

Cobham Hall

Inspection report for boarding school

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| Unique reference number | SC024064 |
| Inspection date | 21 February 2008 |
| Inspector | Sophie Wood |
| Type of Inspection | Key |

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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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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|---------------|---|
| 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

Cobham Hall school was founded in 1962 and is set within 150 acres of grade two listed parkland. Approximately 200 girls aged between 11 and 19 attend the school. Just over half are day pupils, the remainder board on either a weekly or full basis. Some of the original buildings date back to the 12th Century and the Hall is open to the public on published dates in the Easter and summer holidays. As a long standing member of Round Square, an association of schools world wide which subscribe to the philosophy of the educationalist Kurt Hahn, the school shares the belief that 'a child's learning should go beyond academic excellence. Above all, the idea of responsibility and service to others is fostered'. This statement is borne out through the wide variety of experiences this membership brings to pupils in terms of overseas travel to attend seminars and conferences, working to fund raise for charities and sponsoring children in third world countries. Whilst half of the pupils are British, the remainder represent over 30 different nationalities and this factor is quite deliberately celebrated by the school, which places the acceptance and understanding of a multi-cultural community at the heart of its ethos. Boarders reside in comfortable, well furnished accommodation, which is appropriately separated in terms of age. They receive care and guidance from a dedicated team of house mistresses who are led by a well qualified, dynamic boarding coordinator.

Summary

This announced key inspection was conducted over two days by two inspectors. All of the key National Minimum Standards for boarding schools were inspected, as well as a number of others and the recommendations made from the previous visit were followed up. Staff across all disciplines were interviewed, relevant documentation was scrutinised and a full tour of the entire site was conducted. Meals were taken with the boarders and particular focus was placed upon interviewing groups of girls across all age ranges. Clear sources of evidence were found to demonstrate the excellent progress made since the last inspection. The boarding provision has been completely reviewed and restructured, in terms of its accommodation and staffing. The team is committed to ongoing and continued development and strives to maintain a safe and happy environment for all of its pupils. Whilst a number of recommendations have been made, a good number of standards throughout the outcome groups were found to be outstanding.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Following its first welfare inspection in 2004, a number of recommendations for improvement were made and the senior management team worked very hard to implement these. By 2006, when a follow up visit was conducted, almost every item had been fully met and from this current visit, the remaining areas, including boarder consultation forums, the role of the Governing Board and the physical aspects of boarding accommodation have all been satisfactorily addressed. The school has undertaken a direct and systematic approach towards improving its service, with changes being delivered in a measured and timely way. In addition to those recommended by the inspectorate, the senior management team has also conducted its own review of boarding provision and made additional positive changes that further benefit the boarders. The newly appointed boarding coordinator brings consistency to monitoring and staff

management. The girls enjoy engaging in meaningful forums, which ensure their views are taken seriously and responded to. The physical accommodation is now of a very good overall standard and older boarders enjoy more freedom, as is appropriate to their age. The school demonstrates a clear desire to continue to self evaluate and seek to constantly improve. This is demonstrated through a good number of the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools now being exceeded by the school.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Over the last two years, the school has closed its separate medical centre and reduced its number of qualified nurses due to a decrease in the total number of boarders. Two qualified nurses are employed on a part time basis and they work opposite shifts to ensure nursing cover is provided for all pupils, 24 hours a day. In addition to this role, they are also employed as resident house mistresses in the sixth form houses. This dual role compromises the post holders and presents a potential conflict of interest in dealing with confidential information. A medical room is now situated within Blythe House. Medicines and equipment are securely stored and there is one bed, used for day girls who become unwell and are waiting to be collected. Boarders who are unwell are looked after within their own boarding house and if symptoms persist, parents or guardians are required to take them home. Throughout boarder interviews a number said they have experienced difficulty in being referred to one of the nurses by teachers and boarding staff when they have complained of feeling unwell. A number also state they have not always received medicines, for example when complaining of a headache or abdominal pain. Written records within the boarding houses pertaining to illness do not always cross refer to medication administration records, for example, a girl is recorded to complain of pain and the record states pain killers were given, yet the medicines log does not record the individual as receiving any. Another example describes an individual with ongoing vomiting; however, there is no follow up action described in writing. In addition, the administration records show a very minimal use of medication being given over the course of each term. All members of the boarding team have received first aid training, as well as guidance from the nurses in medication administration. All parents are required to provide written consent for medical treatment and a local GP visits on a weekly basis. Boarders can also visit the local surgery in between these visits. Health problems are appropriately and sensitively shared with staff and weekly pastoral meetings are used to identify and monitor areas of ongoing welfare concern. Through pupil discussion groups, a number of participants stated they are not fully convinced that personal information shared with individual staff members remains confidential. There is a clear perception from some that issues have been shared without their consent. A sound Personal Social and Health Education PSHE programme is being delivered, with subjects and course materials appropriate to each year group. Not all year groups are currently covered, however this is planned. Feedback from boarders regarding meals is variable. A good number commend the provision and they all say the catering manager listens to their views and trials their suggestions. Overwhelmingly, the most negative aspect of food provision is reported by the younger boarders as being supper. Those in the sixth form houses have much greater opportunities to cook for themselves in well equipped kitchens. The breakfast and particularly, the lunch time provision is generally positively described and there is a good choice of hot, cold and vegetarian options. The main kitchen is clean and well equipped and all members of the catering team are suitably qualified. The catering manager takes great pride in using fresh produce from local suppliers and has a real avoidance of processed foods. He is informed of all allergies and special dietary requirements and regularly asks the girls for their views on the quality of the food provided. The school has its own

dedicated laundry and boarders are very happy with this provision. In addition, the sixth form houses have additional washing machines so that boarders may choose to use the school provision or do their own.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school is commended for its pro active approach towards bullying. Boarders report very occasional and low level incidents and this is supported through written records. The staff team is sensitive as to any individual's perception of being bullied and tackles reported and suspected incidents without delay. Beyond this, the culture of the school is one of tolerance and acceptance and older boarders, particularly the guardians and prefects, take their responsibilities to look after the younger ones very seriously. Such practice is further supported by clear and effective child protection policies and procedures. All staff receive the school's own ongoing updated training and senior staff attend external provision. The Head Teacher maintains clear and professional links with the local safeguarding team and liaises with this department appropriately. Staff across all disciplines know and understand the procedure, in terms of what to report and to whom. In addition, they all understand the use and purpose of the whistle blowing procedure. Rules pertaining to the behaviour expected of all pupils are clearly explained and the school readily rewards positive conduct. Boarding staff maintain written records detailing any sanctions or punishments they implement and these records are monitored by the Boarding Coordinator and visiting Governors, to ensure they remain appropriate and within the school's prescribed guidance. Serious incident and punishment records are held by the Head Teacher and the documentation is clear, detailed and shows a clear chronology as to the management of each incident. Boarders are given ample opportunities to express their own opinions and report any issues or concerns they may have through tutor groups and house meetings. Boarding houses hold records of any issues brought forward by the girls and these show satisfactory resolution. Boarders say they are aware of the pupil complaint procedure, which is advertised on notice boards throughout the boarding provision, however they further state that they do not feel the need to invoke this process, as their concerns and issues are satisfactorily responded to using informal routes. The head teacher maintains clear, chronological records pertaining to parental and third party complaints. These demonstrate thorough investigation and responses given in accordance with the school's policy. There are numerous systems in place for older boarders to be given supervisory roles over the younger ones. Through democratic election, girls may be appointed as prefects and guardians and their roles and responsibilities are made explicitly clear. They are required to undertake a supportive role, described by the school as a 'big sister' and they do not have powers or influence that could be detrimental to the welfare of younger boarders. Representatives from these groups show a sound awareness of their roles and are commended for the maturity and sensitivity they demonstrate. This is further supported through the content of surveys received from younger boarders, who frequently describe guardians and prefects as excellent sources of support. The school insists that all boarders from overseas have guardians appointed by their parents. Whilst the school does not manage this provision itself, it advises parents to only use reputable agencies if they do not have family members or friends that can be used. The school requires full contact details of all appointed guardians and maintains ongoing appropriate contact with them. The physical environment offers safety and security. Detailed risk assessments are adhered to and these are regularly reviewed. Fire drills are routinely practised, during the day and night and all fire fighting equipment is maintained and in good order. The grounds are regularly patrolled throughout the night and CCTV provides additional safeguards. The boarders say they feel safe within the

school. A robust recruitment procedure is implemented in practice. All prospective employees undergo rigorous checks, including the telephone verification of written references and seeking detailed explanations of gaps in employment histories. Every adult working in the school, either on a full time or sessional basis is subject to a Criminal Records Bureau disclosure check and resident staff are explicitly required to supervise any visitors they may have.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are offered a wide range of activities, both on and off the school site. All boarding areas have their own common rooms equipped with music systems, televisions and DVD players. Bligh House has a large projector screen, which is particularly popular for weekend movies. The overall attention to providing comfortable, spacious lounge areas ensures the girls use their free time to be with their friends and relax in pleasant surroundings. A variety of extra curricular clubs are provided for those wishing to pursue drama, hockey, music, art, tennis, cookery, orchestra, swimming and riding and a recently upgraded sports hall houses indoor courts, a dance studio and gymnasium. External trips are planned for each forthcoming year and boarders are expected to attend a number of these. Within this year's student planner, trips to the Tate Modern, Camden Town market, Blue Water shopping centre, Madame Tussauds and The London Dungeon are featured. The girls also say that any sensible and reasonable suggestions they make are also honoured and older boarders are given greater freedom off site that is appropriate to their age. The grounds are extensive and secure and boarders know which areas are out of bounds. There is ample space throughout the school site for girls to enjoy the company of others, or to spend quiet time alone if they wish. Boarders across all ranges are able to identify members of staff they feel able to go to, should they have a personal problem. A small number believe confidentiality has, on occasion, been breached. The school is aware of this view and is working hard to resolve it. The girls are particularly positive about the student leadership team, which gives older girls a sense of appropriate responsibility for the younger ones. An independent listener is available to the school and information regarding her contact details and other external help lines are displayed within the boarding areas. Such information is not currently featured within student handbooks and the boarder's understanding of the role of the independent listener is limited. The emphasis placed upon anti discriminatory practice within the school is commended. The annual cultural festival involves the whole school, for which pupils wear costumes and prepare foods from around the world. Regular whole school assemblies explore a variety of other faiths and cultures and the girls say the mixed and varied population of the school is a feature they particularly value themselves. Although boarders work hard during the school day and many hold additional positions within and on behalf of the school, a good balance is maintained between these responsibilities and free time. Staff are vigilant to detect any indicators of stress or anxiety and boarders say their workloads are manageable. Good provision is in place for organised and private study. Younger boarders are supervised in groups, whilst older girls have ample space and resources within their own single bedrooms. Access to computers, the library and other resources further aids private study.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are able to contribute to the operation of boarding in numerous ways. Regular house and tutor group meetings give them ample opportunities to offer their thoughts and ideas and those spoken with say their suggestions frequently come to fruition. The student council is

productive and boarders also maintain regular and ongoing communication with the catering manager with regards menu planning. There are clear methods in place to introduce new boarders to the school. The 'big sister' system ensures newcomers are not left alone and they receive clear written details before their arrival. The school has a clear policy with regards the use of email and internet safety, hence a number of sites are blocked. Whilst this aspect causes some frustration to boarders, their ability to maintain contact with family members and friends can be maintained through their individual school email account, mobiles, school telephones and letter writing. The school ensures boarders have access to local facilities outside of the school that are appropriate to their age. Regular group outings occur and the school either uses its own transport or local taxis. Greater independence and flexibility in terms of leaving the school site is afforded to older boarders and the school ensures appropriate access to the media and newspapers is provided on a daily basis. Boarders describe positive relationships with different members of staff throughout the school. Those boarders from overseas and those with additional learning needs particularly commend the support and services provided by the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) department and Susan Hampshire Centre.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Systems are in place for the safe keeping and distribution of pocket money and every boarder has secure lockable space within their bedrooms. The school shop stocks a broad range of items in order for boarders to obtain any personal requisites they may need and there are frequent trips to nearby stores. Boarding accommodation is provided over three areas. Main House is occupied by the younger years, who are grouped in small dormitories and they are invited to personalise these areas with posters, photographs and their own bedding. Every boarder has sufficient cupboard and wardrobe space and there is a sufficient number of bathrooms close by. Common rooms are well furnished and kitchens are stocked with additional suitable snacks and drinks for the evenings. The two sixth form houses offer single occupancy bedrooms and those girls who carry additional school responsibilities are rewarded with their own en suite bathrooms. Both houses are spacious and well decorated. Kitchens here are larger because the girls cook more independently as they grow older. A rolling programme of refurbishment is in place. More recently, double glazed windows have been installed and a number of bathrooms have been upgraded. The staff and the girls confirm the maintenance team respond very quickly to requests for repairs and individual maintenance team members are allocated to each house. Boarding areas are warm and all first floor windows are suitably restricted. Every aspect of the boarding provision is cleaned to a very good standard and the girls appreciate this. The girls in the Trees wing of the Main House say the common room is sometimes cold and the maintenance team is now aware of this. Bathrooms throughout offer good privacy and there is a sufficient number of showers and toilets available to avoid excessive waiting.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The written information available to parents, boarders and staff is informative and clear. Information for prospective boarders is written in a style to suit the different age groups accommodated, as girls may join the school as early as aged 11, or later on in the sixth form. Older girls are frequently from overseas and on exchanges, therefore clear attention is paid to ensure information is further explained by the EFL department. The school continues to update its website and this has its own password protected parent log in. All boarding staff have a

clear contract of employment and job description, which is underpinned by the school's policies and procedures and separate boarding staff handbook. Clear and detailed records are held in respect of risk assessments, punishments, accidents and complaints and these are all routinely monitored by the Head Teacher and Governors to ensure appropriate follow up action is taken. Other written records held in the boarding houses are being monitored by the Boarding Coordinator and visiting Governors. Records pertaining to absences and late returns from holidays or exit weekends are not always being fully completed, although the staff state the girls contact them in advance to let them know. The duty roster for the boarding team ensures good supervision levels and the girls know who is on duty and when. Over the last two years, the boarding provision has undergone significant positive changes. New contracts and job descriptions have been issued and great emphasis is being placed upon the training provision and appraisal systems for the boarding team. The hand book is underpinned with relevant policies and procedures, although a number of these are not regarded as being contractually enforced. The disciplinary policy does not currently describe the support and guidance a staff member can expect to receive in the event of suspension or investigation. The Boarding Coordinator works closely alongside the Bursar and together they continue to implement clear and focused management systems. This begins at the induction stage for newly appointed staff, who are given a focused and supportive introduction to their new post. Subsequently, all members of the boarding team have professional development plans, which are reviewed every term. These focus upon each individual's areas of strength, as well as areas needing to develop and this process leads into training provision and clear target setting. This aspect is commended. The boarding coordinator works in each boarding house at least once a week to ensure she remains directly aware of how the houses are operating and members of the team say her leadership style is both professional and supportive. This style of inclusive and democratic management is prevalent throughout the school and it begins with the head teacher. Staff members across teaching, boarding and ancillary departments are made to feel valued themselves, hence they are motivated and work collaboratively with a common aim to provide an excellent service for those in their care.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

| Standard | Action | Due date |
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Recommendations

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

- review the various records held pertaining to illnesses and medication administration to determine their accuracy (NMS 15).
- provide opportunities to seek the views and opinions of the boarders with regards their views about their ongoing health care (NMS 15).
- seek appropriate external advice and guidance with regards the current dual role of the two nurses, with particular regard to the management of confidential issues (NMS 15).

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- ensure the PHSE programme is expanded to adequately provide for all year groups (NMS 6).
 - further research the views expressed by a number of boarders pertaining to breaches in confidentiality (NMS 7).
 - ensure the complaint's procedure and other sources of external support are added to the student handbook for easy reference (NMS 5).
 - review the current provision with regards an Independent Listener for the boarders (NMS 14).
 - ensure the disciplinary procedure includes the guidance and support that staff can expect to receive during suspension or investigation (NMS 35.4).
 - review the current external legal advice in place, which determines certain policies and procedures as not formulating a part of the contract of employment.
 - ensure that written records pertaining to absence and late returns are comprehensively completed (NMS 32.3).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for boarding school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' health is promoted (NMS 6)
- safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and welfare are supported by appropriate records (NMS 7)
- boarders' receive first aid and health care as necessary (NMS 15)
- boarders are adequately supervised and looked after when ill (NMS 16)
- boarders are supported in relation to any health or personal problems (NMS 17)
- boarders receive good quality catering provision (NMS 24)
- boarders have access to food and drinking water in addition to main meals (NMS 25)
- boarders are suitably accommodated when ill (NMS 48)
- boarders' clothing and bedding are adequately laundered (NMS 49).

Ofsted considers 6 and 15 the key standards to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are protected from bullying (NMS 2)
- boarders are protected from abuse (NMS 3)
- use of discipline with boarders is fair and appropriate (NMS 4)
- boarders' complaints are responded to appropriately (NMS 5)
- the operation of any prefect system safeguards and promotes boarders' welfare (NMS 13)
- boarders' welfare is protected in any appointment of educational guardians by the school (NMS 22)
- boarders are protected from the risk of fire (NMS 26)
- the welfare of any children other than the school's pupils is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated by the school (NMS 28)
- boarders' safety and welfare are protected during high risk activities (NMS 29)
- boarders' personal privacy is respected (NMS 37)
- there is vigorous selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with boarders (NMS 38)
- boarders are protected from unsupervised contact at school with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures; all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises are supervised (NMS 39)
- boarders have their own accommodation, which is secure from public intrusion (NMS 41)
- boarders are protected from safety hazards (NMS 47)

Ofsted considers 2, 3, 4, 5, 26, 37, 38, 39, 41 and 47 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders have access to a range and choice of activities (NMS 11)
- boarders do not experience inappropriate discrimination (NMS 18)
- boarders' welfare is not compromised by unusual or onerous demands (NMS 27)
- boarders have satisfactory provision to study (NMS 43)
- boarders have access to a range of safe recreational areas (NMS 46)

Ofsted considers 14 and 18 the key standards to be inspected.

Annex A

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders are enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school (NMS 12)
- boarders receive personal support from staff (NMS 14)
- boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families (NMS 19)
- new boarders are introduced to the school's procedures and operation, and are enabled to settle in (NMS 21)
- boarders have appropriate access to information and facilities outside the school (NMS 30)
- there are sound relationships between staff and boarders (NMS 36)

Ofsted considers 12 and 19 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- boarders' possessions and money are protected (NMS 20)
- boarders are provided with satisfactory accommodation (NMS 40)
- boarders have satisfactory sleeping accommodation (NMS 42)
- boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities (NMS 44)
- boarders have satisfactory provision for changing by day (NMS 45)
- boarders can obtain personal requisites while accommodated at school (NMS 50)

Ofsted considers 51 the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- a suitable statement of the school's principles and practice should be available to parents, boarders and staff (NMS 1)
- there is clear leadership of boarding in the school (NMS 8)
- crises affecting boarders' welfare are managed effectively (NMS 9)
- the school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare (NMS 10)
- risk assessment and school record-keeping contribute to boarders' welfare (NMS 23)
- boarders are supervised adequately by staff (NMS 31)
- staff exercise appropriate supervision of boarders leaving the school site (NMS 32)
- boarders are adequately supervised at night (NMS 33)
- boarders are looked after by staff which have specific boarding duties, and have received adequate induction and continued training (NMS 34)
- boarders are looked after by staff which follow clear boarding policies and practice (NMS 35)
- the welfare of boarders placed in lodgings is safeguarded and promoted (NMS 51)
- the welfare of boarders is safeguarded and promoted while accommodated away from the school site on short-term visits (NMS 52)

Ofsted considers 1, 23, 31 and 34 the key standards to be inspected.