



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**POLWHELE HOUSE SCHOOL**

**BOARDING WELFARE**

**INTERMEDIATE INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Polwhele House School

Full Name of School	<b>Polwhele House School</b>
DfE Number	<b>908/6076</b>
Address	<b>Polwhele House School Polwhele House Truro Cornwall TR4 9AE</b>
Telephone Number	<b>01872 273011</b>
Fax Number	<b>01872 273011</b>
Email Address	<b>office@polwhelehouse.co.uk</b>
Head	<b>Mr Alex McCullough</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Richard White</b>
Age Range	<b>3 to 13</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>100</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (68 boys; 32 girls)</b>
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS): <b>19</b> 5-11: <b>60</b> 11-18: <b>21</b>
Number of Day Pupils	Total: <b>84</b>
Number of Boarders	Total: <b>16</b> Full: <b>0</b> Weekly: <b>16</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>06 Oct 2015 to 08 Oct 2015</b>

## PREFACE

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, as amended. This inspection focuses on the school's compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection.

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule* for intermediate inspections, focusing primarily on compliance with the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools (NMS). The inspection occurs over a period of two and a half continuous days in the school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit;
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features;
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures;
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgement.

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors conducted formal interviews with boarders, held discussions with senior members of staff and with one of the proprietors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period and attended registration sessions. Inspectors visited the boarding house and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and boarding pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mr Adrian Palmer

Reporting Inspector

Mr Phillip Scriven

Team Inspector for Boarding (Housemaster, IAPS school)

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 Polwhele House is a proprietorial, co-educational day and boarding preparatory and pre-preparatory school. It occupies an historic manor house with records that go back to Norman times. Founded in Truro in 1976 as Boscawen Rose School, for pupils from the ages of three to eight, the school moved to its present site in 1981 when it extended the age range to thirteen years. Since 1983 it has educated the Truro Cathedral choristers. The school is surrounded by 32 acres of garden, playing fields, park and woodland on the outskirts of Truro. Since the previous inspection, the school reintroduced weekly boarding in September 2015, following consultation with pupils and parents. The boys' boarding accommodation was refurbished in the summer of 2015. The school has a Managing Council, comprising the two proprietors and a small number of councillors with a broad range of professional expertise.
- 1.2 The school aims to provide a friendly, stimulating and caring environment where all pupils feel valued and are able to reach their full academic potential. It seeks to prepare pupils for the next stage of their education and life by equipping them with strong moral values within a Christian framework that understands and appreciates other religions and cultures. In addition, the school sets out to encourage pupils to be determined and industrious, and to show perseverance in their daily tasks in order to find their own area of excellence.
- 1.3 The school currently has 100 pupils on roll, aged from 3 to 13, of whom 16 (11 boys and 5 girls) are either weekly boarders or those boarding on a flexible basis, accommodated in a wing of the main house. The school has identified 16 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities, all of whom are provided with specialist learning support. The school currently has no pupils with English as an additional language.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups within the school.

## **2. SUMMARY**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

- 2.1 The school does not meet all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015, and therefore it must take the following action.
- Ensure that the school's proprietors monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, and the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and take appropriate action where necessary [National Minimum Standards 11, under Child protection, and 13.1, under Management and development of boarding].

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.2 In addition to the above regulatory action points, the school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Develop a formal written handover process between school and boarding time at the beginning and end of the school day.

### **(iii) Progress since the previous inspection**

- 2.3 The previous boarding welfare inspection was undertaken by ISI in September 2012. The previous inspection recommended that the school provide training for key staff in the administration of controlled medicines to enhance future practice. This has been implemented.

### **3. COMPLIANCE WITH NATIONAL MINIMUM STANDARDS**

#### **3.(a) Boarding provision and care**

- 3.1 The school meets all of the NMS under this section.
- 3.2 New boarders are provided with an effective programme of induction. Daily meetings between boarders and boarding staff allow for regular dissemination of key information. Parents are additionally provided with a boarding handbook. Younger pupils are allocated an older 'buddy' who offers advice and support at key times of the day, and information cards in the dormitories serve as aide memoires. Boarders feel assured in the knowledge that there are several resident adults to whom they can turn for personal guidance, including the school's independent listener, who visits regularly, taking assemblies and being a presence in the school. Posters in the boarding house publish relevant contact details for support. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire made clear that boarders feel confident in their understanding of what to do if they are upset. [NMS 2]
- 3.3 Effective policies are in place for the care of boarders who feel unwell. Parents are contacted initially where possible and boarders are collected. Where this is impractical, they are accommodated in a suitable and separate room, away from other pupils. Care for the emotional well-being of boarders is co-ordinated, but arrangements to record the content of some conversations are informal. The provision of emergency treatment and the management of chronic conditions are undertaken by boarding staff trained in first aid, and parental consent is sought for the administration of any household remedies. These are stored appropriately in locked cabinets and their administration is suitably documented. Boarders' confidentiality is respected. [NMS 3]
- 3.4 Boarders may contact parents and family in private by asking to use the school landline telephone. Boarders report little need to augment this system. They understand the reasons why they may not bring in electronic communication devices and adhere to these rules. The flexible nature of boarding arrangements at the school allow for contact with parents at the beginning and end of the school day where this is necessary. [NMS 4]
- 3.5 Comfortable and well-maintained living accommodation is provided for the sole use of all boarders, including clean and well-lit dormitories, segregated by age and gender, as well as a common room. The boys' dormitories have been recently redecorated and refurnished. Adequate privacy is provided for boys and girls in suitable, clean and well-maintained toilet and washing facilities. Boarders may personalise areas of their accommodation with their own items if they wish. Boarders' accommodation is protected from unauthorised access and CCTV does not intrude upon their privacy. [NMS 5]
- 3.6 Boarders, including those with special dietary needs, are provided with nutritious meals, offering sufficient choice, variety and quantity. Boarders report that they are involved in discussions about the weekly menu. Arrangements are made for alternative food to be provided if necessary. This aspect of the catering arrangements is much appreciated by the boarders. Meals are prepared hygienically in the school's main kitchen, and mealtimes are calm, sociable and orderly. Boarders are able to request snacks in the evening from duty staff, and bedtime routines include a snack and drink. [NMS 8]



- 3.7 Laundry provision for the boarders is suitable in terms of its provision and storage. Valuable possessions may be kept in a lockable space by each boarder's bed, although money and electronic items are currently not permitted in the accommodation but are looked after by staff. [NMS 9]
- 3.8 Boarders enjoy a varied range and choice of activities after school, utilising the school's extensive grounds, as well as indoor facilities. Boarders spoke favourably about much of what is on offer after school and in the evenings, including preparing a campfire and caring for the school ponies. Supervision of activities is in line with school policy, and comprehensive risk assessments are undertaken. Boarders have suitable opportunities to be quiet or alone. Current affairs and news from the outside world are provided through a programme of assemblies, covering topical elements such as a recent lunar eclipse. Access to the daily news is provided through the television in the common room. [NMS 10]

### **3.(b) Arrangements for welfare and safeguarding**

- 3.9 The school does not meet one of the NMS under this section.
- 3.10 The school places importance on ensuring that all measures are undertaken for the health and safety of the pupils. The written health and safety policy covers all aspects of safety in the school. The health and safety committee meets regularly to assess risks for all areas of the buildings and grounds, and the provisions of these are implemented. Detailed risk assessments are carried out for the frequent trips outside the school for boarders. All parents who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they feel their children are in a safe environment when they board. [NMS 6]
- 3.11 Fire safety is comprehensive. The school has an appropriate fire safety policy. Fire risk assessments for all areas of the school are reviewed annually and any deficiencies highlighted are dealt with immediately. Regular fire drills, during both the day and boarding time, ensure that boarders are aware of the procedures to follow. The fire system is tested regularly. Records of fire drills and maintenance of fire equipment are kept and suitable action is taken to remedy any shortcomings. [NMS 7]
- 3.12 The pupils report that they feel very safe at the school. Regular training for all staff is provided and appropriate records are kept. Those with particular child protection responsibilities maintain close links with the local safeguarding board. Prior to inspection the safeguarding policy had several deficiencies, indicating that the annual review by the Managing Council has not been sufficiently rigorous. The policies for safeguarding and child protection now reflect the school's practice, meet regulatory requirements and are known to staff. [NMS 11]
- 3.13 Good behaviour is promoted through the support and guidance that boarders receive from boarding and day staff. The boarders are clear about the expectations staff have of them with regard to behaviour in boarding. Boarders are aware of the school rules, which currently apply to boarding: the small number of boarders means that a separate formal behaviour management system is not required. In discussions, boarders spoke highly about the friendly environment of the boarding community and the mutual respect they have for each other. Suitable arrangements are in place to guard against bullying, as well as for the use of restraint and for searching pupils. [NMS 12]

3.14 The single central register of appointments confirms that the school meets the requirements for safer recruitment. There are currently no family members over the age of 16 living in boarding accommodation. Visitors to the school do not have unsupervised access to boarders. The school currently has no boarders who live overseas or who otherwise require guardians. [NMS 14]

### **3.(c) Leadership and management of the boarding provision**

3.15 The school does not meet one of the NMS under this section.

3.16 The school has a statement of the principles and practice for boarding, which is provided on the website and in the boarding house handbook for parents. All parents who responded to the questionnaire expressed satisfaction with the leadership of boarding. [NMS 1]

3.17 Governors are conscious of and responsive to the needs of boarding. Governance, leadership and management are aware of their responsibility to actively promote the well-being of the boarders. Informal links are well established between academic and boarding staff. Weekly staff meetings allow those involved in boarding to raise any concerns they may have about boarders, and to ensure that information is shared and discussed by teaching and boarding staff. The leadership and management, along with other senior boarding staff, have the necessary skills and knowledge in most areas to fulfil their responsibilities effectively; the weaknesses in the safeguarding policy prior to inspection reflect insufficient rigour in the annual review of the policy. Self-evaluation of boarding is ongoing and this includes discussions with the Managing Council, senior management team, staff, parents and pupils. [NMS 13]

3.18 All staff working with boarders have clear job descriptions. Supervision ratios are appropriate and duty staff are suitably experienced. At all times, boarders know who is responsible for them and staff know the whereabouts of boarders in their care. The school has an appropriate policy for missing pupils. Sufficient staff are resident in the house overnight. Boarders know how to contact the member of staff on duty. Suitable adult accommodation is separate from that of the boarders, and boarders confirm that they do not visit staff accommodation. [NMS 15]

3.19 Boarders report that they do not experience inappropriate discrimination. The needs of the current cohort of boarders are all met. [NMS 16]

3.20 In questionnaire returns from all respondents and in discussions, all boarders expressed their enthusiasm for and enjoyment of boarding. Boarders' views are gathered through regular questionnaires and influence areas such as the food provided. Boarders feel that they are listened to and that their suggestions are often acted upon. For example, every evening, in discussion with the member of staff on duty, they have the opportunity to choose the activity available to them. [NMS 17]

3.21 A complaints policy is available for all parents. Records show that formal complaints are handled in line with the school's published procedures. No concerns regarding weekly boarding have been raised since it was reintroduced in September 2015. [NMS 18]

3.22 In school, all Year 8 pupils are prefects. In the boarding house there is no formal prefect system due to small numbers. However, on the busier evenings for boarding, senior pupils take responsibility for supporting and helping the younger boarders, who appreciate their help and kindness. [NMS 19]

3.23 The school does not arrange long-stay lodgings for pupils. [NMS 20]