

Heath Mount School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Martha Nethaway
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	4 December 2006

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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

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

This is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for children between the ages of three and 13 years. The boarding provision is for children from seven to 13 years. The school was founded in 1790 in London and is now owned by a charitable trust and administered by a governing body. The main school building is a Grade 1 listed Georgian mansion set in beautiful grounds and is leased from the Abel Smith Trust.

The boarding accommodation is partly in the main school and partly in a renovated house, a little distance away, on the edge of the estate. The school has a large sports field, a swimming pool, extensive woodland and a purpose-built sports hall with changing rooms in the grounds.

The school provides education to approximately 423 boys and girls. At the time of this inspection the school was providing places for 80 boarders. The boarders board from Monday evening until Friday morning. In addition to the regular Monday to Friday boarders the school is also flexible in offering day pupils a range of overnight stays, when requested by families.

Summary

This was an announced inspection undertaken by one Ofsted inspector over three days. The inspection looked at the key boarding school national minimum standards under the 'Every Child Matters' outcome groups.

The overall outcome judgement is satisfactory with good and outstanding features being achieved. The outcome judgements for being healthy, positive contribution and economic wellbeing are good. The outcome for enjoying and achieving is outstanding. The outcome areas for staying safe and organisation are satisfactory. There are two recommendations set as a result of this visit. The first relates to a review of staff recruitment procedures. The second recommendation is about improving storage for boarders' possessions.

Boarders at the school are happy and confident individuals who make the most of the opportunities on offer to them. The relationships between boarders and staff are friendly and secure, with all boarders having many people to whom they can turn for help and advice or even just for relaxed company.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, four recommendations were made. The school was recommended to review the boarding accommodation for boys. This has now been thoroughly addressed with a newly refurbished south wing in the school. As a consequence, the quality of the accommodation is excellent. The school has now installed electronic fire safety devices to ensure fire safety is given a high priority at all times. The recommendation related to medication training has now been fully addressed. Finally, the recommendation related to boarders' mobiles has now been reviewed. Weekly boarders can take them into the boarding house and are required to give them to staff at night for safe keeping.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders' health is promoted well. The individual management of boarders' health is well achieved. Staff are well informed about health needs.

Boarders are well educated about substance abuse through the school's personal, social, health and education (PSHE) scheme of work. This includes visits from outside speakers, such as police officers, and the informal discussions that happens with staff within the boarding environment. Boarders receive a mixture of formal and curriculum based lessons. Boarders have many opportunities to discuss a myriad of issues within their form time both in terms of live issues and also proactively with topics planned in advance. This enhances boarders' moral, spiritual, social and cultural education and as a consequence boarders learn to understand the world around them.

The school has a well-equipped health centre. Health care is overseen by two matrons. They are able to administer first aid and deal with minor injuries. Parents of new boarders complete a medical form as part of the arrival's documentation. If boarders are ill they are sent or taken to the health centre. There is also a visiting school doctor who examines all new pupils during the first term and will see boarders regularly, when it is necessary. Boarders are further protected because the school has good systems in place for receiving medication. All medications are appropriately stored and the matrons ensure that comprehensive records are maintained. This ensures that medications are managed safely.

Boarders receive good quality and choice in the catering provision. The school catering is contracted out to an independent company. The school menus, which are published on the school's website, evidence the healthy balance of the food available to boarders. The school catering service has responded positively to requests put forward by the boarders after the food council was set up last year. All boarders take their meals in the dining room. They have a choice of hot food or a salad bar. There is also bread and spread and a dessert and tea to drink. For breakfast, boarders can choose from a choice of drinks and hot or continental breakfast. During the late evening boarders can make themselves snacks, such as cereals and toast.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The system in place to promote the safety and welfare of boarders is satisfactory. There are some key areas in the school's recruitment procedures that have not been consistently adhered to. The school is taking action to address this matter thoroughly.

Boarders are protected from abuse. Boarders' protection is promoted through the school's policies and procedures which inform staff on what actions to take regarding concerns about harm or abuse. Policies are updated to reflect wider guidance regarding safeguarding measures. Boarders develop a clear understanding that they face many challenging situations in their lives and they learn how to make good and safe choices in life decisions, with staff guidance.

Boarders behave at all times in an appropriate, fair and friendly manner towards each other. Staff commented, 'The school ensures that boarders are free from bullying and from the fear of bullying.' Boarders are protected from bullying. Boarders and staff are clear that bullying is

not tolerated in the school. Staff are quick to act in relation to bullying behaviour. The school has community prefects in place to help prevent bullying and they are trained in social awareness, child protection and as mediators, offering a service to younger pupils. They have a specific role to report inappropriate behaviour to key designated staff. They have a key role in supporting positive behaviour and may prevent bullying by intervening at an early stage or by offering mediation. The staff receive on-going training in relation to anti-bullying awareness and this is an integrated part of the school's approach to promoting good behaviour.

Boarders clearly benefit from the climate of praise that is well developed in the school. Boarders' unique skills and abilities are recognised and encouraged for their personal and social growth. The school uses merits and commendations to reward boarders' attainment, effort and success. One parent commented, 'They instil good manners as one might at home, and the boarders are given responsibility for the younger children which they enjoy.'

Boarders are protected from the risk of fire. Boarders learn how to protect themselves in an emergency because they have regular opportunities to practise the evacuation of the building. Boarders commented, 'The school holds regular fire practise and whistle tests.' Staff complete regular checks of the physical condition of the boarding house. Fire drill records show excellent attention to detail with consideration of fire risk and management.

Boarders' privacy is respected and staff provide appropriate supervision and support.

There is satisfactory selection and vetting of all staff working with boarders. The records checked during the visit did not always consistently follow the school's stated policy. The school has clearly identified where the shortfalls are and have taken immediate steps to ensure that future recruitment procedures are more thorough.

Boarders are protected from unsupervised contact, at school, with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures and there is supervision of all unchecked visitors to the boarding premises.

Boarders have their own accommodation, secure from public intrusion. Boarders are protected because their accommodation has magnetic time-locks with key-pads installed in all areas that boarders have access to in the evenings. There are security gates at the school entrance which provide effective safety measures for those entering and leaving the premises.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders receive outstanding personal support from staff. The staff and boarder relationships are very secure and positive. Boarders have opportunities to take on leadership roles in the houses. Boarders are happy and confident when in the company of house staff and converse with them openly and confidently, demonstrating the sound relationship between them. Boarders have regular access to their form teacher, personal tutor and the school counsellor. Boarders commented, 'The school maintains a whole-school approach to pastoral care.'

The boarders' council is well established and boarders are confident when sharing their views with staff at all times. Communication between parents and staff is strong and families are satisfied with the open door policy that the school employs to encourage discussion.

Boarders do not experience inappropriate discrimination. Staff are committed to providing equality for all boarders and families and to taking positive action to eliminate discrimination in all areas of the school.

The student development scheme enables tutors to lead students in Year 7 to 8 through the individual tailored programme. It provides enrichment in six core areas of school life which includes: academic study, the arts, sports and activities, pastoral support, outdoor education and leadership training. The development of peer mediation is highly successful in the school and helps boarders to employ 'emotional intelligence' in their dealings with their peers. Boarders clearly understand that they have an entitlement to learn and work in a supportive environment. School assembly and chapel acknowledge the richness and diversity of British society. Boarders commented, 'Both boarding communities support their own choice of charity and the boarders are becoming involved in the newly formed charity committees' activities in 2010.'

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are supported and encouraged to contribute to the operation of boarding in the school. Staff make sure the views of boarders are the focus of their activity by making the most of every opportunity to find out what they think and feel about their boarding experience. This is achieved through the boarders' committee, questionnaires and food committee. Boarders commented positively about changes made, for example, privileges reviewed, new television and games console in the girls' boarding house, Sky television in the boys' boarding house and an improved range of healthy snacks and drinks now available in the boarding houses.

Boarders can maintain private contact with their parents and families successfully. Boarders are able to use the boarding house phones freely and without being charged. Boarders commented, 'You don't even need to ask.' In addition, weekly boarders are allowed to bring mobiles and hand these in at night to the boarding staff. Boarders have the ability to email their parents and school friends via the school's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) and use this resource responsibly.

Boarders' introduction to boarding is well planned. From the summer term in Year 3 pupils may choose to board. The school provide a 'trial board' for one night at no charge. The school has in place a 'buddy' system whereby a boarder is paired with another student from the same year where possible. New boarders are helped to settle into the boarding community. They receive ongoing support from boarding staff who are in regular contact with their families via phone calls and emails. One parent commented, 'The pastoral care and organisation of activities is excellent.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The boys' accommodation is in the boarding wing in the main house and the girls stay nearby. Since the last inspection, the boys' accommodation has been moved to a self-contained boys' boarding unit which is directly above the dining room and kitchen areas. This area has been successfully refurbished and provides an excellent standard of accommodation. Equally, the girls' accommodation reaches a high standard. Boarders' sleeping and living accommodation is very comfortable and homely. One boarder commented, 'It's a real home from home.'

All of the accommodation is kept exceptionally well and is cleaned by highly dedicated boarding cleaning housekeepers and is decorated on a rolling programme of improvements. Boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities. Again, these are cleaned well and maintained to a high standard. Likewise, boarders have access to excellent outdoor facilities and the grounds are well maintained by a dedicated maintenance team.

Boarders' possessions and money are protected. Valuable possessions are kept securely on the boarders' behalf as appropriate. Although boarders' possessions are well looked after, there are no facilities currently for them to have their own lockable area. This is partly due to the flexible boarding environment, as possessions generally travel home with the boarders when they are not residing at school.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The organisation and management of the school is satisfactory and this is because the recruitment administrative processes are judged as just reaching satisfactory. The school has taken the necessary action to redress this matter. Despite this, the school's performance is strong in relation to pastoral care and boarding provision is flexible, nurturing and enjoyable. One parent commented, 'The school provides the most welcoming boarding opportunity.'

Boarding remains a thriving and vital element of the school. The school's organisation of boarding contributes to boarders' welfare. Boarders are adequately supervised by staff because the staffing levels meet the needs of the boarders. Boarders clearly benefit from the good level of continuity of care being reached. This is because all the same staff work across the four nights, which means boarders get to know staff very well and form positive working relationships. Staff commented, 'Boarders are very well known individually, and are well cared for as a result.' Boarders are looked after by staff with specific boarding duties, with good induction and continued training. The head of boarding and senior house staff are all professionally trained. Staff commented, 'The acquisition of the Boarding School Association's qualification has enabled more staff to be aware of current thinking and boarding house practice is evolving as a result.' Staff training and professional development is given a good priority by the school with staff attending regular events to update and improve boarding practices.

The boarders and staff receive information regarding boarding house general information and expectations. There is good and open communication with parents, mirroring the school's concept of the virtual triangle between boarders, staff and parents. Information displayed in the boarding houses and provided to parents, boarders and staff outlines the care a boarder can expect as well as what they are expected to contribute to the community. The school has plans to enhance communication by creating a regular boarding newsletter for boarders and parents.

Risk assessments of premises and outings are thorough and well maintained and scrutinised. This helps protect boarders even further. As a result, risk assessments and the school record keeping contribute effectively to boarders' welfare. The headteacher monitors and reviews all aspects related to complaints, accidents, behaviour and discipline records.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Boarders understand that quality of opportunity permeates through the whole curriculum and the general Christian ethos of the school.

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):

- ensure that the school's system for recruiting staff who will work with boarders includes all the elements outlined in standard 38.2 (breach of national minimum standard 38.2)
- ensure that boarders have a suitably secure, accessible place to keep personal possessions and valuables. (NMS 20.3)