

Thomas Adams School

Thomas Adams School

Low Hill, Wem, Shrewsbury SY4 5UB

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this boarding school

Adams House is a co-educational boarding house for children and young people between the ages of 11 and 19. There is capacity for 64 children and young people. It is a state boarding school which provides accommodation for children and young people from the United Kingdom and across the world. The school is part of the 3–18 Education Trust. There are currently 1,237 children and young people on the school roll, and 36 children and young people board on a termly or weekly basis.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 September 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers requires improvement to be good

The boarding school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Date of last inspection: 24 September 2019

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Students at this school are strongly encouraged to develop their individuality. Staff support them to grow personally, academically and socially. Staff are committed to students and this is reflected in the positive relationships that exist between students and staff.

Students settle in to boarding life quickly and build friendships. The boarding house has a catchphrase of being the 'biggest family in Shropshire'. Students and staff refer to this family feeling in the house that helps students to feel at home.

Staff empower students to share their views. Students are confident that staff will listen to them and take action or explain why they cannot take action. For example, students raised with staff that the evening meals were not of a good quality. Senior leaders have addressed this with the catering company and students note the quality of food has significantly improved. Students understand and respect the rules. As a result, boarding is calm and orderly. The school independent visitor attends the school weekly. This means that students know her well. The visitor has a good understanding of safeguarding and raises even small concerns with staff as needed.

Students live in a clean, well-maintained environment. Communal areas are bright and spacious, and students personalise their rooms and personal space. Staff complete regular checks, so the environment remains a safe place for students to live.

The prefect system in boarding is effective. Prefects are proud to take on the role and are happy to support other students. Staff support prefects into this role by offering training and guidance. Other boarders see them as role models, as well as a support.

Students make progress with their academic studies and develop socially under the guidance of staff. However, students' records of their time in school and of their non-academic progress are not well collated. This is a missed opportunity for students to have a record of their personal development over time.

Students can access a full after-school programme and numerous trips out of school on evenings and weekends. These include sports, cinema trips, meals out and shopping, as well as hobbies. These opportunities contribute to students' development while they are boarding.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Day-to-day safeguarding arrangements are good. An experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL) effectively leads safeguarding in the school. Several senior leaders, including boarding leaders, are trained to respond to safeguarding concerns

across the school. As a result, the headteacher and DSL ensures that safeguarding is a priority through the day and night. Leaders put clear safeguarding procedures in place to recognise concerns and report them as needed. As a result, staff have clear guidance if they need it.

When staff have concerns about other adults in the school, they raise these to senior leaders. Leaders complete detailed investigations into concerns when needed. In addition, the headteacher liaises with the other professionals appropriately. External safeguarding partners have confidence in the headteacher and DSL. On one occasion, a safeguarding concern about a member of staff was correctly passed to the academic trust to investigate and act. The record-keeping around this incident is unclear and it is not evident how the trust agreed the outcome. As a result, accountability for the decision about how this serious concern concluded is lacking. The new chief executive of the trust accepted this recently historic concern. He is taking steps to review any similar incidents across all schools in the trust. This gives confidence that leaders are keen to learn and keep children safe.

Students in boarding do not go missing from the house. However, staff are aware of how to manage this if this were to happen. Staff know how to contact leaders in emergencies, and this is reassuring for them. Bullying does not happen in boarding. Students told inspectors that they feel safe where they live and are well supported by staff and the other students. This makes the house a positive environment to live in.

Leaders understand the importance of safe recruitment. They take this responsibility seriously. Several leaders have completed training so that they can recruit safely, and interviews are thorough. However, records do not show the verification of references. This is a weakness in the process, which does not reassure leaders that references are accurate.

The school business manager ensures that all statutory health and safety checks are in place. This includes regular checks by external contractors. The school business manager has a robust system to support her oversight of the school site, including boarding. Staff report maintenance issues when they see them, and these are mostly addressed quickly. This helps the home environment to be safe and inviting.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

Senior leaders in the school trust have not always ensured that there is clarity about the circumstances in which staff who were investigated for concerns about their practice have left the school. In addition, trust leaders have allowed unacceptable delays in sharing these decisions with the local authority designated officer. It is positive that the new chief executive of the trust has made a commitment to reviewing processes for when staff leave in such circumstances to increase accountability. However, this has highlighted a vulnerability in decision-making at a senior leadership level.

Boarding and school leaders are strongly committed to the boarding provision. Leaders and managers put their vision of a family feel and a welcoming home for students into practice, and staff work to this vision. Leaders are rightly proud of the positive ethos in the house. This emphasises the high expectations they have of themselves to provide good care, and they meet these expectations.

The governing body is highly committed to the school. They know the school and its history well. They also understand its current challenges, so they can offer support to leaders. Governors recognise the value of boarding. This relates to not only the impact it has on students' educational progress but also the significant impact it has on students' lives and their personal growth.

The independent person and a governor linked with boarding visit the boarding house regularly. Boarding leaders and representatives from the trust complete regular audits. Boarding leaders value the input from others and act on the recommendations that they make.

Boarding leaders and staff prioritise students' needs when planning for the boarding house. The rota has enough staff so that students have someone to turn to, and leaders are available on call outside of regular school hours. Boarding staff link with school staff to discuss students if needed, and the director of boarding is a part of the wider school senior leadership team. This helps the links to school be both operational and strategic. As a result, boarding remains an integral part of the school community.

New staff have a good induction to boarding. They have training and shadow more experienced staff, so they quickly feel like part of the team. New and existing staff are confident about safeguarding procedures and know to report any concerns to leaders as soon as possible. Staff meet with leaders to discuss performance and practice. There are also regular team meetings, where staff and leaders discuss boarding matters. This helps staff to settle into role well.

The boarding provision meets its stated aims and objectives well. Due to the number of students who come from overseas and the number of different cultures represented, the house has a strongly diverse feel where all are individually accepted. This is a particular strength of the boarding house.

What does the boarding school need to do to improve? Compliance with the national minimum standards for boarding schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standards for boarding schools:

- 2.2 The school's leadership and management, including its governing body where appropriate, demonstrate good skills and knowledge, appropriate to their role and undertake appropriate training as required.
- 2.4 The school's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met.
- 19.1 Schools operate safer recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to relevant guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

Points of improvement

- The school should develop children's records so that they include all required information and provide a full record of children's time and progress in boarding.
- Leaders should ensure that any investigations into staff practice are shared with the LADO during the investigation, as appropriate, and when they are completed without delay.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people using the social care common inspection framework. This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Boarding school details

Social care unique reference number: SC020780

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mark Cooper

Type of school: Boarding school

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Inspectors

Karol Keenan, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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