

**Ardvreck School
Crieff
12 December 2006**

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1. Background

The inspection of Ardvreck School took place in September 2006 as part of a programme of integrated inspections of mainstream school care accommodation services by the Care Commission and HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE). It follows from the commencement of integrated inspection under the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act, 2001 on 1 April 2005. This report has been prepared and published jointly by the Care Commission and HMIE.

The inspection covered key aspects of the school's residential provision, including the environment for care, support for pupils, processes for self-evaluation and capacity for improvement. Members of the inspection team interviewed teachers, care staff, and groups of pupils. They analysed responses to questionnaires issued to pupils, their parents or carers, and care and teaching staff. They also met the Chair of the Board of Governors.

Ardvreck School is an independent coeducational school which provides boarding accommodation for pupils aged eight to thirteen. It is located in Crieff. At the time of the inspection, there were 129 pupils on the roll, of whom 93 were boarders. The agreed maximum roll for boarding was 100.

2. Key strengths

The inspection team identified the following key strengths.

- The very welcoming and supportive ethos in the boarding houses.
- Confident pupils who enjoyed and were proud of their school and boarding houses.
- The wide range of challenging leisure and outdoor activities, which enhanced pupils' physical, personal and social development.
- Very good attention to healthy eating for pupils.
- Experienced house staff, who were committed to the care and education of each pupil.
- The leadership and vision of the headmaster for the boarding provision, and the very effective support provided by the head of boarding.

3. What are the views of parents and carers, pupils and staff?

Almost all parents and staff who responded to the questionnaire were very satisfied with all aspects of the schools' boarding provision. Parents found staff welcoming, caring and approachable and would recommend the residence to other parents. They felt their children had good opportunities for personal, social and health development. Staff felt there was an appropriate range of well organised leisure activities and that pupils had well-balanced menus with a good choice of healthy food. Overall, most pupils were content with the provision but some of their views varied across the houses. All pupils felt they would be well looked after if

they had an accident. Almost all thought their residences were good to live in and that staff listened to them and knew them really well. In some houses, around a fifth of pupils did not feel their belongings were safe. In these houses, more than a quarter did not think their privacy was respected while showering and changing, and there were insufficient places to be quiet on their own. Information about the responses to the questionnaires appears in Appendix 3.

4. How good is the environment for care?

Climate and relationships

The climate and relationships in the boarding houses were very good. Pupils were proud of their school and their houses. House staff had created a warm and welcoming atmosphere in the houses and were enthusiastic about engaging pupils in making decisions about their boarding. Pupils were friendly and well behaved and talked confidently with adults about their experiences. They were able to influence decisions about their boarding through house meetings and representation on house and school committees. Older pupils supported new pupils and younger ones very well. The recent addition by the school of mobile phones in the junior house had improved arrangements further for pupils to contact parents regularly and in private. All pupils were also able to communicate with their parents by e-mail and the school encouraged pupils to write a weekly letter to family or friends.

The school had good communication with parents through informative handbooks, the school magazine, regular newsletters, and by telephone, letter and e-mail. Parents received very detailed termly reports on their children's academic progress and personal development, including helpful comments on their progress in their boarding house. Pupils had regular contact with those in other independent schools through sporting and social events. The school had numerous links with the local community and made use of a range of local facilities for pupils' outdoor and leisure activities.

Comfort, safety and security

The junior house and two separate senior houses for boys and girls were attractive, homely and welcoming. Each house had comfortable common rooms and other good social areas for relaxation and a range of activities. Pupils had personalised their own space within the dormitories. However, there were few places in the houses for pupils to be quiet on their own. There were sufficient washing and shower facilities in good working order and the school had provided individual shower cubicles and curtains to improve privacy. Washing machines had been installed in senior houses in response to suggestions from pupils. Pupils had access to a good range of computers, a well-resourced library and music facilities for education and leisure purposes. They also made very good use of the well-equipped gymnasium, swimming pool and outdoor all-weather sports pitches for sport and leisure, as well as a well-appointed adventure playground and wooded areas for imaginative play. Staff and pupils were especially pleased with the refurbished dining room. The discreet lighting and round tables enhanced the social benefits of this focal point of school life. A sickbay had been created in the main building, in response to parents' requests, which allowed good access and care for pupils during the day. The boarding facilities were well maintained. The school had an appropriate rolling programme of improvement which included plans for the renovation of common rooms, kitchen areas and some toilet areas.

All boarding houses had appropriately secure entry systems and arrangements for locking up at night. Staff had organised very good procedures for the reception of visitors. Pupils were well supervised. They used house log books for signing in and out which enabled them to enjoy appropriate freedom and security within the school and grounds. Staff gave good attention to fire safety procedures which included effective night time drills and checks of electrical equipment. The arrangements for dealing with accidents were sensible and clear. School vehicles were well maintained and regularly serviced. Pupils had access to individual cupboards to store personal items but did not always make use of the facility. Staff were receptive to individual pupils' requests for a lockable space. Risk assessments of premises and activities, together with an accessibility strategy, were being updated to reflect current guidance.

5. How well are pupils supported?

Pastoral care

The boarding houses were well staffed with enough staff on duty at all times and when pupils needed them. House staff, both teachers and matrons, provided a very good level of support and care for boarders. During the last year, new staff had joined experienced staff and with them had formed an enthusiastic team committed to ensuring high quality and consistency in the boarding experience for pupils. House staff were approachable and responsive to the needs and views of pupils. Pupils readily sought advice and guidance from house staff on both academic and personal matters. Gap students were carefully recruited through strong links with a reputable school in Australia. They provided effective additional support for pupils. New boarders were made very welcome to the school and were able to take part in a summer camp prior to starting school. Parents and pupils received informative booklets, and house staff quickly established phone and e-mail contact with parents. A busy first weekend of activities and the support of buddy 'sisters and brothers' provided further support to pupils to settle quickly. Pupils' spiritual and religious needs were very well met through daily assemblies led by the headmaster and regular Sunday attendance at local churches.

Pupils had good access to medical care at all times. They were registered with a local health centre whose doctors provided a weekly surgery at the school. The nursing sister, who shared overnight duties with other staff, held open surgeries each morning and kept parents well informed about any health concerns. She briefed other staff on special medical issues, as appropriate, and, together with a team of matrons, supported pupils in a range of pastoral needs, including personal hygiene. Over the last two years, the headmaster's wife and catering staff have been very successful in further improving the quality of meals which were well balanced, healthy and appealing. They sourced fresh ingredients locally, listened to the pupils' food committee and adapted national guidance for school meals appropriately to pupils' dietary needs over the week. In addition, the school promoted healthy lifestyles through daily games lessons and a clear expectation that pupils participate in a range of physical activities for pleasure.

The school had an appropriate child protection policy which the headmaster discussed formally with all staff on an annual basis. Some pastoral staff had received additional child protection training. A robust anti-bullying policy demonstrated a child-centred, no-blame, proportionate approach. Any incidents of bullying were carefully recorded and dealt with appropriately. Pupils felt there was very little bullying and were confident staff would respond with sensitivity and discretion at all times. ChildLine numbers were available to pupils but senior pupils were not fully aware of the particular circumstances when this service might be beneficial. The school

needs to include appropriate discussion of these circumstances with pupils. Access to the Internet by pupils was carefully controlled and filtered and use of mobile phones strictly monitored.

There were few written rules, but guidelines focused on showing respect for individuals, property and safety. Sealed problem or suggestion boxes were used constructively in houses and allowed pupils to share ideas, concerns and complaints confidentially. Pupils could identify a number of people they would happily approach with any concerns, in the expectation they would be taken seriously. The complaints policy offered parents a choice of methods, personnel and levels in raising issues which the school quickly addressed.

Under the requirements of the Education (Disability Strategies and Pupils' Records) (Scotland) Act, the school had submitted its policy on disability and discrimination to the Scottish Executive. However, the school had not yet undertaken a review of its approaches to ensuring accessibility.

Supporting pupils' education

Staff made very effective arrangements to support pupils' education and care and welfare. Pupils undertook prep in classrooms, supervised appropriately by teaching staff who encouraged good study habits. Senior pupils had suitable facilities for private study, in addition to organised prep in class. All pupils had easy access to classroom materials, the school library and computer suite to support their study. The support for learning teacher provided valuable additional support for some pupils and liaised effectively with teaching staff in the houses. All teachers had regular meetings to share relevant information on pupils' academic and pastoral progress to ensure that pupils' needs were met well.

Personal and social development

Provision for pupils' personal and social development was very good. The school provided pupils with a well-balanced and progressive programme for personal, social and health education. It was carefully designed to include relevant aspects, such as living together, life skills and relationships, which could be and were supported in the boarding houses. Pupils were actively encouraged to contribute to their school community and develop citizenship skills through, for instance, expressing their views and sharing in making decisions in school and house committees, and raising funds for charities. They enjoyed and benefited greatly from their participation in the challenges offered through the wide range of sporting, cultural and social activities during the week and at weekends. Pupils worked well together, for example, in team games and school productions. Many achieved success in competitions such as essay writing and debating. The school celebrated pupils' achievements at assemblies and through newsletters.

6. Improving the residential provision

The headmaster provided very good leadership. He had shown clear vision and was committed to the continuous improvement of the boarding provision. In liaison with the Board of Governors, he had recently introduced the new post of head of boarding. He had delegated successfully the day-to-day responsibilities for boarding to the new head of boarding, and shared decisions on its strategic management with her. The headmaster had recently undertaken a thorough review of policies relating to the care and welfare of pupils and implemented up dated

guidance. Housemasters and housemistresses managed their houses very well. Together with the headmaster and head of boarding, they formed a strong and effective team in the care and welfare of boarding pupils.

House staff had a good range of experience, knowledge and skills to meet the pastoral needs of pupils. Teaching staff in charge of the three houses had clear remits and were managing their new roles very effectively. Teachers had annual, constructive professional reviews where their contributions and training needs were discussed. Similar arrangements were not yet in place for other boarding staff. All staff took part in a well-designed programme of professional development and were encouraged to link with similar schools to share ideas to improve the boarding provision. Safe recruitment and systematic recording procedures to meet new requirements were being introduced for new staff. Further improvements were needed in the recording of this information. The school should ensure that all staff working directly with boarders have a copy of the Scottish Social Services Council's Codes of Practice and are familiar with the contents.

The school had developed good arrangements for evaluating the quality of its boarding provision. The headmaster and other members of the senior management team monitored the quality of boarding provision regularly. Staff held weekly meetings with the headmaster and his wife to discuss any issues and identify solutions to problems. Each house had a development plan with appropriate priorities identified to improve the care and welfare of pupils. House staff planned further liaison to share practice, take forward developments and respond to pupils' suggestions. The new head of boarding was in a good position to develop self-evaluation procedures further and monitor the quality of provision across the houses to ensure a consistent high quality boarding experience for pupils. The views of pupils and parents were sought and they influenced future planning. The Chair of the Board of Governors monitored the quality of pupils' experiences through a number of regular formal and social contacts with pupils, staff and the headmaster.

Main points for action

The school and Board of Governors should act on the following recommendations:

- improve the recording of safe recruitment information for all staff;
- update the school's accessibility strategy; and
- continue to improve the boarding facilities as planned, and monitor the consistency of practice.

What happens next?

As a result of the strengths in the performance and management of the school, HM Inspectors will make no further reports in connection with this inspection. The school and the Board of Governors have been asked to prepare an action plan indicating how they will address the main findings of the report, and to share that plan with parents and carers. Within two years of the publication of this report, the Board of Governors, working with the school, will provide a progress report to parents and carers.

Following this inspection, Care Commission Officers will commence statutory twice yearly inspections of the school.

Kate F Cherry
HM Inspector

Rachel Gillespie
Care Commission Officer

12 December 2006

Appendix 1 Summary information

In conducting this inspection the team took account of the following HMIE quality indicators in *How good is our school?* and *National Care Standards*.

How good is the environment for care?	
QI 5.1	Climate and relationships
Standard 5	Comfort, safety and security
How well are pupils supported?	
QI 4.1	Pastoral care
Standard 3	Care and protection
Standard 17	Concerns, comments and complaints
Standard 14	Supporting your education
QI 4.2	Personal and social development
Improving the residential provision	
QI 7.4	Leadership
Standard 7	Management and staffing
QI 7.2	Self-evaluation

Evaluations made using HMIE quality indicators use the following scale to describe the team's judgements:

very good	:	major strengths
good	:	strengths outweigh weaknesses
fair	:	some important weaknesses
unsatisfactory	:	major weaknesses

Reports contain recommendations which are intended to support improvements in the quality of service.

Any requirements refer to actions which must be taken by service providers to ensure that regulations are met and there is compliance with relevant legislation. In these cases, the regulation(s) to which requirements refer will be notified clearly and timescales given.

Appendix 2 Quality indicator summary table

How good is our school? Quality Indicator	Evaluation
Climate and relationships	very good
Pastoral care	very good
Personal and social development	very good
Leadership	very good
Self evaluation	good

Appendix 3 Summary of questionnaire responses

Important features of responses from the various groups which received questionnaires are listed below.

What pleased parents and carers most	What parents and carers would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents were pleased with all aspects of the provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant areas identified for improvement.
What pleased pupils most	What pupils would like to see improved
<p>Almost all pupils felt:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • their house was a friendly place and good to live in; • staff listened to them and knew them well; • they were safe and well cared for, including if they were unwell; • new pupils were given a good welcome; and • there were clear guidelines about behaviour. 	<p>In some houses pupils wanted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • better safety for their personal belongings; • more places to be quiet on their own; • more privacy when washing, showering and changing; and • to be able to make and receive calls to their family in private.
What pleased staff most	What staff would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff were pleased with all aspects of the provision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There were no significant areas identified for improvement.

How can you contact us?

Copies of this report have been sent to the headmaster and school staff, chairman of the Board of Governors and appropriate members of the Scottish Parliament.

Subject to availability, further copies may be obtained free of charge from HM Inspectorate of Education, T1 Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh EH11 3XD or by telephoning 0131 244 8371. Copies are also available on the HMIE web site: www.hmie.gov.uk.

Should you wish to comment on or make a complaint about any aspect of the inspection or about this report you should write either to the Care Commission or to HM Inspectorate of Education at the address below. If you are not satisfied with the action we have taken at the end of our complaints procedure, you can raise your complaint with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman is fully independent and has powers to investigate complaints about Government departments and agencies. You should write to The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 4-6 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS. You can also telephone 0870 011 5378 or e-mail enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk. More information about the Ombudsman's office can be obtained from the website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk.

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