

Boarding Department Inspection Report
IN045920
30 January 2025

Information on legislation and standards underpinning inspections can be found on our website <https://www.rqia.org.uk/>

1.0 Service information

Service Type:

Boarding Department

Provider Type:

Independent Provider

Located within: – Southern Health and Social Care Trust

Brief description of how the service operates:

This service is a school which provides boarding accommodation for children and young people.

Children and young people will be referred to collectively as young people throughout the remainder of this report.

2.0 Inspection summary

An announced inspection of the boarding department took place on 30 January 2025 between 10 a.m. and 4.30 p.m. The inspection was conducted by two care inspectors.

The inspection assessed progress with all areas for improvement identified during the last care inspection and to determine if the service was delivering safe, effective and compassionate care and if the service was well led.

The inspection found that three areas for improvement identified at the last care inspection were met. These were in relation to incident reporting, boarding committee meetings and fire alarm testing.

Two new areas for improvement were identified in relation to the environment and the fire risk assessment.

The inspectors concluded there was safe, effective and compassionate care delivered in the boarding department and this was well led by the management team.

The findings of this report will provide the boarding department with the necessary information to improve staff practice and young people's experience.

3.0 How we inspect

RQIA's inspections form part of our ongoing assessment of the quality of services.

Our reports reflect how they were performing at the time of our inspection, highlighting both good practice and any areas for improvement. It is the responsibility of the service provider to ensure compliance with legislation, standards and best practice, and to address any deficits identified during our inspections.

In preparation for this inspection, a range of information about the service was reviewed to help plan the inspection.

A range of documents were examined to determine that effective systems were in place to manage the service and deliver safe care.

RQIA inspectors seek to speak with young people, their relatives/carers, visitors and staff for their opinion on the quality of care and their experience of living, visiting or working in this service.

Information was provided to young people, relatives/carers, staff and other stakeholders on how they could provide feedback on the quality of care and support in this service. This included questionnaires and an electronic survey.

The findings of the inspection were discussed with the person in charge at the conclusion of the inspection.

4.0 What people told us about the service

The inspectors spoke with young people and staff on the day of inspection. Feedback was also received from young people, relatives/carers and staff through questionnaires.

Young people provided positive feedback as regards the support and care provided by boarding staff and opportunities to take part in a range of activities. The young people reported that the quality of food had improved with the introduction of new catering staff and that they were encouraged to provide feedback/share their views after meals.

Young people said their living spaces were comfortable, suited their needs, and they were able to personalise their bedrooms. They also had access to a range of shared spaces within the boarding department providing suitable areas for both study and relaxation, however, feedback identified a review of the physical environment was required with respect to some bedrooms. This is discussed in further detail in section 5.2.3.

Young people confirmed that they had opportunities to influence and contribute to the operation of the boarding department through the boarding committee. They felt comfortable raising issues, as needed; and were confident that issues would be taken seriously.

Feedback from young people was also received via questionnaire responses. Young people reported that staff helped them to feel safe; staff were there when they were needed; they were involved in decision making about their health and lifestyle; and, staff were aware of what was important to them.

Feedback received from relatives/carers via questionnaire was also positive. They reported that young people were safe and well cared for, with staff keeping them informed about their welfare.

Relatives/carers referenced that staff communicated well with the young people, helping them feel supported and understood. Staff were also recognised for organising activities, providing guidance when needed, and helping young people understand the impact of their actions.

Staff spoke highly of the support and training they received from the management team. They were confident and knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities. Staff demonstrated a caring and compassionate approach when speaking about the young people, highlighting examples of the meaningful relationships built between boarding staff and the young people. They also noted that the headmaster was actively engaged and involved in the daily life of the boarding department and regularly visited with the young people and staff. This enabled the headmaster to remain approachable to both young people and staff whilst also providing direct oversight of their care and routines.

Staff responses via questionnaires indicated that they were satisfied that young people were safe and treated with compassion; that the care provided was effective and that the service was well led.

5.0 The inspection

5.1 What has this service done to meet any areas for improvement identified at or since last inspection?

Areas for improvement from the last inspection on 14 June 2022		
Action required to ensure compliance with the Quality Living Standards for services: Children accommodated in Schools with boarding departments		Validation of compliance
Area for Improvement 1 Ref: Standard 4 Stated: First time	The head of boarding shall introduce an incident report proforma to evidence that there has been a review of the circumstances that led to the incident, the details of the incident and outcome, and any learning and action taken to reduce the likelihood of reoccurrence. This will support the head of boarding with monitoring incidents, identifying trends, patterns and areas for learning.	Met
	Action taken as confirmed during the inspection: This area for improvement was met.	
Area for Improvement 2 Ref: Standard 2	The head of boarding shall ensure children's meetings are held and provide a forum in which boarders views can be expressed, listened to, responded to and used to inform decisions.	Met

Stated: First time	Action taken as confirmed during the inspection: This area for improvement was met.	
Areas for Improvement 3	The head of boarding shall ensure fire alarm testing is undertaken in accordance with policy and procedure and as identified in the Fire Risk Assessment dated 16 February 2022.	
Ref: Standard 10		
Stated: First time	Action taken as confirmed during the inspection: This area for improvement was met.	

5.2 Inspection findings

5.2.1 How does the boarding department promote and make proper provision for the welfare, care and protection of the young people?

Discussion with staff and young people identified that the boarding department is located close to community facilities, social opportunities, and recreational spaces. The staff team actively supported young people to establish links/connections with the local community, helping them engage in activities that promoted their social and emotional wellbeing. This also encouraged the development of their personal interests and hobbies, contributing to a well-rounded and fulfilling experience within the boarding department.

Promoting young people's involvement and active participation is essential for supporting young people to influence the way they are cared for and reinforce that their views and opinions matter. Discussion with young people and review of records confirmed that there were opportunities for young people to raise any issues, and express preferences in regard to activities. Records also evidenced that young people were able to influence the running of the boarding department and delivery of care and support. These opportunities included participation in a boarding committee which represented a cross-section of young people, as well as the use of electronic platforms to capture their views. Staff were also available to young people if they needed support, advice or guidance. Young people reported that they felt confident raising complaints or concerns with staff and had trust that these issues would be thoroughly addressed.

The behaviour management approach within the boarding department was designed to promote and develop positive behaviours. Young people were actively involved in discussing and agreeing appropriate consequences to actions through the boarding committee. Responses to behaviours were proportionate and reflective of responsible parenting practices.

Discussions with staff provided assurance that staff were knowledgeable and vigilant in relation to child protection and safeguarding issues; and child protection training was provided to all staff on an annual basis. No concerns were identified regarding the management of child protection incidents.

However, advice was provided that the child protection policy should be updated to include reference to and signpost staff to current regional guidance on child protection and safeguarding protocols; specifically, the Cooperating to Safeguard Children and Young People (Department of Health, 2024) and The Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland's (SBNI) Procedures Manual. This will be reviewed as part of future inspection activity.

Discussions with relevant staff, alongside a review of medication records, confirmed that safe and effective arrangements were in place for medicines management, and ensuring young people received timely and appropriate support for their health needs. Individual Health Profiles were maintained for each young person, which provided assurance that there were robust systems in place to meet and monitor the health needs of young people.

5.2.2 How does the boarding department ensure staff have the necessary training and support to meet the needs of the young people?

Discussion with staff and review of rotas identified that there were sufficient numbers of staff available to support the young people on a daily basis. No concerns were identified regarding staff availability or the capacity to meet the needs of the young people. A child centred, pastoral care ethos was observed by inspectors which acknowledged and recognised the individuality of each young person. On the day of inspection, the relationships between staff and boarders were noted to be warm, relaxed and supportive. Staff reported working well together and described effective levels of support and communication from the management team.

Training records confirmed that boarding staff had completed necessary mandatory training, to enable the provision of safe and effective care, in key areas such as child protection, fire safety and medication management. Some staff had also undertaken additional training in autism and special educational needs to enhance their skills to better understand and support the diverse needs of the young people in their care. The development of staff knowledge and skills is crucial as it empowers staff to offer personalised, informed care, tailored to individual young people's needs.

5.2.3 How does the boarding department ensure young people experience a safe and high quality environment?

The boarding department provided a well-equipped, comfortable and welcoming environment. Young people's bedrooms were well maintained and they were free to decorate them according to their individual preferences. This allowed for the creation of personal spaces that reflected each young person's identity and sense of belonging. Such opportunities are important as they supported the young people in developing a sense of ownership and comfort, contributing to their overall well-being and emotional security.

A review of privacy arrangements identified that the design of a small number of bedrooms required review to ensure they provided an adequate level of privacy for the young people. Young people's quality of life is influenced by the value placed on privacy, dignity, fulfilment and choice in all aspects of daily living. Ensuring that all bedrooms offer sufficient privacy is essential to young people's personal autonomy. The headmaster provided assurance following the inspection that the necessary alterations to the identified bedrooms were reviewed as part of the most recent fire risk assessment and could occur in a way that was compliant with fire safety regulations. This was identified as an area for improvement.

Appropriate security measures were in place to ensure a safe and secure environment within the boarding department. The use of electronic fobs, sign out sheets and established routines were used to help staff maintain awareness of the young people's whereabouts and ensure their safety. These arrangements enabled young people to participate in age-appropriate activities and outings outside the boarding department.

The young people reported that the quality of food had improved with the introduction of new catering staff and that they were asked for feedback following meals, which is good practice. In addition to the provision of daily meals at designated times throughout the day, young people also had the opportunity to prepare snacks and meals themselves, promoting the development of their independent living skills.

Fire records evidenced that fire safety checks and drills were completed regularly and consistently. However, the fire risk assessment had not been reviewed in line with the timescales recommended. An assessment of fire precautions should be undertaken at least annually or whenever significant change occurs that could impact fire safety, such as structural modifications, changes in building use, alterations to occupancy levels, or after fire related incidents. Any required improvement works or changes to fire procedures should then be carried out. Evidence of this should be maintained and be available for inspection. This has been identified as an area for improvement. Evidence was provided by the boarding department that an updated fire risk assessment was completed following the inspection.

6.0 Quality Improvement Plan/Areas for Improvement

Areas for improvement have been identified where action is required to ensure compliance with the **Quality Living Standards for services: Children accommodated in Schools with boarding departments**.

	Standards
Total number of Areas for Improvement	2

Areas for improvement and details of the Quality Improvement Plan were discussed with the management team as part of the inspection process. The timescales for completion commence from the date of inspection.

Quality Improvement Plan	
Action required to ensure compliance with the Quality Living Standards for services: Children accommodated in Schools with boarding departments	
Area for improvement 1 Ref: Standard 2 Stated: First time	The responsible person shall ensure the design of identified bedrooms are reviewed and actions taken with the aim to promote privacy for young people. Ref: 5.2.3
To be completed by: 1 September 2025	Response by registered person detailing the actions taken:

	Refurbishment plans have been drawn up for new doors to be fitted at the identified bedrooms, in line with fire safety requirements and to enhance privacy.
Area for improvement 2 Ref: Standard 10 Stated: First time To be completed by: 27 March 2025	The responsible person shall ensure that the fire risk assessment is updated in line with best practice and the timescales recommended. Ref: 5.2.3
	Response by registered person detailing the actions taken: The Bursar, Facilities Manager and Head of Boarding will oversee a new schedule for updating fire risk assessment in line with best practice and recommended time scales.

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The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
James House
2-4 Cromac Avenue
Gasworks
Belfast
BT7 2JA

Tel 028 9536 1111
Email info@rqia.org.uk
Web www.rqia.org.uk
Twitter @RQIANews