

# Witham Hall School

Inspection report for boarding school

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<b>Inspection date</b>	18 November 2009
<b>Inspector</b>	Jackie Callaghan
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<b>Address</b>	Witham Hall School Witham-on-the-Hill BOURNE Lincolnshire PE10 0JJ
<b>Telephone number</b>	01778 590222
<b>Email</b>	
<b>Registered person</b>	Witham Hall School
<b>Head / Principal</b>	Charles Welch
<b>Nominated person</b>	Charles Welch
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	14 November 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**

Witham Hall School is a co-educational preparatory school providing pre-prep, day attendance weekly and flexi-boarding. The school is located in the village of Witham-On-The-Hill, Lincolnshire between the towns of Bourne and Stamford.

This is an established school. The school's main catchments area attracts children from Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Rutland. The school has established a good reputation for achievement in sports and the arts.

Pupils can board from the age of eight, although most begin flexi-boarding and then progress to weekly boarding as they move through the school. The majority of pupils when moving to their next schools become full boarders, so Witham Hall offers them a sound base to begin to experience living away from home. Currently there are 16 male weekly boarders and 10 female weekly boarders. In addition there are 49 male and 39 female flexi boarders. This gives a total of 114 boarding pupils.

### **Summary**

This was an announced full inspection, which concentrated on the key boarding schools national minimum standards. All outcome groups were inspected with being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving and organisation judged as outstanding. Positive contribution and economic wellbeing are judged as good.

Witham Hall is an outstanding school and exceeds a large majority of standards. Pupils enjoy boarding at the school and benefit from clear, professional, effective and imaginative boarding management. This coupled with a staff team who are skilled, knowledgeable and enthusiastic provides all pupils with stimulating and purposeful care.

Pupils do contact parents and their families when boarding, however, there is only one private pupils telephone on which they can do this. At times there can be long queues to use this phone. Although this standard is met and pupils report that it does not overtly stop them from phoning home. The benefits to pupils welfare by increasing the numbers of telephones would be significant. One recommendation for the development of practise has been raised in positive contribution as a result.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### **Improvements since the last inspection**

Not applicable.

### **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils gain a superb understanding about the benefits of healthy living. There are efficient arrangements to make sure that medication is safely administered. This ensures that pupil's health needs are fully met and their welfare is totally safeguarded. There is excellent access to a local general practitioner (GP) who works closely with staff to meet pupil's health needs. The

school successfully fosters peer relationships that allow pupils to share affection, support and empathy. This was supported by the pupils with one commenting that 'the staff and other pupils care about you'.

Pupils are provided with a nutritiously balanced and appealing menu, taking into consideration their likes and dislikes. The meals are of a high standard with alternative options always available. There is an abundance of fresh fruit and healthy snacks available. Most importantly, pupils have plenty of opportunities to fully participate in a variety of activities that are fun and suit their interests, skills and abilities. This ensures a fruitful range of health benefits, experiences and challenges. All pupils talked very positively about the food and about staff. Comments included, 'I like the food and being with my friends' and 'Witham Hall boarding is always enjoyable and the matrons and the house parents are really nice'.

### **Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe**

The provision is outstanding.

Overall, the school has an excellent focus on safeguarding and protection issues. The school has outstanding leadership that consistently promotes an environment where safety and pupils' welfare is paramount. Pupils confirm this view with one pupil voicing 'I feel very safe boarding here'.

There is an effective system in place to record any concerns made known by pupils and/or others. The head of boarding monitors the bordering pupils' complaints record. This is efficient and makes sure that pupil rights and entitlements are upheld and that the process is effective. Witham Hall has a detailed anti-bullying policy and bullying is known by all to be unacceptable. Any issues are discussed openly within the school ensuring pupils are protected. This helps staff and pupils work successfully together to ensure care is continually cohesive.

Pupils are greatly protected by the school's child protection systems, policies and procedures. This provides a safe and very secure environment that pupils enjoy. All boarding staff display a strong commitment to supporting and encouraging pupils' individuality. As well as recognising their strengths and aspirations. This is echoed by the schools' behaviour management process which focuses on the positives. Pupils are encouraged and supported to behave in ways that are socially acceptable. Consequently, all the pupils are very courteous and have exceptional manners.

Pupils enjoy a safe environment, where risks are regularly assessed and actions to limit these risks are promoted. They are protected by a robust safety regime. All portable electric appliances are tested annually. All hazardous substances are kept securely locked away and, a comprehensive annual fire risk assessment is in place. Pupils take part in regular fire escape drills. They are given no warning that the drill will take place which demonstrates staff's clear understanding of how pupils learn from first-hand experiences.

Staff respect a pupils' wishes for privacy and confidentiality. Staff successfully recognise that not all children are the same. They completely understand the ambitions and needs of each individual and ensure pupils have choice and control over the support they need and how it is delivered.

Pupils are protected by the organisation's robust recruitment systems that ensures all staff are subject to security checks such as Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) disclosures prior to their

employment. Pupils are equally protected from unsupervised contact with adults who have not been subject to the school's complete recruitment checking procedures. Pupils have their own accommodation which is very secure from public intrusion. This view is echoed by a parent who wrote 'the boarding house provides a caring and safe atmosphere'.

### **Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do**

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils receive inspiring support from staff. The school provides a child-orientated environment where learning and taking part is exciting and enjoyable. A parent survey states that pupils receive 'excellent care by the matrons, our daughter feels very secure and at home'. Another parent wrote 'my daughter has been a weekly boarder for 3 years and we only live 6 miles away'. The overwhelming benefit of this approach is that pupils' participation in positive recreational experiences successfully contributes to their physical, social, spiritual growth and development.

Pupils are actively developing their confidence and practical abilities. They are helped and supported to access a variety of in-house and community based activities that enhance self-awareness, develop identity and improve their self-esteem in an age-appropriate manner. The staff team promotes pupils positive awareness of gender and diversity both within the school and the wider community. This view is shared by a parent who comments that 'my daughter loves the environment and has developed a caring and compassionate nature whilst boarding'.

### **Helping children make a positive contribution**

The provision is good.

The school's diligent systems consistently gain pupils' views about matters affecting their daily lives and the general running of the school. This helps pupils to have ownership of the setting and actively encourages a sense of belonging. Staff are enthusiastic about ensuring that all pupils play an active role in society.

Systems for contact and sharing of information with families are developing. Parents can phone the school for progress reports and staff contact them to keep them informed of any changes or issues of concern. Pupils are supported to maintain contact with family and friends whilst boarding. However, there is currently only one pupil payphone. Pupils raised that on some nights there can be long queues to use the phone. As a result, the positive steps to increase partnership working with parents are at risk of being undermined by the lack of a generous pupil phone provision.

There is a buddying system where existing pupils successfully help new pupils to settle in. This ensures that new boarders are actively supported to feel at home quickly. The relationship between staff and pupils is seen as purposeful, creating a supportive and caring atmosphere in which all pupils feel secure and comfortable.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Pupils do not bring in pocket money as the school provides all essentials. All pupils, however, do have space in their rooms where they can lock away personal items.

The accommodation for boarders is appropriately lit, warm, well decorated and homely. There are a range of facilities on site that boarders have good access to in the evenings and weekends. These include a sports hall, squash court, Astroturf and technology centre. The grounds that surround the school are well maintained and offer the pupils a safe environment in which to relax or pursue sporting activities. As a result, pupils board and learn in a fully inclusive environment which inspires them to respect and value their own needs and the differing needs of others.

The overall standard of accommodation is good, providing a vibrant comfortable place for pupils which assists them with communal style living. This view is echoed by a parent who states that boarding has 'the feeling of a family unit'. Pupils are encouraged to decorate their bedrooms with family photos and other items which reflect individual interests and preferences. Pupils have access to suitable toilet and washing facilities that supports their privacy.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

Excellent information is available for parents and pupils on all aspects of boarding. The school use their website to publish important policies like child protection. This demonstrates that the school are open and transparent about its safeguarding responsibilities.

Pupils and staff enjoy the stability of an efficiently run school. Systems for monitoring the operation of the boarding are excellent, and the school has an atmosphere of creative and focused direction with pupils' welfare clearly at the forefront. One pupil commented that 'you get to do more at Witham than you do at home'.

Pupils are looked after by staff that understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently. Staff are supported in their role with robust policies and procedures which specifically set out the expectations and guidelines. All staff receive a first-class induction to boarding and regular training. All staff including house parents and matrons undertakes statutory child protection training. This ensures that they are sufficiently equipped with skills to support and meet the needs of pupils in their care.

There are essentially two boarding groups, one for boys and one for girls though these groups are subdivided by year group. The organisation of boarding remains the same for boys and girls and is of a high standard. Pupils receive excellent care from a consistent staff team and sufficient numbers of staff are in place to provide safe supervision levels.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. Each staff member has a vital role in implementing an inclusive approach. The staff group consider all aspects of their work and how stereotypes, attitudes and assumptions may prevent pupils from fully participating within society.

Staff have great confidence in the people who manage them and managers value the staff. Regular staff meetings involving all staff, ensures consistency of approach and a professional working partnership. The management of the school clearly works in harmony and, along with the staff team share a positive practical vision for the pupils who attend Witham Hall.

## 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):

- consider improving the access to private telephones for boarders use (NMS 19.3)