

Holmwood House School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Date of last inspection	3 October 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

Holmwood House School opened in 1925. It operates as a co-independent school, providing education for pupils from four and a half years to 13 and half years of age. Flexible boarding facilities are offered only to pupils aged eight years old and above. The school is a converted Victorian Manor House with additional teaching blocks added in the grounds. The school is set in grounds on the outskirts of Colchester. Facilities include large playing fields, tennis courts, indoor swimming pool and a dance/drama studio.

Summary

This was an announced full inspection which assessed the service's performance against all the key National Minimum Standards (NMS). The overall judgement is based on the outcomes of the standards inspected. The service provides good outcomes in Being Healthy, Staying Safe, Enjoying and Achieving, Positive Contribution, Economic Well-being and Organisation. The most impressive aspect of the visit was the enthusiastic atmosphere between boarders and their relationships with younger pupils and the staff. The surveys completed by pupils are generally positive and include comments, such as 'I feel completely safe', 'I can trust everyone!' and 'This is a really good school! GO Holmwood House School!' Boarders are able to have a balanced experience where enjoyment is valued alongside achievement.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The recommendations from the previous inspection carried out by the Commission of Social Care Inspectorate (CSCI) have been addressed or partially addressed. Improved arrangements for storing of medication are noted, along with child protection training for staff, monitoring of sanctions and incidents, welfare facilities for pupils with emotional needs and fire drills and practice. Previous recommendations made in relation to staffing levels and gender at bedtime have also been met. However, some parts of the boarders' bathroom facilities are not maintained to a satisfactory standard and induction programmes for new staff are not yet formalised.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders' health is promoted. Boarders receive first aid care as necessary from experienced matrons who provide an open door surgery where boarders visit at any time of the day. Boarders receive Personal, Social and Health Education lessons through the school curriculum by designated staff with particular areas of expertise. Boarders are clear about the school's rules on smoking, alcohol and illegal substances and have received lectures from the police about keeping safe, the dangers of paedophiles, internet, smoking, drug abuse and alcohol. Policies and guidance in place promote boarders' health. The school holds a medical history of each pupil excluding General Practitioners' (GP) details and the health of boarders is monitored and screened on arrival. Parental consent to medical treatment and first aid is obtained at the point of admission and medical updates are obtained from parents. Surgeries are held each weekday by matrons and were observed to be very busy as children feel able to drop in for support, regarding minor ailments or just reassurance. The relationship between the matrons and children is extremely positive and caring and surveys from pupils confirm this. The parents remain totally

responsible for boarders' medical appointments and boarders remain registered with their own GP as most pupils live within half an hour of the school. At inspection matron contacted parents to arrange collection of boarders who were unwell and boarders confirm they go home at any time night or day if unwell. Boarders have suitable accommodation when ill and receive regular checks from staff. The matron is qualified in first aid but does not have a medical background. She dispenses only homely remedies and first aid with consent of parents. Medication records examined were not signed by the staff member who dispenses them and staff. Safeguarding and promoting boarders' health and welfare is well supported by other appropriate health records. Boarders are provided with three meals a day, with a choice of main meals including a vegetarian option and salad buffet. Boarders comment that they would like more choice of vegetables and larger portions for the older boarders. Surveys from pupils remarked on likes and dislikes of the school food. Sampled meals were nutritious, presented well and records confirm boarders are sought their opinion regarding food preferences. Boarders have snacks available at bedtime, access to a 'tuck shop' in the evenings and water from fountains throughout the school. Overall boarders receive good catering provision, although quantity and choice are sometimes limited.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school's countering bullying policy is available for staff, boarders and parents. Boarders have a clear understanding of what they should do if someone is making them unhappy. Results from questionnaires issued to boarders prior to the inspection show that bullying is not an issue within the school. Boarders identify a wide range of adults within the school whom they would go to with any problems. The school has and follows an appropriate policy on child protection, which is consistent with Local Safeguarding Children's Board procedures and is known to staff. The headmaster and deputy head are responsible for any child protection issues. Boarding staff receive training in child protection and have completed an on line course recently. Interviews with staff confirm they are conversant with the signs of abuse and the procedures for reporting any forms of abuse. The child protection policy includes enough detail in respect of the requirement that a referral is to be made within 24 hours of allegation or suspicions in line with the NMS. The school has had no incidents of child protection within the last year. Boarders are helped to develop appropriate behaviours in line with the school's new green dot system. The 'Rewards and Sanctions' booklet provides clear information and includes a statement on sanctions used, which includes missing a night of boarding, loss of activity, letter of apology or suspension from school. The use of physical restraint is rare. The behaviour of boarders during the inspection was exemplary. Records indicate that minimal sanctions and punishments are issued and boarders are aware of the rewards system. The use of discipline is fair, appropriate and promotes positive attitudes between boarders and staff. Boarders' complaints are appropriately responded to by staff and boarders confirm they know how to make a complaint and say they are confident any complaint will be dealt with by staff. Boarders are protected from the risk of fire and safety hazards. They are familiar with the fire evacuation procedures and regular fire drills take place in the boarding house, including announced, unannounced and night time evacuation. A fire risk assessment of the school and boarding provision is in place. Fire fighting equipment is regularly serviced and tested together with emergency lighting and fire alarm systems serviced by an outside fire safety company. Fire safety training is provided to staff and professional advice sought regarding safety issues. The adventure playground in the school which backs onto the school drive is secluded and overgrown. This limits visibility from the school and playing fields and may compromise pupils' safety. The headmaster was

informed and agreed to arrange trimming of foliage to ensure full visibility of the area. Boarders are protected by vigorous selection and vetting of staff and volunteers. Records indicate staff do not commence work in the school until full checks are completed. Sampled files contain appropriate checks, references and identification checks. Boarders are protected by drivers who are employed by an independent company, who complete Criminal Record Bureau checks (CRB) on drivers used to transport boarders. Files confirm ancillary and maintenance staff all have CRB checks. Wherever possible, maintenance and cleaning staff will carry out work in the boarding houses during out of school hours, when boarders are not present. Outside visitors to the school are kept under supervision by staff to protect pupils' safety. All visitors are requested to wear an identity badge whilst on the school site and sign in and out of the building, although records show they do not always sign out. Boarders have their own accommodation, secure from public intrusion. The grounds to the house are open to the public but the boarding house has restricted entry and locked key pads to the entrance with stair and fire door alarms to help keep boarders safe. No incidents have arisen. The boarding house has window restrictors on all windows. Risk assessments are updated regularly and there are good systems for creating a safe environment for boarders. Boarders say their personal privacy is respected as staff always knock on doors and wait for a reply prior to entering. However the school reception office in the main building was unattended during an evening and personal information was accessible, which breaches confidentiality of both pupils and families.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Boarders are encouraged to succeed and do not experience inappropriate discrimination. The school promotes the integration of all boarders and staff are aware of cultural diversities, although the school currently has few boarders from different ethnic backgrounds and no overseas students. Evidence confirms cultural differences are recognised and encouraged with special diets provided when requested. Boarders have access to good support from staff and a wide range of recreational areas and facilities within the school. The boarders say in surveys they can talk to different staff who listen and that they feel supported. Boarders are aware of the study times and of the different activities available in and outside of school. Day-pupils study with boarders and have the opportunity to attend after school activities. This provides time for boarders to socialise with friends from school that do not board. Individual hobbies and interests are supported wherever possible. Boarders gave examples of staff encouraging their sporting interests. Boarders are observed to have access to activities including cricket, rugby, dancing, rugby, hockey, rounder's, netball, tennis, drama, football cross country, ping-pong, basketball, squash, athletics, chess, cookery and the use of an indoor swimming pool within the grounds. Boarders enjoy indoor activities in an area called "the cellars" where boarders play pool, access books, games, watch TV, video and DVDs. There are facilities for boarders to have some privacy in the garden and cellar area.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders are able to contribute to the operation of the boarding school through occasional house meetings, questionnaires and one to one feedback. However house meetings are not held regularly for boarders and the school does not have a school council. Systems in place support boarders to communicate and maintain contact with their families. Many boarders live within the local area so maintain regular private contact with their parents and families. Boarding

is flexible and boarders go home every weekend, so contact with family and friends is ongoing. Boarders may contact friends and family at all reasonable times without having to seek permission from staff. Private telephones are available to boarders in the boarding accommodation and many boarders have their own mobile telephone. Staff contact parents about their child's progress and highlight any concerns day or night. Parents are also encouraged to contact the school and collect their son or daughter if needed. New boarders are introduced to the school procedures and operation, and are enabled to settle and receive, along with parents, a comprehensive information pack prior to entering the school. New boarders are encouraged to stay one week during year seven to test the boarding house and accommodation. Some year seven's occasionally board, which helps integration with year eight boarders. There is also a buddy system in the school to help support younger pupils. The systems in place enable new boarders to settle in a planned and organised manner whilst feeling supported by staff and older boarders. There are excellent relationships between boarders and staff and boarders confirm in feedback that, 'your tutor is always there for you and 'if I had a problem I would go to my tutor, matron, headmaster or friends.'

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders are provided with satisfactory accommodation comprising of shared dormitories. Boarders say they enjoy sharing with other boarders and are happy with the sleeping provision. They each have a good quality single bed and bedside cabinet which they can personalise with posters and photographs. Rooms are clean and painted to a good standard. However this is not consistent throughout all dormitories. Many boarders personalise the walls above their beds and together with their own bedding from home, make the dormitories look homely and welcoming. Boarders bedside cabinets do not contain a locked area for boarders to store valuable items however boarders confirm they do not bring valuable items in to the school and request matron lock up their mobile phones at night in the surgery. Boarders have adequate private toilet and washing facilities and satisfactory provision for changing by day. However one bath hot tap did not work and some tiles in the female boarder's showers were loose and in need of re-grouting. The facilities in the boarding house allow total privacy when washing and dressing and bathing facilities include satisfactory water pressures and temperatures for both showers and baths.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A suitable statement of the school's boarding principles and practice is available to parents, boarders and staff. The school's prospectus covers all aspects of boarding life. The staff handbook provides detailed instructions and information about the school policies and procedures, the code of practice and expectations. Weekly diary information is displayed for pupils and parents to see. Risk assessments and school record keeping contributes to ensuring boarders' safe welfare. Sampled risk assessments are thorough and include all aspects of the school, including the building and most outside areas. Boarders are looked after by staff following clear boarding policies and practice which is comprehensive and up to date. Records of incidents and accidents are consistently maintained, such information enables central monitoring of any trends and follow up action if required. The school has an up to date development plan for 2008/9 and school crisis policy. Boarders are adequately supervised and looked after by staff with specific boarding duties. Staff induction although not recorded in

files, takes place with continuing training. The staffing levels are sufficient to meet the needs of the number of boarders accommodated day and night. Boarders are made aware of who is on duty and who is responsible for them at specific times, both within the boarding house and at free time. Boarders know where staff sleep at night and say they feel able to call upon staff if necessary. The boarding staff operate as a supportive team and ensure that boarders are aware of activities, events and any changes in the staff cover. Boarders benefit from clear leadership of the boarding house and boarders are complimentary of staff. Boarding staff confirm they receive good levels of support, attend regular meetings and briefings to keep them updated with any issues within the school. Boarders and staff are complimentary of the management of the school and say they are supported and included in all aspects of school life. The atmosphere between boarders, staff and headmaster is mutually positive and respectful. Staff appear dedicated and child focused and boarders say they are happy to be part of an excellent school, which has helped them develop in confidence.

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 a record is kept of all medication given to boarders which is signed by the responsible member of staff and is regularly monitored by an appropriate designated senior member of staff (NMS15.12)
- ensure meals provided to boarders are adequate in quantity and choice (NMS 24.1)
- ensure there is a clear school policy restricting access to school premises. This is with particular regard to childrens' records which are left in the school office (NMS41.4)
- ensure boarders have the opportunity to contribute their views and opinions regarding the operation of the boarding provision (NMS 12.1)
- ensure boarders' bathroom facilities are adequately maintained (NMS 40.6).

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.