

Concord College

Inspection report for Boarding School

Unique reference number	SC020770
Inspection date	12/10/2009
Inspector	Trevor Hall
Type of inspection	Key

Setting address	Concord College, Acton Burnell Hall, Acton Burnell, SHREWSBURY, SY5 7PF
Telephone number	01694 731 631
Email	theprincipal@concordcollegeuk.com
Registered person	Bell Concord Educational Trust Ltd
Head/Principal	Neil Grant Hawkins
Nominated person	Barbara Mary Dean
Date of last inspection	14/11/2006

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Crispins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

Concord College is a Co-Educational Charitable Foundation that celebrated its 60th anniversary this year. The College provides accommodation and education for 345 boarders and 20 day pupils, who are between the ages of 12 and 20. Concord is an International School with boarders attending from many parts of the world and with a record of high academic achievement.

The College is set in extensive grounds, in the Shropshire countryside, some 12 miles south of Shrewsbury. Based around the Main House, Acton Burnell Hall, the college has 14 distinct boarding houses, 11 on the main campus two in the village of Acton Burnell and one, only used between January and July in the nearby village of Acton Pigot. The college has an excellent range of student facilities, including a modern sports hall, a student recreation hall 'The West End', student kitchen and good dining room and catering facilities.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was an announced inspection undertaken by one Ofsted and one Boarding Schools Association inspector, conducted over three days. The inspection looked at the Boarding School National Minimum Standards (NMS) under the Every Child Matters outcome groups. The inspection was informed by the school producing a detailed and comprehensive pre-inspection self-assessment and by an extensive questionnaire completed by all of the college's boarding students and by completed questionnaires by interested parents. This inspection revealed that the college that is operating to a very high standard, the school was judged to be good in two of the Every Child Matters outcome groups and outstanding in the other four outcome groups, achieving an overall rating of Good.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the college was last inspected, a new medical centre has been developed, which meets the NMS requirement for the college to be able to isolate young people that are ill from the main body of the college community. This facility can accommodate up to two young people.

Staff recruitment practice has improved since the last inspection, with all new recruitments having had enhanced Criminal Records checks done by the college prior to deployments in the college. The appointment of a specialist Human Resources professional to assist the school bursar in respect of staff recruitment has helped the college to build upon its existing good practice in this area. Previously made

recommendations in this area have been appropriately addressed by the college, who now, not only meet the required minimum standard, but surpass it.

A written agreement now exists between the college and all adults who are accommodated within the College, but who are not directly employed by them. This agreement spells out clearly the terms of their accommodation, guidance on their contact with boarders and their responsibility to supervise their visitors. It also makes it clear that non-compliance with the agreement may result in the termination of their accommodation and that they are obligated to inform the college if they are charged with, or convicted of any criminal offence.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Students' health and wellbeing needs are being effectively promoted through professional and comprehensive services.

Students have access to high quality medical treatment and first aid. A team of three registered nurses ensure that appropriate medical treatment and advice is available in the school's medical centre at all times. A doctor's surgery is held once a week in the medical centre. Since the last inspection the provision for caring for sick students has been re-organised.

The new medical centre enables up to two young people to be isolated from the rest of the school community, should they contract contagious illnesses. When in use the medical centre is appropriately staffed and has within it the means for students to contact staff, should they require assistance. In practice, however, many young people who have minor illnesses prefer to remain in their own rooms whilst they recover. In such circumstances staff check on students regularly and records of these checks are maintained. Most boarding areas within the school have within them a telephone that ill students can use to summon assistance between staff checks, however, not all areas do and as such students in these areas are, potentially at least, left somewhat vulnerable. It is acknowledged that most students have personal mobile telephones and would use these to alert staff if they needed assistance, however, the college should not rely on such an arrangement to ensure student safety.

The school operates a highly developed medication policy, procedure and practice guidance that specifically addresses the use of non-prescribed medication and students self-medicating. Many students self medicate and all students have within their bedrooms a suitable lockable cabinet in which such medication can be safely stored. Policies and procedures are in place for the safe storage and administration of medication, for those students who, for whatever reason, do not self medicate. Staff are trained in the administration of medication and actively put into effect the school's health education policies and integrate these into their daily contact with students. Consent for medication and first aid is sought from parents and guardians on an appropriately detailed consent form.

Student's welfare is promoted because a record is kept of the outcomes of all known medical appointments to ensure any ongoing concerns are addressed. Information regarding the health and medical history of each student is gained as part of the school's admission process through proactive contact with families. This ensures individual needs are identified and that each student receives an immediate and appropriate response when they are ill.

Students have access to information and guidance with regard to health and social issues in age-appropriate formats. These areas are also addressed formally through the school's curriculum. Boarders are relaxed and well informed when discussing personal, health and social matters.

Students' religious and health related dietary needs are met by a team of catering staff responsible for the provision and preparation of meals. These staff have a comprehensive understanding of what makes up a good balanced diet and have had training about nutrition to enable them to put this into effective practice. Vegetarian options are available at each main meal, which are taken in the school's central dining room, as is soup and a salad bar option. Fresh fruit is plentiful and is always available throughout the day. All students are required to eat their main meals in a central dining room but can also buy food in the evenings from a small snack bar in the 'West End' building, they also have a very well equipped student kitchen on campus and can make snacks in most of the boarding houses.

Menu planning is adventurous, integrates culturally appropriate food and encourages students to try new dishes. Flexible arrangements are made to take account of students' choice and students' responses to both formal questionnaires and informal discussion confirmed that whilst they feel that the food could be better they acknowledge that the food at Concord College is of good quality, is varied and nutritious.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Student's safety is promoted because staff are aware of the college's policies and procedures; they listen to the concerns of their students and take appropriate actions to ensure their welfare.

Students are cared for in a warm and friendly atmosphere. The college has appropriate anti-bullying policies and students expressed confidence that staff would deal with any instance of bullying promptly and effectively. Students indicated that bullying does not happen at Concord college stating that irrespective of the college's stance "other students would not tolerate it".

Student welfare is safeguarded because staff receive regular in-house training in child protection and demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of policies and procedures. The college's designated child protection staff are in the process of

attending approved external training and will cascade this training down to all of the college's staff who work within the boarding houses. All staff working within the boarding houses attended internal child protection awareness training as part of their induction and have regular updates provided at the start of each term. Boarders confirm that they feel staff give a high priority to keeping them safe.

Students state that the college respects their privacy and confidentiality, that their concerns are listened to and they are supported to behave well. Great care is generally taken to ensure that confidential information on young people is kept safely locked away, however, in some of the boarding houses, information was on open shelves and on notice boards, in areas that are accessible to young people, this information should be kept in locked cabinets,

Positive behaviour is actively rewarded and inappropriate behaviour is addressed in a very fair and measured way. The college has a strong focus on promoting effective and supportive networks, for example, younger students are very positive about the in-college mentoring system and older students were happy to acknowledge the role of the college's prefects and monitors in promoting peer support and guidance. Boarders consider the college is good at caring, encouraging and communicating. A clear behaviour management policy, together with an established structure and opportunities for the students to be guided to learn good social skills has the positive effect of creating a harmonious and friendly environment throughout the college.

The college has a clear complaints procedure and information about this is available to students and parents through written material. Students state that the college responds quickly to any concerns raised by them and students are proactively supported to raise any concerns or issues that they have.

Students expressed confidence in the safety and security of the college. The college grounds, including those boarding areas located off the main campus are protected by an extensive network of closed circuit television security cameras. These cameras do not intrude on boarders reasonable privacy and are supplemented at night by the colleges own night staff who patrol the grounds checking doors and windows etc.

Students learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they regularly practise the emergency escape drill and staff receive fire training. Safe procedures are in place to protect students through tests on fire systems and other electrical equipment at appropriate intervals.

The College has a good set of comprehensive environmental risk assessments and has a good system to inform maintenance staff of any known issues, this system prioritises remedial work on a risk assessment basis and ensures that student health and safety is always the priority. In inspecting the college's boarding provision it was noted that several ground floor windows lacked opening restrictors, this could conceivably undermine the security of these lodgings. Several upstairs windows also lacked appropriate restrictors these could present a falling hazard.

The college operates an established robust staff vetting procedure which is applied

consistently and staff demonstrate an excellent awareness of the need to safeguard their students at all times. Staff recruitment files contain extensive evidence of recruitment checks that have taken place prior to staff being employed. This includes an appropriate enhanced Criminal Record Bureau (CRB) check. All adults who visit the boarding accommodation are supervised by staff. This practice ensures that young people are appropriately safeguarded.

The college has thorough risk assessments for all aspects of the premises, grounds, boarders' behaviour and activities, both on and off site. Particular efforts are taken to ensure that all areas used by the boarders are free from avoidable safety hazards.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Individual and group support to students is given a very high priority by the college. Students are benefiting from living in a college where staff are focusing on promoting their success, meeting their needs and celebrating their achievements.

Staff work in a very encouraging and supportive manner and consequently the care, social opportunities and activities are of a high standard. Students freely initiate interaction and seek help from various staff members on duty. The college provides an environment where the value of equality and diversity is understood, promoted and celebrated. The college community represents the individual and diverse identities of students and this uniqueness is celebrated in a way that promotes awareness and understanding.

Concord College prides itself on the quality of its pastoral care, through the new medical centre, the college's counselling service, the independent listener and the pastoral structure promoted by the excellent relationships witnessed between the students and staff. Students confirmed that they are encouraged to discuss all matters related to their boarding life and stated that staff always respond positively and take all issues raised seriously.

Students enjoy living in a setting that has an effective equal opportunities policy and an ethos of inclusiveness. No student raised any issue about inappropriate discrimination either directly to the inspectors nor in the student questionnaires completed by the whole boarding group prior to the inspection. The multi-cultural nature of the college is seen as a positive strength by both students and staff alike. Students talked enthusiastically about the college's ethos and the friendly relationships that exist between both students and the college's staff group, this they feel, makes the college both effective and special.

Study provision within the college is very good, with ample space available for all boarders to work on preparatory or private study. The boarding accommodation provides each student with either a single or twin bedroom that has provision for study within it, enabling them to benefit from a more focused work environment. All students interviewed expressed unreserved appreciation of the boarding

arrangements and whilst there was an acknowledgment that the college's newer boarding houses offered a higher degree of personal comfort and better facilities, none considered their accommodation to be inappropriate or substandard.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Students are actively encouraged to contribute to the running of the college because their views and opinions are valued, which results in social cohesion and a strong college identity.

Students consider that they benefit from a supportive boarding experience, which is open and inclusive. The college's systems gain students' views about matters affecting their daily lives and the general running of the boarding houses. They also believe that by effectively communicating with them about matters concerning their own lives, progress and future, the college is helping them to learn how to take responsibility, become independent and to develop appropriate self-confidence. A college council has recently come into being and regular prefect and monitor's meetings enable students to raise concerns, discuss worries and express points of views.

Students each have a team of house staff and a personal tutor who oversees and coordinates their care and education. The house staff play a key role, encouraging and supporting each student to develop, self-confidence and respect for others. Individual religious belief and moral development is respected and accommodated and all students are expected to be tolerant of each others different, beliefs, backgrounds and cultural experience and tradition. All staff actively address any difficulties that students may have. The college has good systems in place to obtain the views of students, through the use of surveys and through group meetings, although the recording of the latter need to be consistently maintained. Essentially students believe they have a voice in the college and staff listen to them.

The staff respond to boarders in a supportive and thoughtful way and boarders are in turn positive about their relationship with the staff. This helps students to feel valued and gives them a sense of ownership of the setting and encourages the to become a real part of college life.

Due to the fact that so many of the students resident at the college are foreign students, the college promotes a very positive attitude to student's maintaining regular contact with families. Students are encouraged to maintain appropriate contact with friends and family, as the college understands the value and importance of such communication. Broadband internet connections have been improved, following students expressing concerns about slow connection speeds. The college has committed considerable resources to enable them to acquire the best internet connection currently available and has reserve capacity to enable future increases in capacity, however, there is a limit to what can be achieved due to the rural location of the college.

Students are supported to take an interest in the outside world and have daily access to newspapers, telephones, wide screen televisions in all communal areas and the internet. In addition students are involved with community based activities, visiting local primary colleges, the Duke of Edinburgh Awards and fund-raising, for a variety of charities.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The standard of accommodation throughout the college is generally good, with certain aspects, Paul House for example being outstanding; all boarding accommodation is comfortable, well maintained and clean and provides a safe environment for the students. Not all windows, both on the ground floor or those above first floor level are currently fitted with appropriate opening restrictors, to ensure either the required level of security or safety.

All boarders enjoy either single or twin accommodation which has good individual private study space, they are spacious, clean and appropriately decorated. Generally the college campus is free from graffiti and is clean and well maintained. Students expressed their general satisfaction with their living accommodation and were happy with the level of internal security within the college, stating that very little was ever lost or stolen. Each young person, in addition to having their own room key is provided with a lockable safe within their bedroom, keys for which are held both by the student and the house staff.

Boarding areas of the college are clean, well decorated and well maintained, they are fit for purpose and are age-appropriate. Since the college was last inspected two new boarding houses have been commissioned, one Paul House offers up to forty female students an outstanding level of accommodation, with all bedrooms being single occupancy, having en-suite facilities and air conditioning. The other new boarding house, Acton Pigot is situated a little distance away from the college and is leased each year from January until July. This accommodation was visited, despite not being open at the time of inspection and the accommodation seen was of a very high standard comparable with the rest of the boarding accommodation. The college has an on going development plan which includes provision for improving the existing boarding houses and expanding the boarding provision further, with several more potential boarding houses having been acquired locally and plans to create a similar purpose built boarding house akin to Paul House, for boys has also been mooted. The college has good maintenance provision, that is well organised and ensures that work is prioritised to primarily ensure that the health and safety of young people is appropriately maintained. No students of Concord college are currently boarded out, however, the college has appropriate policies in place to enable such arrangements to be undertaken if necessary.

Students can choose to decorate their bedrooms with suitable pictures or posters, which helps to maintain a homely environment. All accommodation, surrounding

buildings and the grounds are maintained to a high standard by a dedicated team of support staff. The college grounds are beautifully maintained and offer the students a safe environment in which to relax or pursue leisure or sporting activities.

The college is located in a rural setting within easy reach of Shrewsbury. Regular shopping trips are organised to enable boarders to replenish stocks of personal requisites and the local village post office also stocks such items. The college has its own transport so as to enable the students to access the wider community.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The college's coherent philosophy, clearly stated values, high expectations and good leadership help students to not only achieve at a high academic level, but also helps to create a nurturing and supportive environment in which students learn to respect others and to celebrate diversity and achievement.

Concord college has a comprehensive range of documents that clearly reflect the college's commitment to boarding practices and principles. The students' and parents' handbooks give all required information to young people and their families on the services available, in a format that is easy to understand. This includes the philosophy of care and the expectations of the college.

The Principal and senior management team provide strong leadership to students and staff. They are actively involved in the day to day operation of the college and boarding houses.

The health and safety of boarders within the college and when off campus is taken extremely seriously. The college's estate management team and school bursar ensures that this aspect of care is co-ordinated across the college site, giving support to those with delegated responsibility for specific health and safety tasks. A range of relevant documents, including the accident log, reveal that there is proper assessment of potential risks to students within the college. These include: risk from intruders; use of apparatus during play; outings and spread of infections as well as other risks specific to other more specialised off-site activities. All these potential hazards are given due consideration and where necessary measures are in place to reduce them.

Students make good academic progress at Concord college because staffing in the college is well organised and effectively managed. Their welfare is comprehensively monitored with regular discussions within staff meetings, effective communication systems exist across the college site.

The senior management team effectively monitor all relevant records, such as the complaints, child protection and discipline. This ensures proper scrutiny of all aspects of the students' care. Any shortfalls in these areas are identified and addressed. This quality monitoring and other similar initiatives contribute to periodic reports to the

governing body and the college's overall development plan.

The college has a well-established crisis management plan that anticipates a wide range of foreseeable incidents or crises. The crisis management plan names individuals undertaking specific roles and appropriately allocates responsibilities with specific timescales.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. All of the college's recording systems take account of potential needs in relation to a young person's diversity such as identity, race, culture and religion. The college provides an environment where the value of equality and diversity is understood, promoted and celebrated.

Boarding houses are organised and operated extremely well, they are focused on the needs of the young people in residence and are warm welcoming and nurturing. The current boarding arrangement contributes effectively to boarders' welfare, with all of the houses working closely together to ensure that experiences for all students are focused to their needs, abilities and capabilities. The physical condition and standard of decoration and equipment of all the boarding houses is of a very good standard, and whilst the newly opened boarding house possibly reflects a higher standard of accommodation than in other parts of the college, this is no more than is to be expected in a modern purpose-built residential unit as opposed to houses that have had to adapt over many years to changing standards and expectations.

Boarding houses are appropriately staffed and young people are generally well supervised. Whilst students confirmed that they can always find staff if they need assistance, it is unclear, particularly at weekends, which staff are on duty and which are not, a clear system to inform students of which staff are responsible for them is necessary to fully meet the required NMS.

Boarding houses are well supervised by staff and the college has effective cover arrangements for staff who report in sick. Staff are appropriately aware of the whereabouts of boarders at all times, including when they are off the college premises on trips or visits.

Staff members sleep-in each night and boarders know how to contact staff should they require assistance, either by knocking on duty staffs doors or by ringing duty staff on the internal telephone system. Some houses, Old Walls, Elizabeth House and Acton Pigot, however, are multi-sited or are split into areas of separate accommodation. Not all these separate boarding areas have access to there own internal telephone and young people would need to leave the comparative safety of these locked buildings to summon assistance, this arrangement could potentially expose students to an unacceptable degree of risk and does not fully comply with the NMS. Good registers of boarders are maintained so that staff are aware of how many young people are resident within each boarding provision at all times.

Concord College has substantial strengths and a sustained record of delivering outstanding performance and managing improvement. Where areas for improvement emerge the college recognises and manages these well. The senior management

team provides effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records in responding to parent or student complaint and any perceived child protection issues. The college has made appropriate referrals to the local safeguarding board since it was last inspected and this inspection has not revealed any issues that the college should have referred, but has failed to do so. The college willingly embraces working appropriately with outside agencies and regulators and has a good record of consulting with these agencies when it is appropriate to do so.

Staff and students at all levels are given numerous opportunities in forums such as meetings and individual assessments, to help with the college's organisation and development. This consultation and regular communication ensures proper scrutiny and advancement of all aspects of the students' care. Any shortfalls in these areas are identified and addressed very quickly. This quality monitoring and other similar initiatives contribute to reports to the governing body and the college's overall strategic plan and implementation.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the registered person should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that boarders who are ill are regularly checked and adequately looked after by a member of staff, and are able to summon staff assistance readily and rapidly when necessary (NMS.16.1)
- ensure that all windows accessible to boarders above the ground floor and presenting a risk to safety are fitted with suitable opening restrictors or alternative safety measures (NMS 47.3)
- ensure that all vulnerable windows on the ground floor of boarding houses are fitted with security locks, opening restrictors or intruder alarms (NMS 41.5)
- ensure that the confidentiality of personal information about boarders is protected (NMS 7.5)
- ensure that boarders know which member of staff is responsible for them at all times and have the means to contact that member of staff responsible for them at all times (NMS.31.3)
- ensure that all boarders have a satisfactory means of contacting a member of staff in each house at night. (NMS 33.4)