

Cottesmore School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC014473
Inspection date	19 January 2009
Inspector	Paul Taylor / Gaynor Moorey
Type of Inspection	Key

Address	Cottesmore School Buchan Hill Pease Pottage CRAWLEY West Sussex RH11 9AU
Telephone number	01293 520648
Email	office@cottesmoreschool.com
Registered person	Mark Rogerson
Head / Principal	Tom Rogerson
Nominated person	Mark Rogerson
Date of last inspection	17 June 2004

© Crown copyright 2009

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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

Cottesmore is a co-educational preparatory school which can accommodate up to 150 boarders from the age of seven up to the age of 13. The school is set in 30 acres of grounds which include an adventure playground, a lake, tennis courts, indoor swimming pool and sports field. The school is set in a large listed building and the children who board have their dormitories mainly on the first and second floors. Cottesmore is a ten minute drive from Crawley and is on the outskirts of the village of Pease Pottage.

Summary

At this announced inspection all the key standards were assessed. The school provides an outstanding level of care for the children who board there. Each child's individuality is valued and respected and the ethos in the school ensures that those who board there are nurtured and developed both academically and socially. The strong leadership of the school and systems operated therein, ensure that all the children have their welfare promoted and protected. The size of the school ensures that all the children can be monitored and supported closely and that there is 'always someone to talk to.'

Boarders live in comfortable accommodation and benefit from a wide range of activities. The boarding ethos of the school is relaxed, open and homely and there is an emphasis placed on respecting each other and showing courtesy and manners to everyone. One recommendation was made as a result of this inspection.

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.

The school offers clear guidance to the pupils on the promotion of healthy living and lifestyles. Other health issues are discussed in Personal, Social, Citizenship and Health Education (PSCHE) within the school day and the children can approach members of staff to discuss any personal issues or problems. Appropriate information is provided to the children on issues such as illegal substances, sexual health, and other social issues. This information is shared sensitively and commensurate with the children's development and understanding, bearing in mind that some of the children join the school at the age of seven.

Detailed and thorough health records are developed for the children. These contain information such as health histories, allergies and specific health needs, vaccination records as well as any issues which may affect a child's emotional wellbeing, such as bereavement or divorce. Specific health plans are kept for children who have identified health needs such as anaphylaxis or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Sensitive information is shared with members of staff on a 'need to know' basis and all records are kept securely stored.

There are clear policies and guidance with regards to the monitoring and promoting of the children's health. Examples of policies include medication, what to do if the nurse is unavailable, injury during games, asthma and anaphylaxis. The policies are reviewed and overseen by the registered school nurse who is very experienced. The administration and storage of medication is closely and robustly audited and monitored. Records are thorough and up to date. Clear records are kept of medication coming to the school and a stock take is maintained to ensure that all the records tally. Medication is kept securely stored.

The children have access to a doctor who comes to the school twice a week. Additionally, appointments with a female doctor can be arranged if that is what a child wants. Other health appointments are also in place if they are needed, these include opticians, dentists or other specialist input, such as a speech and language therapist if needed.

The nurse provides caring and sensitive attention to children who present themselves to her. She is very aware that some children may at times require reassurance and a kind word rather than medical attention. Support offered to the children is nurturing and attentive. The school nurse notifies parents or guardians of any illnesses or injuries and clear records are kept of any accidents. The sick bay is situated next to the nurse's room. It is comfortable and child friendly and has a bell which children can use to summon help.

There is a rolling program of first aid training and this ensures that there is always a qualified 'first aider' on the premises.

The standard of catering in the school is outstanding. The kitchen is well managed and the chef ensures that all the staff are trained appropriately to their roles. The kitchen is regularly cleaned and a visit by the Environmental Health Officer graded the premises as 'excellent'. Meals are sourced as much as possible with local produce and most of the food is home made. The menu is prepared on a weekly basis and unanimous feedback from the children, members of staff and parents stated that the food is of a very high standard. Additionally, the catering staff are very aware of specific dietary needs for any particular children and ensure that these are met.

The health and dietary needs of the children at the school are met to an excellent standard.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The children are encouraged to support and care for each other. The small size of the school means that there are always adults around to support the children and that any incidents or niggles between them are quickly noted. Additionally, the school operates a 'monitor' system. Monitors are senior pupils who have a role and duty to support younger children if they need it. Beyond this, the school has a 'Happiness Charter' which outlines behavioural expectations and a 'Worry Box' in which the children can post concerns to senior members of staff. The Happiness Charter also provides a list of adults to whom the children can approach for help and advice. The list includes the contact details of the school's independent visitor as well as Childline. The children are encouraged to live as part of a close community and to look out for each other. The school approach ensures that bullying is unacceptable and the children report it is not a problem.

The school has a member of staff who is responsible for the monitoring of child protection and who trains and disseminates information about child protection to all members of staff. There is a clear child protection policy in place for the staff to follow and this contains clear guidance with regards to reporting issues of concern and how to respond to disclosures by children. All members of staff have child protection training as part of their induction and the child protection co-ordinator ensures that all members of staff receive refresher training and reminders about their role and obligations every term. This training includes all adults who work in the school, including maintenance staff, catering staff, domestic staff, teachers and matrons. All members of staff have access to the Local Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures. The level of awareness about child protection issues and the adults responsibility to keep the children safe, ensures that there is an excellent commitment to ensuring that the children are kept safe from abuse.

The children are very clear as to what behaviour is expected from them. There are sanctions in place such as detention, extra chores and being asked to take time out quietly to think and reflect about behaviour. Disciplinary measures are seen as an opportunity for children to discuss and address their behaviour rather than being seen as a punishment in itself.

The school celebrates achievements and good behaviour. Rewards include late nights, acknowledgement and applause at an assembly, earning house points and visiting the headteacher for acknowledgement and praise.

The children have numerous opportunities to voice their opinions and complaints. It is clear that most of the children are confident to express their views both in writing and verbally. This means that any complaints or issues can be passed on to various members of staff including the head of boarding and headteacher. The children are responded to when they raise issues and feedback from them confirms that their views are taken seriously and acknowledged.

Boarders and staff alike are protected from risks to their safety and wellbeing. A robust and comprehensive programme of risk assessment identifies and addresses any known or perceived dangers. Such risk assessments are regularly reviewed and when necessary, amended. The whole environment is risk assessed with potentially hazardous areas such as the lake, swimming pool and shooting range having suitable restrictions in place to prevent access. The children know which areas of the school are out of bounds. All children are taken on a tour of the grounds by the staff when they arrive so that the message about this aspect of school life is made very clear.

When trips are carried out away from school site, robust and individualised risk assessments are completed. These risk assessments are not only completed by the member of staff responsible for the trip or activity but are checked and endorsed by the member of staff responsible for Health and Safety and then checked and endorsed again by the headteacher. The children living at the school are encouraged to take part in activities which encourage their confidence and experience and in this context are encouraged to take calculated and sensible risks. Examples of such activities include tree climbing and swimming in the lake in the summer. As already stated, these potentially high risk activities are the subject of a robust risk assessment process together with clear guidelines for staff, pupils and with approval of parents.

Records confirm that frequent testing of fire equipment and alarms is carried out and that fire drills occur regularly in both daylight and at night. An inspection of the premises was carried

out by the fire brigade in June 2008 and this found all the systems in place for fire safety to be satisfactory.

Children living in the school have their privacy respected. They are able to shower, wash and change privately in the dormitories and staff supervision is discrete, ensuring that the younger children have easy access to assistance and guidance if needed, but not impinging on older and more able children.

The school operates a rigorous and robust recruitment process which ensures that all adults working in the school in whatever role are subject to references and a Criminal Records Bureau check (CRB). CRB checks are renewed every three years. The bursar oversees the compilation of detailed and thorough staff records and telephones references to ensure their veracity. The Head Teacher also examines the recruitment records to ensure their accuracy.

There are clear guidelines and expectations for visitors to follow. All visitors must wear a visitors badge when on the premises and sign the visitors' book. Additionally, they are supervised and escorted when on the premises. Any adults who live on the grounds and who are related to members of staff working in the school, are subject to CRB checks, and do not go into the school without supervision.

The boarding accommodation is separate from the school and as such no one has access to it unless they are meant to be there. The boarding living areas are for the exclusive use of the children who live in the school and are not shared.

The school operates very well organised and audited systems to ensure that the safety of all the children is promoted and protected vigorously.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Children in the school are offered a wide and varied range of activities. There is a strong belief in the school that there is something at which each child can enjoy and excel, whether this is academically, in sport, drama, music or hobbies. The children are encouraged and supported to take part in diverse activities as part of their development and growth. Examples of activities provided by the school include chess, various sports, fishing, swimming, shooting, snooker, board games and outings to bowling, ice skating and sports events such as rugby matches. Additionally the children also have the opportunity to socialise with each other during their free time.

The school operates a system called the 'Happiness Charter' and this makes it clear to each child who is available to them for support and advice. The children have a wide choice of adults to whom they can approach and this includes an independent visitor who not only visits the school but is available by telephone. Additionally the children are very aware that they may approach their form tutor, heads of boarding, nurse, matrons, gap students, headteacher and his wife or any other teaching staff in the school. The wide range of adults available, combined with the small size of the school means that advice, guidance and reassurance are readily and easily accessible. All the children feel that they are listened to and feel that there is 'always someone you can talk to.'

The school has children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Difference is celebrated and seen as an opportunity to learn about different cultures and religions. Cultural and religious issues are taught to the children and opportunities are given to children from different backgrounds to value and enjoy their background whilst being integrated into the school community, which is Christian based. Children from different religious backgrounds are given the opportunity to attend religious ceremonies and the school facilitates this. Whilst the whole school is expected to attend chapel on a regular basis, those with different religious backgrounds are able to use this time to contemplate and reflect.

There are a number of children for whom English is a second or even third language. Support is offered to the children by members of staff who can speak different languages fluently whilst bearing in mind that many of these children are attending the school to develop their use of English as well as to develop academically.

The small size of the school ensures that those children who for various reasons are struggling to 'fit in' are supported and monitored so that they do not become isolated.

Clear guidance is in place for members of staff to follow with regards to appreciating and acknowledging different cultural and religious backgrounds and this ethos is spread throughout the school.

The support offered to the children and opportunities that they have at the school are of an outstanding quality.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The children have numerous opportunities to share their views on how they feel they are being cared for and what they would like to improve. Formal forums include the School Council and the Food Council. Both consist of pupils chosen by their peers to represent their views to key senior members of staff such as the headteacher and the chef. Thorough minutes are kept of the meetings which contain full agendas. Examples of improvements made as a result of these meetings include décor in the girls changing room changed to a colour they prefer and a re-introduction of 'pop corn' chicken onto the menu. The children also spend time meeting with tutors and during what they call 'Set Meetings'. Additionally the children are able to speak with the heads of boarding to discuss issues such as who they would like to share dormitories with and what sort of activities or films they like.

Children boarding in the school are able to contact parents and loved ones via telephone and email as well as being encouraged to write weekly letters. Computer keyboards with Korean characters and the Cyrillic alphabet are provided for the use of those children for whom that is their primary written language. Children whose families live abroad and in different time zones are allowed to telephone their parents at times that are convenient to the children and their families. It is clear that the school values the children's need to be in contact with their loved ones. Emails and telephone conversations are carried out in private and the right for children to have privacy during these times is acknowledged and protected.

The process of inducting new boarders is sensitive and nurturing, especially for the younger children. All new boarders are given a handbook before they arrive at the school. The handbook describes what they are to expect at the school, the routines and rules as well as what support

is available to them if they need it. Once they are at the school each new boarder is assigned a 'shadow' who is an established boarder and who is designated to support the new boarder until they have settled in. Additionally each dormitory has a monitor who is a senior pupil and whose role is to support and guide the younger members in the dormitory. To underpin this process, members of staff regularly contact the parents of new boarders to update them on their child's progress and how they are settling in.

The children at the school have ready access to the outside world. They all have access to television, news papers, email and regular outings into the community.

The ethos of the school is for every member of the community to look out for each other. This is underpinned by the children having adults to whom they can speak to and relax with, especially in the evenings. The children speak highly of the head of boarding as well as the nurse and matrons. The atmosphere and interaction is relaxed and respectful.

It is clear that the views of the children are valued and listened to and that the relationships between the staff and children ensure that respect and tolerance are key values in the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Children are able to keep personal possessions secure in lockable boxes kept in the changing room. Additionally they all have their own bedside cabinets and lockers for storing clothes. The children are discouraged from bringing in very valuable items, but if they do, these are placed with the head of boarding for safe keeping.

The dormitories are spacious and comfortable. All the children have bunk beds and are able to personalise their personal space with posters and pictures. The dormitories are kept tidy by the children and are kept clean by the domestic staff. The common rooms have been established as specific areas for the children to use and are still being developed with regards to installing new furniture.

There are adequate numbers of sinks and showers available for the children. The pupils are able to shower privately in the boarding area. Members of staff have separate toilet and shower facilities. The communal changing room used by the boys during the day is stark.

There is a team of staff who meet regularly to discuss the refurbishment and repairs needed throughout the school. The refurbishment program discussed in the minutes of these meetings has identified that the boy's changing room is in need of refurbishment.

Overall, the accommodation provided to children who board, is clean and comfortable.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school has a very well presented and attractive prospectus which clearly outlines the ethos and what children and parents can expect. All the children have a handbook which is also very clear as to what living at the school entails and what the routines, rules and systems are whilst at Cottesmore. Additionally there is a website which describes what the school provides and gives access to the latest inspection report carried out by the Independent Schools Inspectorate.

The small size of the school and the fact that boarding takes place in one part of the building means that the organisation of boarding is consistent and safe. Boys and girls have clearly demarked separate boarding facilities, however the standard of accommodation is very similar.

The staff responsible for boarding provide a good balance of supervision for the children. The supervision of those boarding is discrete and does not impinge on privacy. The level of supervision does vary, bearing in mind the young age of some of the children and their need for guidance and prompting in some areas.

The safety of the children who board is protected by having a robust risk assessment process which is checked by those responsible for the boarding area, the member of staff responsible for health and safety issues and the headteacher. All members of staff liaise with each other on an informal and formal basis. Communication is achieved quickly and efficiently by the use of the school's intranet and by having regular meetings involving all members of staff. The headteacher is involved in numerous meetings held by different departments. Forums in which meetings are held, apart from the staff meeting, include the Works Committee in which maintenance and health and safety is discussed, the senior management meeting, boarding staff meeting, and the meeting held between the head, proprietor and financial bursar.

Records are checked and endorsed by the member of staff responsible for them and are then checked and endorsed by the headteacher. This ensures that the headteacher is very much involved in the oversight and management of the school whilst sharing and delegating responsibilities. Records which the headteacher monitors and endorses include records of punishments, staff recruitment, risk assessments, health records and records kept on pupil's achievement and progress. The school also has a system which highlights any children which may need additional monitoring and support and this information is disseminated using the school intranet.

There is a comprehensive staff handbook which outlines policies and guidance with regards to boarding and the welfare of children in the school. New members of staff have a clear induction process and this involves training in child protection and the emphasis on duties of care and supervision for those children who board. The school policies outline who is responsible for reviewing staff performance and training and this is also outlined in each member of staff's job description.

The level of communication between all members of staff in the school is excellent. Each child's needs, concerns and idiosyncrasies are known to the staff. The staff team is managed and supported by a senior management team who are experienced and knowledgeable, and who provide excellent oversight of the running of the school.

Promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The different backgrounds of the children living in the school are celebrated and enjoyed and seen as an opportunity to learn about each other. Each child's individuality is acknowledged and valued, whether this be a cultural or religious difference or an individual ability to excel in a specific area. The acknowledgement of the importance of difference and how this can enrich everyone's experience is embedded in the school. This is achieved through academic learning in the school curriculum, the varied menu, celebrating and acknowledging different religious festivals and by enabling children to communicate with loved ones in different time zones. This ensures that the approach of the school is inclusive and avoids isolation for children with different backgrounds.

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
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

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

- continue with the plans to refurbish and redecorate the boys' changing room on the ground floor. (NMS 45).