarders and boarding houses have reduced and most recently there have been key changes to the staffing of the girls' boarding house. Business systems have been revised and some are still in the process of bedding-in, whilst others are more established.

The school has engaged a business manager to market and promote boarding, but in a measured way and with an interest in promoting different strands of boarding to the more traditional. The experiences of the current boarding group are extremely positive with boarders welfare being well promoted and safeguarded. Boarders frequently described boarding in terms of being "home from home", "a community" and "a positive experience". Boarders appreciate the house staff describing them as "genuinely caring" and "very approachable" or "legend". They accept there have to be boundaries but described these as "very reasonable" and "fair". During the week boarders time is balanced between study, relaxation and activity. At weekends lifestyle is more relaxed and there are plenty of opportunities to enjoy trips, activities and outings in the local area.

The boarding accommodation is different in style but not in essential facilities. Both male and female boarders enjoy the atmosphere of their boarding house and have opportunities to visit each on a social basis. Boarders are able to influence how boarding is structured and particularly appreciate the changes made to weekend lifestyles. In their responses to questionnaires boarders used many superlatives to describe their boarding experience and these were reinforced in group and individual discussions. Comment such as "I love this place. It truly is a home from home and has created a whole new family for me" summarises the feelings of boarders conveyed throughout the inspection.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Many of the recommendations made at the last inspection have been superseded by changes in the establishment and key personnel. Others, such as risk assessments have been acted upon but because of further personnel changes have taken longer to implement fully and are so still bedding-in. There were no major issues in recommendations that had an immediate or potentially

serious impact on boarders safety and therefore it is judged that the school has acted appropriately and proportionately in addressing issues raised at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school has excellent arrangements in place to promote and manage boarders health and maintains very high levels of catering dining provision.

Healthy lifestyles are encouraged and supported in boarding through a balance of free time and structured activities, basic life skills training and weekly boarder involvement in lifestyle discussions led by house staff and other professionals. These range from topics such as personal healthcare, personal safety, substance use and abuse through to budgeting and personal financial management.

Two school nurses are employed to cover the school's working week and are on call throughout other times when boarders are on site. The nurses have very good communication systems in place between themselves and the boarding staff. New boarders visit the medical centre as part of their induction to see the facilities and hear about the range of services available. Individual health needs are well documented, information is shared appropriately and both prescribed and household medications are managed, maintained and monitored by the nurses. A local health practice provides the medical oversight and management of boarders ongoing health needs as well as being the referral point for any specialist health care services such as mental health or eating disorders. Any immunisation programmes are arranged between the school and the local health centre collaboratively.

The medical centre is open to all pupils during the school day not just for injury and illness but also for listening and advice purposes. There is a wide selection of health information leaflets available to pupils at the centre. Access to the school's independent listener can also be made from the medical centre with subsequent confidential appointments being undertaken. Staff throughout the school and boarding are trained in first aid and have access to regular first aid kits and equipment around the school and boarding houses. Key staff are specialist trained to use the portable defibrillation unit. All accidents are recorded at the medical centre and monitored weekly.

Nurses work with staff across the school, in boarding, form tutors, support and catering to monitor the health and welfare of boarders and provide a pro-active and pre-emptive approach to boarder and pupil health care. Recently they have been active in preparing strategies that can be quickly put into action in the event of any outbreak of serious winter illnesses.

Catering at the school is provided to an excellent standard. Pupils have a wide choice of meals available to them at lunchtime including, hot soups, main course choices, vegetarian options, lighter snack type meals, salad bar and sandwiches. Added to this is a choice of several hot and cold desserts or fresh fruit.

Boarders rated the meals very highly. They particularly enthused about breakfasts which regularly provide a choice of cereals, four hot food types, toast, spreads, fruit and yoghurts.

The catering arrangements at weekends have been adapted in response to boarders requests and lifestyle and now allow for a later breakfast and a roast evening meal on Saturdays. Brunch

on Sunday mornings was undoubtedly the most popular meal and everyone agreed that weekend catering, together with the more relaxed timescales made the weekend experiences much more enjoyable. There is a regular catering person working at weekends and boarders and house staff were unanimous in their appreciation of the effort and outcomes of her work.

The kitchen provides food boxes to the two boarding houses throughout the week and these consist of snack foods and some treat foods such as chocolate bars and biscuits together with stock bottles of milk and butter. Individual cartons of milk and bottled water are available and supplied to the houses as required. Boarders generally agreed that overall with a potential intake of three good cooked meals during the day plus snacks in the evenings, they were well provided for. In addition there is always fresh fruit available throughout the school day and in the boarding houses.

Catering is managed between the head chef and the catering manager who is also a qualified nutritionist. Menus are designed in advance and reflect a wide selection of balanced meals. Special diets are catered for but there were none required by boarders at the time of inspection. Boarders stated they could talk to catering staff whenever they needed to and if they had particular meal requests the kitchens would usually oblige them, provided they had sufficient notice. Food preparation, cooking and storage arrangements as well as catering practice is regulated by the district council and boarders use the original dining room for most of their meals, apart from weekday lunches.

The opening of new dining facilities adjacent to the original dining room has increased the ability of the school to provide a more efficient delivery at lunchtimes and means boarders' evening and weekend dining arrangements should be less disrupted because of other functions hosted by the school.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Arrangements to safeguard and protect pupils and boarders are good and practice is underpinned by robust policies and guidelines.

Boarders were clear that they were not being bullied and felt confident that the school would react quickly and positively to any incident that occurred. The school has held particular focus events to do with bullying, its nature and the current trends in types, such as cyber bullying. There is advice and encouragement built into such sessions to show how potential or actual victims can present themselves in a more assertive way.

Protection from abuse is well supported through robust policy, sound practice and whole school awareness training. There is a designated child protection co-ordinator to whom all staff would report any incidents or suspicions of abuse. The school has forged good, productive links with the Local Safeguarding Children Board and local safeguarding managers who have reported the school as having taken appropriate actions in response to concerns and complaints made. Boarding house staff take steps to know the whereabouts of boarders at key times throughout the day and evening, using role calls, signing-in/out books and the need for boarders to report and introduce visitors to the boarding houses. Visitors to the school are signed-in and given a visitor badge. They are then escorted around the site. Similar arrangements are in place for contractors working on the school site. Gentle, but appropriate, training in 'stranger danger' and personal safety is provided through discussion and Personal Social Health Education sessions

in boarding. Boarders are discouraged from going out alone. They can have stopovers and visits to other pupil's houses subject to both sets of parental agreement.

There are appropriate behaviour and discipline guidelines in place at the school. However, the approach to boarding rules and regulations is very much self-determined by boarders and the need for discipline is genuinely unnecessary beyond gentle verbal reminders. House staff do have an input to shaping of house rules and routines. This is done in consultation with boarders who plainly stated they felt any rules or behavioural expectations were reasonable and saw no reason why they would want to ruin a good deal. Both houses do have expectations on room tidiness and the younger year groups have a traffic light system of warnings. Beyond this there have been no behaviour reports made and no sanctions applied to any boarder this year.

Personal privacy in boarding is well respected. All boarders from fifth form up have single bedrooms, there are plenty of shower and toilet facilities and staff monitor boarders in a sensitive and non-intrusive way. Boarders responses to questionnaires and in discussion supported the fact that they felt their dignity and privacy was not compromised in boarding. They also knew how they could make complaints and stated they always knew the outcomes of any complaints or concerns raised with staff.

Safety arrangements in the boarding houses are good and regularly monitored. Each boarding house is covered by a fully automated fire detection and alarm system with appropriate fire fighting equipment in place throughout each building. There are regular fire drills with complete evacuations practiced in each boarding house at times when boarders are in place. They take place unannounced and at unsocial times for the sake of realism. Professional contractors are used to service and maintain these systems as well as other mains services such as mains electrical, portable electrical equipment, gas, boilers and water safety. Rooms are checked for safety aspects by staff and suspect equipment or circumstances checked. Premises safety is subject to individual buildings being risk assessed, there is a professionally prepared fire risk assessment for the site, all entrance doors to boarding accommodation are key-pad controlled and boarders access to high risk activity areas such as the swimming pool or fitness suite is limited to supervised sessions only.

Risk assessments for specific activities and more routine occurrences are in place. These have been revised since the last inspection and are now in the first review period. They are co-ordinated across the school by the estates manager who has responsibility for health & safety. They then form part of the school's health & safety committee agenda which in turn feeds into the board of governors. The full review of risk assessments is not complete therefore it was not possible to track assessments to evidence they are being updated as well as re-dated. There are examples of future high risk activities, such as ice skating and ski trips, being risk assessed with information from the venue being used to inform the compilation of the school's risk assessment.

The school has robust recruitment procedures in place. From a sample of files inspected it complies with the requirements of the national minimum standards and recommendations of the safer recruitment for schools handbook. Notes of interviews and selection varied in their detail between files sampled. Vetting checks are carried out on all employed staff, peripatetic staff, Gap students, resident spouses and governors. It was noted that two of the governors have not yet completed their CRB application forms. Each employed member of staff has a

single central record of checks and references and can be cross referenced to the Criminal Records Bureau disclosures spreadsheet kept by the school.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school provides boarders with a wide range of activities and opportunities, excels in providing support and practices an inclusive ethos which is apparent throughout the school.

Boarders reported having plenty of weekday evening clubs, activities and sports opportunities they can enjoy. Swimming, gym, fitness suite, lifestyle discussions, theatre and arts are all based on site and boarders have regular slots to enjoy these facilities under fully qualified supervision. There are also opportunities for spontaneous entertainment in the houses according to gender focus. Boarders have the opportunity to mix socially with local day students and those day boarders being introduced to the facility in after school clubs. 'Trennick football' on Thursday evenings and has become something of a legend in itself, and is enjoyed by boarders, staff and local day pupils alike. At weekends boarders reported they have a balance of free time and organised outings or activities. There are no compulsory prep times at weekends and lifestyles are more relaxed and homely. An increase in activities funding and careful budgeting by house staff enables more adventurous trips and activities to be arranged. Many are combined activities between both houses including for example an imminent go-karting event and a trip to The Eden Project ice skating. Boarders are also able to enjoy the natural local amenities of the area such as beaches and moor lands.

There are excellent support services available to boarders on an individual basis from a number of sources within the school and independent of the school. Boarders confirmed they felt well supported and cited adults they could turn to for advice and help if they felt the need. These included house staff, tutors, chaplain, headteacher and independent listener. Boarders know how to access services from the medical centre and the school's own pupil counselling service. This service is run by trained sixth formers for any pupil in the school. There were examples of boarders being supported through issues such as home sickness, bereavement, family health issues and traumatic events within the boarding community. House staff support boarders with their academic performance through encouragement and target setting for the younger boarders. There is good monitoring of boarders academic and overall performance within school but boarders stated there is no negative carry-over of issues from school into boarding. Through their questionnaire responses, in discussions and through observations it was very clear that boarders are exceptionally well supported individually and as a group. There is great mutual respect between staff and boarders and the boarding environment is encouraging, nurturing and fulfilling.

The school is an inclusive school and encourages pupils from other nationalities into boarding. many of these students will follow a complete course of education before entering Higher Education whilst others have traditionally come to the school for a limited time period from their home country as part of their educational development. The school encourages overseas students to be a full part of the school community and as boarders have opportunities to experience the local area, its culture, history and scenery. The school is based on Christian moral values and encourages all pupils to grow together as individuals as well as a community. Overseas boarders who contributed stated that though nervous when first arriving in Cornwall

were soon made to feel at home by the school and their fellow boarders and feel fully integrated into the school community.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have many opportunities and means by which they contribute to the way boarding is arranged. Because boarding numbers are relatively small and the boarding staff are a consistent group, boarders have regular individual opportunities to talk with staff. Boarders attend regular role call meetings in their houses at specific times through the day and these are used to share information, pass on news, raise issues and generally check on boarder's welfare. Boarders understand and explain they have access to various committee's, such as the dining room committee, as a vehicle by which they can contribute their views. There are also 'suggestions boxes' in the houses for boarders to use. Boarding house meetings do take place and minutes are taken. Actions arising from issues raised are then fed back. Mostly however boarders will approach staff direct to raise issues, express concerns or make suggestions. These include boarding house staff, catering staff, head of boarding and headteacher all of whom are in daily contact with boarders.

Contact with parents is not a problem and whilst there are pay phones available in the houses most boarders use more personal communication methods. There is wireless network access in the boarding houses and every pupil has an email account. Mobile phones and email are amongst the most popular communication methods used. The school is also looking into the logistics of enabling boarders to access a social network on a structured basis as another means of communication.

Boarders spoke well of the school's induction arrangements to boarding. There is a lot of pre-arrival contact between school and parents during which time there is a regular exchange of questions and information. The school's prospectus and statement of principles on boarding are available on line and boarders arrive ahead of the term start dates in order to have time to settle. There is usually a welcome party for new arrivals and parents where possible and these are well received. Boarders from overseas stated how much these events helped with their introductions to the school and reassured parents. The school also operates a 'buddy' system for new pupils in order to enable an easier introduction to the school.

As previously observed there is excellent awareness of individuality and mutual respect displayed between staff and boarders. Boarders are able to visit each others houses and so get to know staff of both genders. Staff are variedly experienced in boarding and have assumed or been aligned to particular roles within boarding. They work well as a staff group and provide appropriate role models, leadership, guidance, encouragement and nurturing to individual boarders. Boarders respect and appreciate the time and effort staff give to them and were able to express this in a very mature way. Boarders recognise they need boundaries in place to protect them and enable them to live as a group. They also felt that expectations placed on them were reasonable and they respected them. There is a genuine warmth of relationship between boarders and house staff. Boarders state they trust staff, feel safe in their care and appreciate their caring nature.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school currently operates two boarding houses. Malvern is a detached house located at the bottom of the school drive and is home to girls' boarding. It was extensively refurbished three years ago and further recent reorganisation of the accommodation has taken place. Apart from living and sleeping accommodation it comprises a computer suite, laundry and small outside garden area used for relaxation and barbeques.

Boarders have single bedrooms spread over different levels within the house. Rooms vary in size with some having the space to accommodate two boarders. Showers and toilet facilities are more than adequate for the number of boarders living at Malvern and boarders reported no concerns or issues with the way their accommodation and facilities are managed.

There are areas within the house where boarders can gather or be apart from others, but the hubs of the house are the kitchen/diner and lounge areas. Here is where girls relax, watch TV, listen to music, chat and have interaction with visitors and house staff. There is an easy flow from the lounge through the office to the boarding mistress's flat. Girls regularly spend time sitting with staff in the duty office and often have the company of the housemistress's two dogs. The use of soft furnishings, flowers, pictures and the pets creates a very homely atmosphere when the house is occupied and is highly appreciated by boarders.

Boys are accommodated in Trennick, located on two floors within the main school building. The layout of this accommodation has been adapted over time and whilst much more spread out than Malvern, none the less provides boys with a good level of accommodation and space. There are separate common rooms on each floor level, a games area with pool table, kitchens and computer suite and study room. Most boarders have single room accommodation and in common with Malvern the rooms vary in size. The school has invested in upgraded shower and toilet facilities throughout Trennick and boys reported they were happy with the boarding accommodation and that it worked in terms of them being able to enjoy privacy as well as communal life. The bedroom furniture is sound but appears a little dated and beds appear to be small against the height of some boarders.

In both houses there are staff living-in as part of the house compliment and boarders have easy access to staff by day and night. Boarders have individual lockable cube safes and a lockable drawer in which to store their valuables but also emphasised their mutual respect for each others property and privacy.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The organisation of boarding by the school overall is good.

Suitable statements of the school's principle and practice in boarding have been established and have been updated to reflect staff changes and personal styles. They form part of the school prospectus as well as comprising other specific documents and are included on the school website. The organisation of boarding is wholly appropriate to the number of boarders accommodated.

Monitoring of essential school records is established and rests either with the head or has been delegated to key staff. The school operates a clear set of values in terms of its expectations on pupil behaviour and attitudes and reinforces these effectively. Consequently the incidence of serious punishments and complaints is low. Accidents are monitored by the medical centre

and estates manager and records of serious accidents by the head master. Boarders welfare is protected through risk assessment, regular review and ongoing awareness of staff.

Boarders are looked after by an appropriate number of staff and in a manner that is non-intrusive but effective and maintains staff awareness of individuals. House staff have clear boarding duties set out in their job descriptions and a comprehensive boarding staff handbook containing key policy and procedures for boarding. Training opportunities are available to boarding staff and have been taken-up plus boarding staff share their extensive knowledge and experiences between colleagues.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Boarders from different countries are accommodated. All have integrated well and formed good relationships with other boarders. Different cultural calendar dates are celebrated and there are themed food evenings. In an area not noted for its multi cultural nature the inclusiveness of the school and its value base provide valuable lessons in citizenship for pupils.

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):

- number the fire break glass points in Malvern to show rotation of weekly testing (NMS 26.4)
- prepare clear evidence that supports risk assessments are reviewed and not just re-dated (NMS 47.9)
- ensure the renewal of bedroom furniture in Trennick is included in a programme of refurbishment (NMS 42.1&2)