

Thomas Adams School

Thomas Adams School, Lowe Hill, Wem, SHREWSBURY SY4 5UB

Inspection dates	07/03/2017 to 09/03/2017	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Good	2
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The boarding provision is outstanding because

- Young people thoroughly enjoy boarding and are proud of their excellent personal achievements.
- Young people value the diverse friendships they make and lifelong relationships they form.
- Young people acknowledge the positive impact that boarding has on their educational progress.
- Governors, the senior leadership team and staff secure the safety and well-being of young people and educate them to keep themselves safe, in line with their age and abilities.
- The boarding staff team is dedicated and goes that extra mile to enhance the experiences and future opportunities of young people.
- The boarding staff team is experienced and professional. Its continuing professional development, both as a team and as individuals, raises the quality of practice across the whole school.
- There are robust external and internal quality assurance processes, which involve feedback from professionals, parents and young people.
- The leadership team contains inspirational and passionate leaders. They have excellent oversight of the boarding provision and continue to be driven by future aspirations informed by research and partnership work.
- Governors have clear oversight of the boarding provision. The governor representing boarding is actively involved in listening to young people and contributes to quality assurance processes.
- All national minimum standards have been met. There are three areas for further improvement. These relate to the quality of food, Prefect training and the development of the school's quality assurance tools. These are all minor development

areas and do not affect the outstanding progress young people make because of their boarding experience.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop and formalise a quality assurance tool that identifies outcomes against the national minimum standards and Ofsted's outcome judgements.
- Formalise prefect training to include accredited courses.
- Continue collaborative work to ensure that the quality of food improves.

Information about this inspection

The school was given three hours' notice of the inspection. Meetings were held with the headteacher, both deputy headteacher, head of boarding, residential staff, governors, health and safety staff and young people. Parents and professionals were spoken to on the phone. Staff handovers were observed. Two evenings were spent observing staff interactions with young people. Meals were also taken with young people.

Inspection team

Dawn Bennett

Lead social care inspector

Full Report

Information about this school

Adams House is a co-educational boarding house for young people between the ages of 11 and 19. There is capacity for 60 young people. It is a state boarding school, which provides accommodation for young people from the UK and across the world. There are currently 1,277 young people on the school roll and 49 young people board on a termly or weekly basis.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Outcomes for young people are outstanding. Young people have a highly inclusive, yet individualised and well-planned boarding experience that enables them to make significant strides in their educational, personal, and social development. They enjoy their boarding experience, are proud of their contribution to it and their achievements, and have exceptionally positive relationships with boarding staff. A young person who had previously stayed at the boarding provision stated: 'Going to Thomas Adams, helped me grow in so many different ways, with different perspectives.'

Young people develop self-esteem, self-worth and become confident individuals. Young people experience a wide range of new opportunities, activities and experiences influenced by ideas gathered from the boarding community. They successfully participate and enjoy themselves alongside peers. Not only do they learn new skills and hobbies but they also learn how to socialise and interact. Staff encourage young people to have an understanding of the wider community and support any individual young person to be involved in the local community. For example, a young person can represent a sport for their school team and a local community team.

Young people actively contribute to the running of the boarding house and school. There is a school council and a sixth-form committee, on which young people using the boarding provision are represented. The boarding provision also has its own dedicated prefect group. Prefects attend boarding staff team meetings, governor boarding sub-committees and a young person will sit on the interview panel for any new boarding staff. These systems, along with many others, encourage open discussions and enable young people to feed points of view directly to the head of care, senior leadership team, headteacher and governors. Young people influence change in the boarding house and across the school site effectively. This results in young people feeling listened to and a valued part of the school community.

The food provided to young people is not high quality. Governors, the senior leadership team, staff, parents and young people are very aware of this shortfall. New caterers have been secured to address the concerns. It is currently early days, but some positive changes are beginning to emerge. It is, however, acknowledged that this will take time to get it right for every young person. This is causing frustrations at all levels. However, there is open dialogue and a range of systems in place to ensure that improvements and shortfalls are being captured and addressed.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

Parents and external professionals all say that the boarding provision is extremely beneficial and makes a significant difference to young people's lives. A key strength of the service is the boarding staff team. Its members are passionate, dynamic and always child-centred. They are excellent role models to young people and their relationships positively influence the ethos and values of the boarding community. Boarding staff work proactively in partnership with parents and professionals to ensure the best outcomes

for each young person. A young person told the inspector, 'The quality of service provided by the house parents is outstanding. They are ever-present in the lives of the young people and handle situations with utmost care.'

All new young people, regardless of their age, cultural background or country of origin receive a comprehensive induction. They all receive a warm and inclusive welcome from everyone and quickly feel part of the boarding and wider school community. This sensitive and caring approach is indicative of the ethos of the boarding staff team. Young people are positively encouraged to make the most of both their social and educational opportunities. This helps them become active members of the school and their boarding house. It also helps them settle in very quickly. All young people experience and appreciate the family atmosphere and ideals, which exist in the boarding house.

Staff give a strong focus to nurture and the emotional well-being of young people and their families. Staff give significant time and energy to building mutually respectful and trusting relationships. They provide consistent, caring, healthy routines that allow young people to feel secure and safe to flourish in other areas of their lives. This is especially reassuring to some young people, who at times experience inconsistencies or uncertainties in other areas of their lives. A parent stated: 'The support we have all had, including myself, has been incredible. Without wishing to take from that support, it's my observation that (as a family) we are not particularly special but that one of Adams House's strengths is the depth of its support for all students and families, which frequently goes far beyond the call of duty and doesn't stop the day they leave Adams. It really is "Shropshire's Biggest Family".'

Staff consult with parents and professionals, both informally and formally. As well as day-to-day phone calls and emails, regular questionnaires are sent to parents, and any feedback gained is quickly acted upon. The staff team has also recently set up a new initiative, a Facebook account that is accessible to parents and young people which celebrates life in the boarding house.

How well children and young people are protected

Good

Young people benefit from staff who provide care that is open and inclusive. Staff strongly promote and celebrate the uniqueness of all young people. Staff are skilled at building young people's identity, self-confidence and self-esteem. As a result, young people learn to respect and value the strengths of others and this enhances the school's inclusive community.

The risk of harm or bullying to any young person is minimised effectively by an extensive number of proactive initiatives embraced by boarding staff. There are detailed policies and procedures that are regularly reviewed and made available to all parents. These underpin regular staff training that ensures that staff know how to act to make sure they are part of a safe, nurturing and responsible boarding community. As a result, serious incidents are very rare in the boarding community.

The head of care and the staff team take their role as corporate parents seriously. If an incident does take place, they will take the time to look at lessons learned, to prevent it

from happening again in the future. For example, parents sign to say they give permission for their child to have a night out of the boarding house. However, after reviewing this practice, boarding staff now do their own checks on the young person's intended destination. This is because they will often have more local knowledge than the young person's parents. If staff feel it is either not safe or appropriate, they will override the parents' permission after discussion with the parents and the young person.

Boarding prefects also play an important role in contributing to the safety and well-being of their peers. They receive an induction into their role and regular direct supervision with the head of care. They do not currently access accredited training that would further strengthen their knowledge and feed into their future university applications and career paths.

Staff sensitively support young people to become responsible individuals and members of society. There are systems in place to manage the rare incidents of inappropriate behaviour and to respond to complaints. Young people confirm that matters are dealt with fairly and they are actively involved in resolution discussions. The focus of intervention is always to educate and support those involved to develop their future social and life skills.

The leadership ensures that child protection and safeguarding procedures are well established and systematically reviewed. Leaders and managers also make sure that all staff receive regular child protection training. This covers a wide range of subjects, which include the dangers of radicalisation and extremism, the safe use of information and communication technology and awareness-raising in relation to child sexual exploitation. This gives staff a solid knowledge base, which they apply in their everyday care to ensure that young people stay safe.

Young people's safety is promoted by the boarding and wider school staff. They ensure that risks are regularly reviewed and appropriate action is taken to manage and reduce them. For example, a site risk assessment identified a pathway on the school site which was not well furnished with lighting. By addressing this, young people are using this safer route through the school grounds rather than through town. Thorough risk assessments are in place and regularly reviewed, and the visitors' policy ensures that adults who visit the boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised. This good practice ensures that young people are appropriately safeguarded at all times. The school continues to operate a robust staff vetting procedure. Staff recruitment files contain clear evidence of recruitment checks that have taken place prior to staff being employed.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The head of care provides strong dynamic leadership, which results in consistently high standards and a vibrant boarding community. Boarding staff are dedicated and greatly appreciated by the young people. Boarding staff provide motivation and support to young people and conscientiously strive to help each individual young person to achieve their best. As a team, they ensure that every aspect of a young person's potential is recognised and achieved.

All boarding staff are professional and dedicated to their personal development, which is supported by the school's senior leadership team. They receive a comprehensive induction, regular supervision and annual appraisals. They are guided by detailed policies, procedures and guidance. Training events are frequent, and staff comment positively on the quality of the courses. Those staff who do not hold a professional qualification linked to boarding are supported to become qualified.

Currently, three staff are completing the Boarding School Association's two-year professional development certificate. They are constantly feeding research, learning and practice from other establishments back to the rest of the staff team. This is used to inform and develop day-to-day practice. For example, they are currently working on final assignment pieces on transgender issues, prefect handbooks and activities. This work will be used to directly influence the future quality of care and young people's outcomes within the boarding house.

Governors and the senior leadership team take an active role in the development of the boarding community and facility. There is a dedicated governors' boarding sub-committee, which involves three governors, the headteacher and the deputy headteacher. This meeting is also attended by the head of care and boarding prefects. Prior to attending, the prefects gather the views of other young people to share with the committee members. Some members of the committee will also join the young people in the boarding house for tea prior to the meeting, and they then feed back any observations to the full meeting. As a result, governors are very well informed of issues in the boarding community.

Governors, the senior leadership team and staff continue to drive up standards. They use a range of tools, as well as internal and external audits, to identify strengths and areas for development, which feed into a development plan. However, they do not have a quality assurance tool that identifies outcomes against the national minimum standards and Ofsted's outcome judgements to ensure that they continue to achieve outstanding outcomes.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceeds the standard of good and results in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or if their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number	123589
Social care unique reference number	SC020780
DfE registration number	440345

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for boarding schools.

Type of school	Boarding school
Number of young people on roll	1,377
Gender of young people	Mixed
Age range of young people	11 to 18
Headteacher	Liz Dakin
Date of previous boarding inspection	16/01/2014
Telephone number	01939 233 311
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