

Port Regis School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Bridgette Lowe
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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

Port Regis School is a co-educational independent boarding school providing boarding for over 200 children aged seven to 13 years. The school is situated in 150 acres of parkland one mile from the town of Shaftesbury in the Dorset countryside. The younger children are accommodated in the main building divided into three houses. Two purpose built boarding houses, one for boys and one for girls are situated close to the main building and accommodate the older children.

Founded in 1881 Port Regis is a Christian foundation, although children of all faiths are welcomed at the school. The school aims to provide children with an all-round education of the highest quality and encourages every child to discover and develop the talents and interests that lie within them. The school offers a wide-ranging academic curriculum and an extensive range of extra-curricular activities.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This full announced inspection evaluated the school's performance against the national minimum standards for boarding schools. All key standards for boarding schools were addressed and the recommendation made at the last inspection was revisited. Boarder and parent feedback have been taken into account while carrying out the inspection. All boarders had the opportunity to complete a questionnaire and numerous boarders were spoken with throughout the inspection.

The school's boarding provision is judged as outstanding in all areas assessed. Pupils receive excellent health care from the school nurses, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Boarders' health and well-being are promoted to a very high degree. The school's excellent life-skills programme offers children a huge range of opportunities to prepare them for independence. There is a positive and confident focus on child protection and safeguarding that results in the children feeling safe at the school. There is an ethos of positive behaviour management. The school has excellent health and safety measures in place. Recruitment practice fully adheres to the Safer Recruitment in Education guidance with the human resources manager being extremely focused on safeguarding.

Systems for pupils to achieve and enjoy are excellent with invaluable support from the independent listeners. Opportunities for boarders to have a voice and input into their lives at the school are actively engaged in by pupils, whose opinions are listened to and acted on. The boarding environment is maintained to an excellent standard with a range of boarding opportunities such as boarding in dormitories in the mansion or single rooms in the purpose built boarding houses. The management of the school is effective and coordinated, with a boarding staff team committed to

ensure the boarding experience is positive and enjoyable. The vast majority of parents comments were extremely positive about the care and experience their children receive. Comments from boarders include, 'I love boarding, I think they do very well at choosing who and which dorm everyone is in', 'We are always asked what dorms we would like to be in', 'It's amazing it's so much fun', 'I really enjoy boarding', 'I always have access to email as well as phones, 'Matrons and house parents are fun and relaxed, weekends are amazing', 'If I feel home sick staff are really nice' and 'Everyone is really friendly'.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the school was asked to act on one recommendation. This related to the school maintaining the unique reference number of all Criminal Record Bureau Disclosures for all staff appointed. Well maintained records now hold all the relevant information required.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders have access to excellent medical treatment and first aid provision. The health centre is situated in the heart of the school mansion house and easily accessible for all boarders. It is efficiently run by the school nurses who are qualified and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. All procedures and policies relating to health matters are maintained effectively. The boarders are positive about the care given and that their health and well-being are well looked after. Boarders report they are able to go to the school nurses with any concern or issue especially if they are homesick or just need some tender loving care. There is a purpose built sick bay which provides excellent arrangements should a child be ill with the school nurses being nearby to attend to them throughout the night.

Health information for each boarder is requested from parents for first aid, medical, dental or optical treatment should there be a need. Excellent care plans are maintained and regularly reviewed of all children who have significant medical or health needs. Children are asked how they would like their individual care needs to be met and can record their views on their care plan. This empowers the children to be in control of their own health and well-being. Information is shared with staff on a need-to-know basis, further promoting the health of children to a good degree. Record keeping throughout the medical centre is very good. Significant medication records are maintained well and stored securely, with individual files being maintained on each boarder. The boarders have access to local general practitioners as necessary.

The school has an effective personal, social and health education programme which the school calls the 'Life Skills' programme that is age appropriate and relevant to the needs of the pupils. The programme offers a vast range of opportunities for children to develop independent skills and encompasses preparation for life in senior boarding schools. The curriculum also involves aspects of health, well-being and provides

education for pupils on how to keep themselves safe. Boarders are complimentary about the range of skills they learn in these sessions including first aid.

The catering staff have an excellent understanding of boarders' dietary needs and wishes, and provide a varied and balanced diet. The variety, quality and quantity of food are excellent with boarders being very complimentary about the choices on offer. The school caters for many different diets, for cultural and medical reasons if needed. Boarders can access fresh vegetables, salad and fruit at mealtimes and enjoy the social occasion mealtimes provide in the comfortable cafeteria environment. Boarders are actively involved in the food provision via the school council and food surveys. Suggestions by the boarders have been acted on. One boarder said, 'The food here is really good we are really encouraged to eat healthily.'

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders live in an environment which they report makes them feel very safe. The school is extremely thorough in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the boarding pupils.

The school has a clear and responsive anti-bullying policy which is known by boarding pupils and staff. The boarders feel confident that issues associated with bullying will be rigorously addressed, although one boarder reported, 'it's not really bullying, we sometimes just fall out with each other.' The majority of boarders report through questionnaires that bullying is not an issue. The school provides very good education to boarders and staff in relation to cyber bullying and internet safety. All incidents of bullying are taken seriously by the staff and the school acts quickly to address any bullying or negative behaviour. Any incidents of bullying are fully monitored and coordinated by the head of pastoral care. The peer support group also receive specific training from Childline to identify and report any concerns they may see with their peers.

The boarders are protected from the risk of harm or abuse by appropriately trained and experienced staff that follow robust policies and procedures. Suitable child protection training is provided on a regular basis to all staff, including non-teaching or boarding staff and gap students. Staff have a clear understanding of key child protection matters and the action they need to take if they suspect a child is at risk of or is being harmed. The school liaises with the local authority designated officer to ensure that their policies, practices and procedures are robust. There is a clear focus on safeguarding and child protection with competent and experienced designated staff taking overall responsibility for this. All staff have a quick reference card they carry; this explains the school's code of behaviour for staff and what to do should a member of staff suspect abuse. This provides staff with an excellent system to manage any safeguarding situation and to further promote and protect the welfare of the children. Boarders report that they feel very safe at the school and have a variety of adults they can talk to. There are no ongoing child protection concerns at the school.

The behaviour of the children seen throughout the inspection was exemplary. The children were relaxed and very open about their experiences as a boarder. The school addresses inappropriate or negative behaviour in a positive manner focusing on praise and rewards. The school ethos is based on promoting happy, confident children who embrace the school's values of decency, kindness and consideration of others. The boarders spoke openly about supporting their friends and staff echoed the culture of boarding children being very caring of others. The boarders understand what sanctions may be implemented and feel they are fair and only used when necessary; which is infrequently.

The boarders are protected from the risk of fire. All aspects of fire safety are addressed in a suitable manner with regular drills, tests and servicing ensuring the well-being of pupils and staff alike. The boarders clearly know how to evacuate the premises in the event of an alarm being activated. As part of their induction all dorm captains are briefed on child protection and fire safety and take this role of responsibility very seriously. Boarders are very clear about areas within the school site which are out of bounds.

Suitable changing and bathing facilities provide boarders with good privacy. Boarders report that all staff are respectful of their privacy especially at times of showering or changing. Boarders staying in the purpose built boarding houses Prichard Hall and Grosvenor Hall, have additional privacy measures by sleeping in individual rooms known as cubicles. The boarders spoken to were very complimentary about their boarding houses and liked having their own cubicle space as this gave them more privacy when needed.

The boarders are protected by extremely thorough and robust recruitment procedures. The human resources manager has undertaken Safer Recruitment in Education training and demonstrated an excellent understanding of the safeguarding measures to be taken in the recruitment process. All visitors are checked and supervised if moving around the school, providing enhanced protection for children.

The school ensures that any risks posed to boarders are thoroughly addressed. Excellent risk assessments address all areas of environmental, activity and leisure matters without limiting the opportunities for boarders to engage in active and fulfilling experiences.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The school is positive in its approach to offer all children an excellent variety of activities. Full boarders commented that the weekend activities are 'amazing'. The support given to children and the organisation involved in enabling them to access activities is very good. Children can choose from a vast range of evening hobbies that they sign up to and were seen to be enjoying their social and activity time.

Personal support to individual children is an area that the school excels in. A cohesive committed staff team ensures all boarders have someone to talk to if they need to and this is confirmed by the boarders. Staff communicate with the children in a relaxed manner, and children are at ease talking to staff. Boarders have access to two independent listeners, male and female, who are an invaluable resource. The boarders spoke very highly about the male independent listener who plays a very active role in the school. The boarders commented that they particularly enjoy the stories he reads them in the evenings. Throughout the inspection, children were very positive, happy and relaxed and spoke freely about life at the school. Feedback from boarders confirm the variety of staff they can go to for support, especially their tutors, gap students and matrons. Boarders are also very complimentary about the support they receive from their house parents, comments include, 'matrons and house parents are fun and relaxed' and 'everyone is really friendly.'

The school values the different cultural needs of its boarders. During the inspection the inspectors heard of, or saw, no inappropriate discrimination of gender, disability, race, religion or culture. All children are given the same opportunities to participate in all areas of the school life. Overseas boarders and new boarders confirmed that they are made to feel very welcomed and fully supported, to ease their transition into boarding at the school.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are an integral aspect of the school with their views and wishes acknowledged and acted upon. They are encouraged and supported to contribute their views through the school council, boarding meetings and open discussion with a range of staff during boarding hours. The school also regularly surveys boarders on a whole range of topics such as food preferences, dormitory requests and activities. The boarders report their views and opinions are always listened to with actions being clearly communicated to them through notices throughout the boarding environment and morning meetings. Boarders also have many informal and formal opportunities to express their views.

The boarders are assisted to maintain contact with their families and friends. Mobile telephones are only allowed for boarders in A and B forms and for overseas boarders. However, there is an abundance of private telephones for boarders to use in their boarding houses, as well as telephones in the day room. The school maintains very good communication links with parents especially through telephone, email or school events. The boarders state the school helps them to keep in touch with their parents while they are living away from home with one boarder commenting, 'I always have access to email as well as phones.'

New boarders are helped to settle into the school by an effective 'peer support' and 'dorm captain' system as well as a range of staff, including tutors, that are acutely aware of children finding boarding life unsettling. Boarders report they are made to feel very welcome when they start boarding and this helps them settle in quickly.

Comments include, 'If I feel home sick staff are really nice.' Boarders are able to try taster sessions where they can experience life as a boarding pupil, which helps children make the transition into boarding life easier. There is a range of clear information available to parents and children that informs them of what to expect as a new boarding pupil. This includes an informative booklet, the 'V.I.P' (Very Important Parent) boarding guide.

Relationships between staff and the boarders are exceptional with very happy children who obviously enjoy their time at the school. Boarders said, 'Boarding here is really good' and 'it is great to be with friends, day children lose out by not boarding.' Boarders were observed to be relaxed in the company of staff, who showed a genuine interest in the children's well-being.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders are provided with excellent accommodation that is well organised and supervised. The younger children board in homely and cosy dormitories divided into three houses within the mansion, while the older children reside in two purpose built boarding houses, offering increased independence with the provision of cubicles. All boarding areas are very well maintained with boarders commenting that they love their boarding houses. Older boarders enjoy the cubicles in the dormitories as this allows for extra privacy when needed or at times of exam revision. The school places a great emphasis on a home-from-home experience with extra touches provided such as soft furnishings, bedside lamps and children bringing their own duvet covers to add to the comfortable boarding experience. Children can also bring their own small pets if they so wish.

The boarding dormitories provide appropriate protection and separation of boarders by age and gender. Large and spacious dormitories offer boarders ample space to store personal items and possessions. Dormitories are personalised throughout, giving a friendly and comfortable appearance. Excellent facilities offer boarding children ample provision to shower and bath. The kitchen facilities enable boarders to have snacks and treats such and chocolate toast and hot chocolate, which is welcomed by the boarding community.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Individual needs are very well catered for, from religious and cultural to dietary needs. Different cultures are explored, with boarders being involved in events such as themed lunches, with Thai, Indian, Greek and Mexican foods being experienced. The school has a diverse group of boarders that are integrated well into the boarding community. Overseas boarders commented that they are welcomed into the school and helped to settle quickly into boarding life. Boarders are actively supported to get involved with and raise funds for

charities of their choice.

The management of the school is effective and coordinated. The headteacher, who was appointed in September 2010 continues to strive for high standards for the boarding community, with dedicated support from the head of pastoral care and her team. The boarding staff are very committed to providing an excellent boarding experience for the children and continually strive to further develop and reflect on boarding practice. There is a well-structured senior management team which is well informed of its roles and responsibilities and effective in its delivery. Excellent communication between staff ensures that boarders' welfare is given high regard. Boarders are cared for by excellent numbers of staff who are trained and sensitive to their needs. These include house-parents, assistant house-parents, gap students, matrons and tutors. The boarding staff receive regular training to ensure they are up-to-date with child protection, boarding practice, first aid and fire safety. The staff interviewed and observed during the inspection are extremely committed to providing boarders with a positive experience.

The monitoring of all areas and records is extremely good. Effective monitoring of any welfare or pastoral concerns takes place on a weekly basis with all staff meeting to discuss any issues. Appraisal of boarding staff is conducted through regular formal and informal meetings.

A range of comprehensive and effective risk assessments highlight areas to ensure boarders' welfare is protected and promoted. Off-site activity risk assessments are completed to a very good standard.

The school provides a wealth of information to parents and boarders about the boarding practices and principles of the school. The school successfully fulfils its aim resulting in confident and happy children. The school's website has clear and updated information for parents and prospective parents to view.

The boarding houses are well organised and provide a safe and secure environment for boarders. The boarders report they have no difficulty in finding a member of staff when they need to. The staff receive appropriate training commencing with induction and regular updates and have guidance on boarding policies and practice, which are regularly updated.

The boarders are closely supervised, and staff are aware of their whereabouts at all times. Boarders are well informed of what areas they can and cannot access on the school site including the school grounds. There are clear protocols for the staffing of organised trips away from school.

The relationships between staff and boarders are relaxed, friendly and appropriate. Boarders report that the staff are, 'Really kind and caring', 'Always here to help us' and 'I love boarding at Port Regis School, it is great fun.' Positive comments received from parents include, 'The school and staff have done an excellent job to help my child fit in' and 'The boarding experience at Port Regis is second to none and is a credit to all the house parents and support staff who make this so.'

