

# Northeast Manor School

Inspection report for residential special school

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<b>Date of last inspection</b>	13 November 2007

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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**

Northease Manor is an independent co-educational special school for pupils aged between 10 and 17. The school offers education and boarding provision for able and potentially able pupils who have specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia and dyspraxia. Approximately 89 pupils currently attend the school with just under half being weekly boarders. The school is situated near Lewes in East Sussex and is contained within its own grounds in a beautiful rural setting. Many of the buildings date from the Tudor period, with newer structures being constructed to complement the overall ambience of the school. The main boarding facilities are provided in three separate parts of the school. Boys and girls are accommodated in separate accommodation.

### **Summary**

This announced key inspection took place over a two day period. During the course of the inspection information was gleaned from boarders, staff and parents and guardians. A full tour of the boarding provision was undertaken and a range of records and documents were examined. Evidence collected during the inspection indicates that boarding provision within the school is of a high standard and continues to develop. Northease Manor provides specialist support to young people who experience educational difficulties due to dyslexia and dyspraxia. Boarding plays an important role within the school and the advent of the waking curriculum provides many opportunities for the acquisition of social and life skills. However, it is felt many opportunities to extract learning remain to be exploited.

The social, emotional, educational and health needs of each boarder are clearly identified on admission. Educational, boarding and therapeutic staff all work closely together to ensure that each individual's needs can be effectively met within a holistic framework. Recommendations arising from the last inspection have all been appropriately addressed. Though three recommendations arise from this inspection, they relate to the continuing development of school.

Boarding provision is managed by a well motivated Head of Care who is supported by two dedicated permanent staff and an enthusiastic gap student. All are aware of the vulnerabilities of the boarders for whom they are caring and are committed to ensuring that boarding at Northease will be a safe, stimulating and enjoyable experience.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

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

All the recommendations arising from the last inspection have been appropriately addressed.

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

The provision is outstanding.

As Northease Manor only offers weekly boarding the primary responsibility for the health of each boarder remains with their parents or guardians. The health needs of each individual are identified prior to admission and signed consent forms obtained. Staff closely monitor the health and wellbeing of boarders during the school week. Any boarder who becomes ill while boarding returns home. The school has an experienced matron who liaises closely with parents

or guardians to ensure that health needs are effectively met. If staff identify any areas of concern they initiate referrals to specialist services. A written record is kept of all accidents and illnesses. The matron reports that the current boarding population are healthy and that very few are in receipt of regular medication. Medication is kept in an appropriately locked facility and a written record kept of all medicines dispensed by staff. All boarding staff have undertaken First Aid training. There are arrangements in place to ensure that staff are able to accompany young people to hospital in an emergency. Guidance, advice and support in relation to health and social issues are provided by both teaching and boarding staff. Staff aim to ensure that boarders adopt a healthy lifestyle by eating properly and getting regular exercise.

The concept of healthy eating is promoted within the school. Food is produced on the premises by dedicated catering staff. Catering staff operate a rolling menu that incorporates seasonal variations. Fresh produce is used to provide wholesome nutritious meals from a range of cultures. A vegetarian option and well stocked salad bar is always available. As boarding staff eat with the boarders on a regular basis they are in a good position to monitor individuals' eating habits and identify any concerns. The Boarders Forum provides an effective mechanism for boarders to comment on catering issues. In general boarders spoke in positive terms about both the quality and quantity of food on offer. Meals are social events and staff and boarders eat together in the school's dining room. While the historic dining room provides a pleasant environment in which to eat, very little noise is absorbed by the many hard surfaces. This can make conversation difficult. This has been recognised by staff who are considering a number of changes that could address the problem.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The privacy of boarders is respected by staff and any confidential matters are discussed in private. Staff always knock before entering boarders' rooms. All toilets and showers offer privacy. Confidential information relating to boarders is kept in appropriately secure facilities.

The school provides suitable information within the pupil handbook to ensure boarders know how to make a complaint. As the majority of pupils at the school experience communication difficulties, information is also provided in a pictorial format. Boarding staff are proactive in seeking out the concerns of boarders before they develop into major difficulties. All complaints are registered in a complaints book. The Boarders Forum has clearly helped in identifying and addressing general concerns. Boarders said they can raise concerns with any of the staff and feel their views will be listened to. No complaints have been made since the last inspection.

The school has child protection policies and procedures aimed at keeping young people safe. The Head Of Care has undertaken advanced safeguarding children training and assumes responsibility for coordinating child protection within the school. All boarding staff undertake child protection training and are clearly aware of their individual responsibilities in regard to reporting any protection concerns. All child protection concerns are recorded in a central log. The school has robust recruitment practices to ensure that appropriate checks are completed prior to any staff being employed. All adults living on the school site have undergone appropriate checks.

Boarders indicate that Northease Manor is a safe environment and that bullying is not a significant problem. Boarding staff are clearly aware of the misunderstandings that can arise between young people with communication difficulties and the potential conflicts that can

arise. Staff closely monitor both the group dynamics within their houses as well as the relationships between individuals.

Boarders are encouraged to develop and maintain appropriate models of behaviour. The expectations of behaviour are stated within the school's Statement of Purpose and pupil handbook. The ethos of the school is based on respect and the promotion of positive behaviour and effort. Positive behaviours and attitudes are rewarded. Boarding staff set clear boundaries and evidence indicates that young people respond appropriately. There is an expectation that each individual will contribute to life within their boarding house and peacefully co-exist with their fellow boarders. Negative behaviours which occur during school time are addressed within school and are not carried into boarding periods. Incidents of challenging behaviour are unusual and restraints are rarely used. Though boarding staff can use sanctions, they prefer to reinforce positive behaviour. All sanctions are recorded and normally consist of the withdrawal of privileges. Boarders feel staff apply sanctions fairly and that warnings are always offered first. Boarding staff make a record of all sanctions issued.

Staff closely monitor the movement of pupils throughout the day and a roll is taken at four different times. The school has an appropriate 'absence without authority' policy which details the measures to be taken by staff in the event of a young person going missing. All boarders are reminded of the importance of informing staff of their movements and the potential dangers associated with the nearby road. All cases of young people absconding are logged and records indicate that incidents of absconding are very rare.

A tour of the boarding houses indicated that they were structurally sound and in a good state of repair. Each of the individual houses were observed to be clean, tidy and in good decorative order. Since the last inspection improvements have been made to the physical environment, including the refurbishment of a number of bathrooms and shower areas. Records indicate that emergency lighting, fire alarm systems, gas and electrical appliances and electrical appliances are subject to regular testing. The school operates within a risk management framework and both the environment and activities are subject to risk assessments that aim to identify particular problems.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are encouraged and supported to engage in their education. Boarding staff keep abreast of the progress each young person is making by maintaining regular contact with their teachers. Pictorial timetables are produced for boarders who experience literacy difficulties. The school operates a waking curriculum that aims to provide a wide range of educational and social experience throughout the day. It is clear that the boarders live full and active lives and each day includes dedicated periods of education, recreation and social time. However, there is currently little integration between the school curriculum and boarding activities especially in relation to the acquisition of social and life skills. A more integrated approach could lead to even more positive educational outcomes. A number of boarders noted that the school day is a long one, however all confirmed that they are extremely well supported and encouraged in achieving their educational goals.

Boarding staff are clearly conversant with the physical, social and emotional needs of the young people for whom they are caring. If it is felt a young person requires additional support to meet their needs, referrals will be made via the Head of Care to the appropriate services. The school

staff includes occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and counsellors. The interaction between boarders and staff was observed to be spontaneous and warm. All the boarders appeared at ease in their surroundings and showed no reluctance to initiate conversation. Boarders confirmed they could ask for support or help from any of the boarding staff. It is evident the young people value the care and attention they receive from staff. While each young person is treated as an individual, each boarding house operates on a communal basis and boarders are part of a distinctive house group.

Boarders have access to a range of activities both within the school and in the local community. There is a dedicated period for activities each afternoon. There are a wide range of activities available, including a film club, horse riding, cookery and sport. The activities programme is subject to regular review and changes with the seasons; more outdoor activities, such as sailing and mountain biking, are offered during the summer term. The school has a range of facilities for recreation that include a gym, games room and swimming pool. Computers and PlayStations are accessible in each of the houses. Boarding staff have access to transport and funds to undertake trips and activities within the local area.

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

The provision is good.

Staff regularly consult young people about all aspects of their lives within boarding. Consultation can take place individually and collectively. The Boarders Forum provides an effective vehicle for discussing issues of common concern. Informal meetings and discussions often take place within the boarding houses and during mealtimes. The Head has an open door policy and any pupil within the school can access her directly.

The school specialises in providing education to young people who experience educational difficulties associated with dyslexia and dyspraxia. The specific needs of boarders are assessed as part of the admission process. The school aims to address each individual's difficulties in a holistic way by integrating the work of teaching, therapeutic and care staff. A range of documents are used to record how each individual's needs are met. For example, there are separate plans in regard to health and education. Boarding staff have access to all relevant information.

The school has a well established admissions policy and prospective boarders are invited to undertake trial stays. While staff have control over the admissions process, the management of departures are much more difficult due to the uncertainties around future plans. It is evident that many boarders experience anxieties about their futures beyond Northease Manor. While it is accepted that staff have a limited role in determining boarders' future plans, it is felt they could be better prepared for dealing with transitions and the stress often associated with change.

Boarding provision is on a weekly basis with most boarders arriving on a Sunday evening and departing on a Friday afternoon. There are good lines of communication between school staff and parents and guardians. Most boarders have their own mobile phones that can be accessed at the end of each school day. There are payphones in each of the boarding houses. Boarders confirmed that they can maintain regular contact with their families and friends.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Boarders wear school uniforms during the day but return to their boarding houses to change before participating in after school activities. Each boarder is provided with storage facilities in their own rooms. The school has a laundry and boarders get their clothes washed as and when required.

A tour of the boarding houses and grounds was undertaken. All boarding houses were found to be clean, tidy and in good decorative order. The boarding houses offer boarders a good degree of space and comfort. There are four distinct boarding areas, three for boys and one for girls. While bedrooms are shared they offer adequate space. Boarders are consulted about who they would like to share with. Many boarders have personalised their rooms with posters and pictures. All four houses have their own common rooms with televisions and, in a number of cases, PlayStations. There is an appropriate number of toilets and showers to meet the needs of the current boarding population. All showers and bathrooms provide a good level of privacy. No boarders raised concerns that their privacy was compromised by the boarding environment.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

While the school has a Statement of Purpose that clearly outlines the overall ethos of education and boarding within the school it needs to be updated to reflect recent changes. A separate pupils' guide is given to each pupil when they arrive; this guide provides a good level of information for all key aspects of boarding at the school. The information is also produced in a pictorial format.

There is an extensive recording system within the school that aims to ensure that the well-being and progress of each individual is carefully monitored. Key information is shared between boarding and teaching staff. While current staffing levels are deemed appropriate to meet the needs of the current number of boarders, there is a recognition that any significant expansion in boarding will require additional staff.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Pupils are introduced to concepts such as sexism, racism and cultural diversity through PSHE, Citizenship and Religious Education curricula.

Boarding plays an important role within the school and just under half the school's population now board. Boarding is managed by an experienced and well qualified Head of Care who is assisted by two permanent staff and a gap student from Australia. The Head of Care is a member of the senior management team. All were met and spoken with during the course of the inspection. The permanent staff team have worked together for three years. All feel that boarding provision continues to improve and that a number of recent changes have led to more consistency in the delivery of care. Each member of staff is committed to developing their knowledge and skills and regularly access training opportunities. Staff were observed to be confident and consistent when dealing with the boarders in their care. The Head of Care clearly monitors every aspect of boarding and visits each house daily. A member of the governing body visits each term and completes a monitoring visit report. Evidence indicates the school is being run effectively and that the needs of boarders are being met within a stimulating and caring environment.



## 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 the school's Statement of Purpose is changed to reflect recent developments (NMS 1).
- further develop the waking curriculum to provide more integration between school and boarding activities (NMS 12).
- provide opportunities for boarders to acquire skills that will help them cope more effectively with the stress associated with transitions (NMS 11).