

# Great Walstead School

Inspection report for boarding school

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<b>Unique reference number</b>	SC014537
<b>Inspection date</b>	17 March 2009
<b>Inspector</b>	Mike Stapley
<b>Type of Inspection</b>	Key

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<b>Registered person</b>	Great Walstead Ltd
<b>Head / Principal</b>	Jeremy Sykes
<b>Nominated person</b>	
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	21 March 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

Great Walstead School comprises of a large Victorian country house with additional buildings around the main house. It is set in a rural and attractive wooded area near the main town of Haywards Heath.

The School was founded in 1927 with 15 children and now has over 180 children in the preparatory school including 26 children who board the vast majority being 'flexi boarders' It is a thriving co-educational school that also has nursery, pre-prep and main school departments, all of which base their practice around strong Christian values and principles.

The school does not offer weekend boarding. The present provision separates boys and girls and caters for the eight to 13 year age groups. All boarders live locally and maintain regular contact with their parents and, as such, many children will remain on the school site until early evening to participate in activities. This creates a very open and flexible environment.

The boarders' handbook states 'Learning to live together, showing respect and caring for each other is vitally important in our boarding family. Remember the Great Walstead Code of Conduct, particularly the first line' 'Great Walstead is a school where we seek to behave in the way Jesus did, the way he spoke and acted towards others'.

### Summary

This is the key announced inspection as part of the three-year inspection cycle for boarding schools.

The inspection focused on the key National Minimum Standards and assessed the school's compliance with recommendations made at the last inspection.

The senior management team has a wealth of knowledge and experience to support the staff and children. The school is effective at ensuring that the children who board receive the appropriate support from staff to help them achieve progress, both academic and pastoral.

The staff team are good with updating all of the relevant information needed to make the children's time at the school a success. The staff team work effectively at gaining the trust of the children and advocate for them in a positive manner.

There are minor areas that require improvement. In discussion with the headmaster and staff it was evident that although the school has a Personal Social and Health Education programme it is not fully developed. In addition some areas of the boarding house require decoration and refurbishment.

Children at the school generally feel there is someone they can talk to and the headmaster has a clear 'open door' policy. In addition, the school has a very effective school council that includes boarding representation. The council is very effective in seeking to empower children, it has its own budget and some of the children who sit on the council have recently been on a training course in the management of school councils.

Overall, the school is warm and very welcoming. The children and parents are very supportive of the school and its ethos.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

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

It is evident that the school has taken positive action to rectify the two recommended actions that were made at the last Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI). The school now has in place an extremely comprehensive staff recruitment and vetting procedure that is monitored by the headmaster. In addition the school has developed a process for the regular review of staff with boarding duties by a more senior or experienced member of staff once that member of staff has been in post for 12 months and completed his probationary period of employment.

In addition the last CSCI report stated 'Some further areas the school may wish to consider include a review of the usage of the of the independent visitor, the quality and presentation of food and developing further strategies for consulting with children who board'. The school carefully considered all these suggestions and all three have been addressed in this report. Communication between children and staff is at the heart of what Great Walstead School does exceptionally well. The commitment the school has to the school council which includes boarding representation is to be applauded.

The inspectors spoke to many of the children at the school in groups and individually. In addition a review of the questionnaires completed by the older children and comments received from parents clearly showed that boarding has an important place at the heart of the school community.

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

The provision is good.

The school nurse is a registered general nurse with additional qualifications in paediatrics and asthma. Evidence of her qualifications and up to date pin number were seen during the course of the inspection. She works from 08.30 to 18:00 Monday to Thursday and is available for consultation out of hours, although in reality if a child is unwell and is due to board overnight arrangements are usually made for the child to be collected by their parents and go home. The school has an additional nurse, who is also a registered general nurse with accident and emergency experience who works on Fridays. Her qualifications and pin number were also evidenced as part of the inspection process. The children all have access to the surgery during the day.

Outside of these hours, first aid provision is given by the head of boarding who has completed the four day first aid training course. All other boarding staff including the gap students have completed the one day first aid training course. Such training is updated on a regular basis.

Boarders are nearly all local and are therefore all registered with their own GPs. Both the school nurses and the Head of Boarding have access to the school GP who they can contact at any time for advice as they also offer an out of hours service. There are also close links with the local school nursing service and the school nurses.

Parents normally take boarders to their own GPs but provision is made to accompany children if that is not possible. Both male and female doctors are available. Referrals can also be made for audiology and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. Dental problems are referred through the child's own dentist.

All medication is securely stored in the surgery either in a locked cupboard or a locked fridge. It is signed in and out as appropriate and prescribed medication is only given to those for whom it is prescribed.

There is a clear protocol for non-prescribed medicines and stock is regularly checked for 'use by' dates. Children are not allowed to keep their own medication apart from inhalers.

There is both a written record and a computerised record of all medication, treatment and first aid administered to all pupils and a consent form completed by parents in advance of such treatment. These forms are regularly updated. Care plans are in place for those children with an identified need.

There is a choice of food at each meal and menu plans were provided. There is always a vegetarian option and the catering department are aware which children are on special diets. Currently, there is one child with an egg allergy whose meals are cooked separately and the school has a policy of having no nuts in any of the food.

The inspectors took lunch with the children and these are nutritious and provided plenty of choice. Tea in the evening provided less variation with a choice of soup and bread and one main meal in addition to the salad bar. Inspectors expressed concern the choice was not enough, but the children said they liked the food and felt that it had improved.

Crockery and cutlery was clean and the timings which operate at lunch time for each year group ensure that there is no significant queuing.

All kitchen staff undertake basic food hygiene training every two years and are due to re-do this in April 2009.

Mid-Sussex Environmental Health Inspectors visited during the inspection and the report was seen for 18 March 2009. This showed the general cleanliness to be excellent. Two recommendations were made; one was for fly-screens to be put up and the other for the catering manager to complete the intermediate level food hygiene training.

The catering manager stated that snacks and milk or water are available to the children mid-morning and also at 16:30. A number of children confirmed this. There is drinking water available in the boarding area at all times with a water fountain in sick bay.

The school does not have an appropriate policy on countering major risks to health. A recommendation has therefore been made that the school should develop one. However, the school does have a medical policy and a separate first aid policy. There is also a policy for the safe administration of medicines which incorporates protocols for non-prescribed medication.

A PHSE lesson was observed and there is a clear policy for PHSE. Lessons are appropriate to each age group and cover such issues as alcohol and drug abuse and smoking.

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

The provision is good.

Boarders are well protected from bullying. The implementation of sound and robust policies and procedures, for example the school policy on bullying, ensures issues are quickly spotted and appropriately dealt with. Pupils and staff gave examples of how such situations are managed and these were borne out through written records. Children that board at the school receive a guide known as the 'Boarders Handbook'. This is an informative document and although it mentions 'What to do if you are unhappy it does not make any reference to bullying and what a child should do if they feel they are being bullied. There is very little evidence of bullying and one of the strengths of the school is managing behaviour in an appropriate manner. The culture within the school is that of a large extended family enshrined in the core values that underpin the ethos of the school. Good relationships and caring for others are fostered in the PHSE programme. Children who completed a questionnaire as part of the inspection do not feel that bullying is an issue at the school and feel confident that any issues they might raise will be dealt with appropriately. The school encourages the highest standards of behaviour and addresses poor or inappropriate behaviour in a suitable manner. Children spoken to consider that the sanctions are reasonable and are generally only implemented to reinforce the rules. Use of sanctions is kept to a minimum and the school prefers to nurture effort, responsibility and positive actions with recognition of children's effort wherever it occurs.

The school has a comprehensive safeguarding policy and the headmaster is the designated person for safeguarding purposes. Staff confirm they are given regular training briefings and the school follows the correct and required procedures regarding notifications and fully co-operates with the statutory processes in West Sussex. There is a very good complaints policy available to parents and the school also has a separate pupils' complaints procedure. Pupils commented in discussion that they can usually resolve complaints or concerns very easily by talking to any member of staff. The school has developed a 'What To Do' poster that gives details of who to contact if any pupil is unhappy or feels they are being treated unfairly or that things are just going wrong. The inspectors evidenced this poster throughout the school and noted it is in very plain child friendly language. Overall pupils feel very safe and well cared for by the staff who demonstrate a genuine regard for their well being and protection. The school does have a policy for searching for and, if necessary reporting any boarders missing. However this policy needs to be further developed to ensure it complies with the National Minimum Standards.

Supervision of children who board is of the highest standard and is very evident with five members of staff regularly on duty to a maximum of 26 pupils at the time of the inspection. Pupils always know who is on duty and where to find them as staff strike a good balance between giving them space to grow and safeguarding them from harm. The school has a comprehensive behaviour management plan, with clearly stated expectations and a code of sanctions, which the children are fully aware of. In discussion the pupils confirm that the code of conduct is reasonable and imposed fairly, enabling them to develop and make decisions in the full knowledge of penalties they may incur. The school has a current fire safety policy; fire evacuation notices and fire routes are clearly displayed. There is evidence of current tests on fire extinguishers, fire alarms and emergency lighting systems. Pupils confirm there are regular fire drills and fire alarm tests. Pupils' safety and welfare are protected well during high-risk activities both on and off the site and the school only uses facilities, which are licensed with

the relevant national governing bodies, and only staff with relevant qualifications lead these activities.

There are no reports of intrusion into pupils' personal privacy and shower cubicles afforded the pupils security when they are changing and washing. Pupils comment that they are treated with respect by all of the staff. There is rigorous selection and vetting of staff who work with the young people. All staff records inspected had checks through the Criminal Records Bureau, references, identity checks and interview notes. The gap students that the school used had completed all the necessary checks prior to them coming to the school including 'certificates of good conduct'. All visitors must sign in on arrival and wear a visitors badge on site. Pupils' accommodation is kept thoroughly secure from public intrusion by key pads on the doors.

There are comprehensive measures in place to protect pupils and staff from safety hazards and a wide range of risk assessments for outings, transport, activities and others. Outdoor and recreational areas are well presented and suitably risk assessed. However inspectors noted that some of the windows above the ground floor and in the pupils dormitories needed to be fitted with restrictors. There is evidence of portable appliance testing on appliances in the boarding area and throughout the school. Given that the school offers flexi boarding contact with parents is quite straight forward. Children look forward to their overnight stays and in many respects see boarding as fun and time to 'chill out with friends'.

The school does not make any formal guardianship arrangements on behalf of parents. Therefore this standard is not applicable.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders have access to a wide range of activities. These include a sufficient number of supervised activities for boarders during the evenings. The school has a number of excellent facilities including a very well equipped sports hall and a covered heated swimming pool. In addition during the summer months children make a great deal of use of the school's 260 acres of farmland and woodland. The school has its own 'Challenge Course' with ropes, logs, swings and balances which are very popular with children of all ages. For boarders whose interests lie elsewhere than the sports fields, the school has an impressive performing arts department.

The activity programme is very popular and all the children spoke very highly of the facilities that the school offers individuals. In addition parents spoken to directly or those who completed the 'Parents comment Form' stated that Great Walstead School is very strong in its extra curricular activities and particularly those on offer to boarders.

All of the boarders spoken to are satisfied that there are a number of people that they could turn to if they had a problem or wished to talk to someone about a problem. These people could be any member of the staff team and were not confined to the boarding house.

The school has a strong sense of community and the Christian values upon which it was founded are embraced and supported. Boarders spoke with pride about their school, its principles and the ethos it promoted. They were very clear that they felt fully supported from a wide range of people. In addition to the staff mentioned above, they could also turn to the school's independent listener. Children spoken to are aware that they can contact her directly and



information on how to contact her is available throughout the school and in the boarders' handbook.

A school council operates very effectively and all children feel that they can use the school council members to help to resolve any issues. Several children who are members of the school council have undertaken training in the organization of school councils in London which is to be commended. An example of change they have been able to effect is the allocation of use for one of the outside play areas.

The school is justifiably proud of its pastoral programme, which is of a very high standard. There is evidence of formal and informal liaison between the headmaster, head of boarding, the medical centre, personal tutors and the learning support department. Where appropriate welfare plans are drawn up for any boarder who is in need of additional support in any area.

The school has a clearly stated policy regarding the promotion of equal opportunities. As has been mentioned it has a strong Christian tradition, and this is evident in the caring way the children and the staff respect each other.

There is no evidence of discrimination and a PSHE lesson observed encouraged children to think about prejudice and treating each other equally.

Children who do not have English as their first language are supported well, both in school and in boarding time.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders are of the opinion that there are a number of ways in which they could contribute their ideas about day to day life in the school and about the boarding house. The school has a very effective school council. The council helps to empower the children and boarders spoken to stated unequivocally that they are able to express their views that are taken seriously and they are listened to. The chair of the council is a pupil and several members of the council have undertaken a training course in the management of school councils. In addition the council has its own budget and contributes to the School Development Plan. A food survey was conducted among boarders in February 2009 and the results were given to inspectors.

Most boarders only stay for one or two nights per week, but all have access to the telephone in the boarding office if they wish to contact parents in private. Mobile phones are not allowed.

The telephone numbers for Child Line and the independent listener are found in the boarders' handbook and on notice boards throughout the school.

Both medical and boarding staff are in regular contact with parents and boarding staff will telephone during the evening if children become ill or distressed.

Taster nights are available to children who wish to try out boarding and new boarders are issued with a boarders' handbook which gives them information about routines and house rules. More experienced boarders help those who are new to boarding.

Children said that newspapers are purchased daily and these are placed in the library which children can access easily.

Boarders said that they are well looked after and cared for and spoke very highly about the pastoral care at Great Walstead School.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

The boarding areas are kept neat and tidy, and children speak positively about the facilities. The dormitories are reasonably well decorated and furniture is of a good standard. However some of the boys' dormitories do require decoration and refurbishment. In addition some of the beds are of an older style and require replacement. The school does however has a rolling programme of refurbishment and decoration.

Toilet and washing facilities are adequate. Some children did comment that there are sometimes long queues to use wash hand basins. The school is giving consideration to increasing the number of washbasins although this issue really only occurs when the number of flexi boarders is comparatively high as on the majority of nights facilities are adequate. Comments received from parents whose children flexi board at the school stressed that children did for the most make a conscious choice to board one or two nights each week and really looked forward to being with their friends particularly during sports or other activities. Parents described boarding as being 'inclusive' and very much like an 'extended family'. The majority did however comment on the need to upgrade facilities which has been acknowledged by the school.

Those children that flexi board do have lockable facilities to store any of their personal possessions; alternatively they can hand in such items for safekeeping. Children spoken to and comments received from parents did not raise any issues of items being lost or stolen while children boarded overnight.

The school keeps a small stock of relevant personal items so that children who forget anything minor can obtain such items from the school.

No children are accommodated in lodgings arranged by the school, either during term-time or in the school vacations as the school offer flexi boarding and in a very few cases four nights boarding each week.

### **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

Great Walstead School is a School that exists to provide a first class education for boys and girls in a caring Christian environment, so that each individual is inspired to reach his or her potential in mind, body and spirit. Its underpinning philosophy is based upon a strong Christian ethos which permeates every aspect of school life and chapel plays an important part in the moral and spiritual guidance that the children receive. The school welcomes children from alternative religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds and gives all of them the opportunity to develop their own spirituality and prepare them for life when they leave the school.

The school has a suitable statement of boarding principles and practice entitled 'Great Walstead School - Boarding Ethos and Aims' that is available to parents, boarders and staff. This is reviewed on an annual basis and was last updated in February 2009.

The general provision of boarding accommodation at the school is reasonable; some communal areas including the boarding sitting room has been refurbished and now provides a higher standard of comfort. In addition the school has enhanced the boarding area to create a more homely environment. However there are some facilities including the boys' dormitories that would benefit from refurbishment. Some of the beds and mattress's are also in need of replacement. The boarding area for both girls and boys is situated in part of the original country house. There are usually five staff on duty, two of whom sleep-in. The staff are consistent in their approach to the children and provide the children with many opportunities to take part in a wide range of activities.

Responsibility for monitoring twice a term, the records of risk assessments, major punishments, complaints or accidents is divided between the senior management team depending on the area that is being monitored. As an example, the health and safety committee is responsible for monitoring accidents and risk assessments at their regular meetings. These have been slightly increased to twice each term to ensure compliance with the standard. The senior management team monitor major punishments and complaints.

All staff have appropriate job descriptions, induction and are clear about their roles and responsibilities. At the time of the inspection the boarding department was being managed by the headmaster's wife. This is a temporary measure as the new deputy head (pastoral) will commence his duties at the start of the summer term. At present none of the boarding staff have attended any formal training in boarding practice although they do all have a thorough induction, a mentor and regular monthly meetings with the acting head of boarding. It is anticipated by the school that the new deputy head and his wife, as joint heads of boarding will review this aspect of boarding life for all boarding staff.

The school does not place boarders in lodgings and therefore national minimum standard 51 is not applicable.

## 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 has, and follows, an appropriate policy on countering major risks to health including substance abuse. National Minimum Standard 6.
- ensure that a written record is made of any incident of a boarder missing from school, the action taken and any reasons given by the pupil for being missing. National Minimum Standard 3.

- ensure that all windows that are accessible to boarders above the ground floor are fitted with window restrictors. National Minimum Standard 47.
- ensure that the standard of decoration of the boarding house and other areas for boarders is adequate. National Minimum Standard 40.
- ensure that the furnishing of the boarding house and other areas for boarders is suitable to the number ages and needs of boarders accommodated, comfortable and in satisfactory condition. National Minimum Standard 40.
- ensure that all staff are provided with opportunities for training and updating in boarding practice. National Minimum Standard 34.