

Winchester House School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Christy Wannop / Carole Moore
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

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

Winchester House School is a co educational preparatory school for day and boarding pupils between the ages of three and thirteen. It is non selective and mixed ability and has been co educational since 1976 providing pre- preparatory early education since 1984. The school was established in 1875 as a boarding school for boys and moved to its present location in the small market town of Brackley in 1922. Boarding is available in two distinct houses, one for boys in the original Tudor building and a new detached building for girls aged between 7 and 13. There are extensive grounds, gardens and playing fields, a swimming pool, tennis courts arts and music centre and science block. There are currently 77 children who board, either full time or on an occasional basis and 156 children attending as day pupils.

Summary

This was an announced key inspection and covered all the key NMS under the ECM outcome areas, plus organisation. This setting meets all and exceeds a significant number of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools.

The school values boarding and invests in the development of a unique approach which puts the child's experience both now, and for their future life, at its heart. Leadership and management of the school is strong, imaginative and effective. Children benefit from good communication between boarding and educational staff and there are effective links between the school and home over matters such as welfare, health and educational issues. This high quality pastoral care supports the individual needs of young people and children identify strongly with the school's positive ethos. Children at Winchester house are happy and do well.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last full 2004 National Care Standards Commission inspection found shortfalls in recruitment, child protection training and knowledge, poor food and risk management.

There has been a complete change in management and these areas are now exemplary. There are strong systems for keeping children safe through safe recruitment of all adults at the school and staff have good external and internal training in child protection. The quality of food is very good and children live in a safe environment where unnecessary risks are minimised.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The provision is outstanding. This is an all round healthy school where good food and lots of exercise are part of everyday life. Children learn about healthy lifestyles through an excellent personal, health, social and citizenship education (PHSCE) programme and they grow their own vegetables and recycle. Staff say the PHSCE programme underpins whole ethos of the school and threads through the 24 hour curriculum and children make the link between what they learn and what they do. Parents endorse this as a ' wonderful ethos with children's needs the priority.'

Children have good health support. Arrangements for first aid and health care are professionally managed by the nurse who plays an active role in health promotion. Parents say, 'It is very reassuring to have such a skilled and knowledgeable professional on site.' Children routinely enjoy healthy lifestyles and confidently adopt practices which ensure their own safety, making the link between what they learn in PHSCE and how they live their lives. The school recognises the importance of good emotional and physical health, and makes sure children are well fed and rested and helped if worried or upset. If children have particular health or emotional issues, or do not have regular contact with parents, the school draws up excellent care plans to deliver the care they need. Parents have a positive view of boarding in their child's life. For example, 'The boarding system allows excellent 24 hour care.'

Children say food is healthy and plentiful and that they are 'very lucky' to have such a good cook. Special diets are catered for unobtrusively, either on religious, cultural or medical grounds, and mealtimes are well organised, social occasions. Children have enough food, have choice, and say they like it.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are exceptionally well cared for and say the school is 'conscious about well-being.' Provision for safeguarding children is of a high standard and parents have confidence in the school's procedures for welfare, health and safety. They say, 'Overall the school has a good balance between keeping children safe and encouraging independence.' Staff at all levels, gap students and prefects are trained or briefed in child protection. There are good links with safeguarding in education advisors at the local authority who report good relationships with the school and a pro active and enthusiastic attitude to safeguarding issues. The school's child protection procedures have recently been reviewed and improved; and it remains for the school to ensure that these are consistent with the Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures for Northampton.

There is an excellent approach to preventing bullying, including imaginative use of technology on the school's website and internet pages to enable children to report any worries or concerns. Children say that staff are quick to act if there is bullying and take 'immediate action' to sort things out, and parents say the school adheres to a 'robust anti bullying policy.' Children learn about how to keep themselves and others safe through the 24 hour PHSCE curriculum and are confident that adults have the ability to protect them.

An open approach to complaints means that children and their parents know that their views will be taken seriously and issues sorted out. Parents say 'I feel I can talk openly to the school' and that, 'Complaints are dealt with quickly by the head and deputy.'

Standards of behaviour are excellent and children develop a maturity and a care for others, whilst also being enabled to be children and to play and have fun. Parents say 'Our impression is that children respect each other.' They describe the school's behavioural approach, 'Golden rules are prominently displayed and the head, through assemblies, reinforces what these are and the benefits to the whole school community.' These explicit rules assume children want to be good and stress the positive to encourage mature behaviour. Children described their acceptance and understanding of the need sometimes for different adult responses to children with different needs. They recognise the significance of positive reinforcement for children who may not be so able.

There are well organised systems for managing risk and safe recruitment. There is a rigorous recruitment and selection procedure for all adults, teaching and boarding staff, gap students, governors, and ancillary staff and in the management of visitors to the site. Children live and learn safely within an environment where risks from fire and avoidable hazards are anticipated, planned for, and reduced through good health and safety systems. Children know what to do in an emergency and there are no concerns from the Fire Safety Authority or Environmental Health Department. One parent said, 'The school has a disciplined but practical approach to safety.'

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

In 2008 the Independent Schools Inspectorate judged the school's educational experience to be outstanding both in its breadth and quality. The school promotes excellent educational outcomes for children and has high standards in governance and leadership. One parent commented, 'The learning support team is excellent and has helped my son keep pace, small classes, wonderful facilities and strong leadership from the head, no wonder it is a success.'

There is a wide range of regular, varied activities which are central to the ethos of the school. Parents say the school provides, 'a learning environment that is challenging, rewarding, varied, supportive and great fun.'

Through activities that focus on challenges and new experiences, value individual strengths and abilities; children learn about leadership and working together to achieve for a team, a group and their community, not just as individuals. Children say the school is good at 'encouraging you and stretching you in the things you're good at. It gives you self confidence and mental strength. It makes sure you get a go at everything.' Parents also recognised the school's excellent attitude to 'ensuring ALL children are given the opportunity to do their best in both education and other interests.'

Boarders have excellent personal support from a range of adults at the school. Pastoral staff seek out and establish positive joint working with specialist advisors where children may have additional needs. There is excellent care planning to support particular needs and sensitive, imaginative and enthusiastic consideration by boarding staff of each child. There are plenty of adults that children say they trust; and a new Independent Listener, clear about her responsibilities to children when children want to talk to someone outside of the school's pastoral and teaching team.

Staff acknowledge and support each child as an individual and challenge discrimination. The atmosphere is inclusive and recognises positive differences. Children say they have great support and made clear through their contributions in discussion that the ethos is about valuing the contributions of others too.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school is an inclusive community in which they all feel safe and valued. Parents value this 'strong focus of community,' and boarders clearly make firm friends and appear happy and open in their relationships. Communication between adults and children, and between the school and parents is a real strength. Parents report communication to be 'very valuable and

fruitful', and that 'staff readily get in touch if there's an issue, academically and pastorally.' Another parent said, 'The school are outstanding about realising each child's potential. The tutor system is a good way of ensuring each child has a mentor and a contact with parents.' Children with parents overseas are helped through sensitive staff support, to make phone calls and keep in touch with home.

Whilst the school council may have lapsed during the last year, there are plans to revive and strengthen it and there are many other forums where children learn and participate in the democratic process with incredible maturity. Children have plenty of good ideas, such as wanting private study slots with teachers, more boarding for girls, suggestions for improving teatimes and play areas; and each boarding house gives them the opportunity through regular meetings, to have their say and the school is in tune with children's views. A parent commented, 'Girls boarding house run fantastically. Huge communication between housemistress, parents and children. Teaches children how to communicate properly. Confidential too. Able to talk.' Boarders say that can talk to all staff because they are 'really open.'

The school welcomes new boarders and children tell us they are quickly helped to find their feet. Prefects and dormitory 'Captains' play an important role in assuring a supportive atmosphere for each child. Parents appreciate and acknowledge the 'breadth of friendships' across age groups at the school and the mutual benefit of this for children.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The school promotes independence and prepares boarders for life by encouraging the skills they will need for young adulthood. This happens through the Learning to Lead programme, but also in the expectations that adults have of children to participate and take responsibility for themselves and the decisions they make so that they are accountable to the school community. Parents see the opportunities for personal development through fundraising and expedition planning as 'a fantastic experience' and that children are 'strongly aware of the relationship between working hard and achieving results.' There is an atmosphere of healthy respect between adults and children. Children say they trust their friends and adults in the school and feel that their possessions are safe.

The school environment is well furnished, welcoming and homely. The school has a programme of refurbishment within boarding and has already invested in renovations of bathing facilities and boys dormitories. The Governors have a keen eye on the development and improvement of boarding provision. Staff want children to feel like it is a home from home and children say they love it and their bedrooms and the common rooms. 'Everyone should board.'

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

Parents and children have an excellent range of information about the school, through its prospectus, website and additional boarding handbooks that describe the principles and operation of boarding. Leadership and management of the school is strong and parents feel the Head 'sets the tone very positively.' The senior management team set clear direction leading to improvement which results in a high quality of care and education. They are focussed on making changes that will have a positive impact on children's experience of boarding. There is hands-on intelligent management with a strong child focus and a sense of humour.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Policy, procedure and good practice helps children to know that they are valued as individuals and their diverse needs are met in everyday life. The school celebrates difference through inclusion and respect and children learn about the needs of others and the wider world community. Each child is encouraged to fulfil their potential.

Senior staff and Governors are clearly accessible to children, parents and the whole staff team. The school development plan sets out the direction for the school and a range of regular recorded meetings all levels within the school demonstrate effective coordination across disciplines. The Head teacher monitors the school's records of risk assessment, major punishments, complaints and accidents and takes action where needed, thus contributing to boarder's welfare. The right people meet, discuss and decide matters in the best interest of children, for example form tutors, SMT, residential staff, and external advisors. Consistently good responses from parents in Ofsted surveys indicate they are very happy with a school that exceeds their expectations and they describe communication from the school as excellent. Children are wholehearted in their love of the school. Staff say it is 'a happy place to work' and that they enjoy 'making memories' for children.'

Boarders are cared for by sufficient experienced staff with a clear understanding of their responsibilities, who commonly undertake a broad range of training to keep up to date. They are well supported, professional and sensitive in their approach. There is a team approach to boarding school life, which supports innovation, accountability and positive development. Children thrive in this environment. Many staff are long standing, but welcome new ideas and new staff, and are a major asset to the consistency and stability of the school. Staff say they feel part of the whole team 'from homesickness to times tables' and are proud of how children grow and increase in confidence, essential for their next step to senior 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):

- liaise with LSCB to ensure the school's safeguarding policy is consistent with LSCB procedures (NMS 3.2)