

Northbourne Park School

Inspection report for boarding school

Unique reference number	SC023672
Inspection date	12 October 2009
Inspector	Mark Blesky
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	5 December 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

Northbourne Park School was founded in 1980. The school educates over 170 boys and girls (boarding and day pupils) between the ages of three and 13. The Old Rectory provides education for three to seven years and Betteshanger House provides for seven to 13 years in scenic wooded grounds spanning over 40 acres.

Outdoor education and sport are major elements of the school curriculum, along with music and languages. There are two classes of French speaking pupils at the senior school running parallel with the English classes, which gives the school a multi-lingual and multi-cultural environment.

Summary

This is a good school with strong elements of care and support. The ethos of the school is to promote personal growth and development. Boarders are motivated and confident which stems from encouragement from boarding and school staff. Procedures and practices are underpinned by child focussed philosophies. Much importance is placed in the value of relationships in this school and boarding staff strive to ensure boarders form long and enduring relationships with one another and the boarding staff team. The head teacher and senior management team provide strong and supportive leadership and guidance to the boarding staff.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

This school was last inspected in 2006 and no recommendations or actions were made at the last inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Matters of first aid are dealt with by house parents and the two matrons. Training has been undertaken, but refresher training is now due for first aid staff. Medication is controlled by the matrons and all administration appropriately recorded. Although there is secure storage for medication, current procedures would benefit from improved supervision when medicines are being administered. The local general practitioner provides regular support and advice to both matrons.

Boarders are able to have their individual and diverse needs met within their care planning and matrons will arrange appropriate healthcare to accommodate this. The matrons have undertaken limited training in the control and administration of medication and further training should be sought expeditiously. Medication is administered either in the matron's office or, during night time hours, the boarding house. All medication is given under adult supervision. The school has not yet developed a self-administration policy and procedure and this will need to be undertaken with accompanying risk assessments.

Meals are well planned providing a high standards of nutritious food with well managed meal preparation. The chef manager is very motivated and demonstrates her passion to provide the

young people with good quality meals. Mealtimes can be a little rushed at times and whilst this is somewhat inevitable, adequate time should be made available as far as possible. It was noted at the last inspection and again noticed during this inspection, that staff do interrupt meals with business and news items. This distracts the young people from their meals and should be avoided. Such interruptions do little to enhance the occasion and add further delay. The kitchen area is very well maintained and the staff work very hard to maintain this. Work advised by environmental health has been completed and the school has a proactive approach to maintaining food hygiene. Young people state that the food and meals are always enjoyable. They say that the second choice is always a good alternative to the main meal and that the catering staff listen to their views regarding likes and dislikes. A school council forum is being developed and this will introduce food and meals into the standing agenda items.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Anti-bullying procedures are maintained to prevent bullying in the school. Guidance for staff provides signs and symptoms of bullying along with early warning signs. Guidance is underpinned by the school's zero tolerance to bullying and the clear expectations for the school's staff to respond promptly. Young people say that bullying is something that is not present in this school.

A comprehensive and detailed child protection policy is published by the school and all staff receive mandatory training in these matters. Guidance for staff features supporting legislation and clear procedural routes to address any suspected safeguarding matters. The head teacher is the child protection and safeguarding co-ordinator and as such oversees all staff training and liaison with external agencies.

Discipline and behaviour control is detailed in the staff member's handbook and guidance addresses a range of occasions when control measures may be needed. Sanctions for negative behaviour are not maintained to be punitive or frequent and the school strives to teach self control rather than rule-bound approaches. Young people say that staff always let you know when you need to behave more acceptably and that the responses by staff are fair. All consequences that follow episodes of negative behaviour are in accordance with approved sanctions. Any major concerns over pupil behaviour are typically managed by the head teacher and the head teacher has an overseeing role of all notifications of poor behaviour.

Regular fire drill and evacuations are undertaken by the school. Staff and young people say that any new member of the boarding staff or new boarder is subject to a fire evacuation drill.

House parents and gap students that supervise the boarder's accommodation do so in a manner sensitive to the boarder's privacy. Staff knock on boarder's doors and await invitation into the rooms. Bath times and showering is also managed to ensure young people are not embarrassed or uncomfortable.

All recruitment of staff is managed within robust employment procedures. Reference checks and criminal records bureau checks are maintained by the school's administrator and detailed records are kept of all staff. Checks are completed with details of previous employment, identity checks and where necessary, checks with overseas authorities.

Gap students that are employed by the school undergo the same level of recruitment checks and induction training.

The boarding area is out of bounds to visitors and the day pupils. The design of the school enables the boarding area to be appropriately supervised by staff. All visitors to the school must sign in and out and all visitors must wear a visitor's badge to clearly distinguish them from school staff and teachers.

Risk assessments are undertaken for all outside activities. Risk assessments consider risk to the young people from the environment, the activity and any related equipment. Whilst the outside risk assessments are adequate, risk assessments are somewhat vague regarding on site day to day activities. Risk assessments for boarders are not currently effective, the definition of risk is unclear with little evidence of the plan or action needed to minimize or remove the risk. An effective on site risk assessment should be undertaken expeditiously.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

House parents provide supportive and sensitive guidance to all boarders. The house parents have a wealth of experience in working with young people and maintain an open door ethos towards the care and support of the boarders. Boarders say that they can approach either house parent at any time and that they are also able to approach the gap students. Gap students present as insightful and caring with understanding of their role and the part that they play in to support of the boarders.

The head teacher ensures that policies and procedures focus on the boarder and puts their needs to the forefront. Boarders say that the head teacher is always available for them and makes time whenever they need to speak to him. The importance of the boarder's welfare is clearly articulated in staff guidance and the school's philosophies of care and guidance.

An appropriate recruited independent person is available for any boarder that wishes to discuss matters outside of the school's staff.

This school has boarders of differing nationalities and as such the understanding of culture and language are primary elements of the schools ethos. House parents and boarding staff are insightful to the diverse needs of the boarders and are able to consider how culture, religion, or customs may impact on the boarders day to day lives. The school ensures that boarders are given opportunities to study and discover the cultures and traditions of others. Boarder's day to day activities are organised to ensure that groups appropriately mix with one another through mealtimes and boarding houses. Boarders say that there are times when different groups tend to side with one another in minor disputes, when this occurs, boarding and school staff are prompt to discourage this. The house parents and head teacher are very aware of the need for cultures to have positive experiences of one another and boarding policies and procedures serve to underpin this. Boarders say that any young person that experienced difficulties would raise this matter and the boarding staff along with the head teacher would address this promptly.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

There are suggestion boxes in the school, which can be used by the boarders to make comments or raise ideas.

The school has recently introduced a school council, which will provide forum for the boarders to raise matters more formally. The head teacher will oversee this forum to ensure comments and suggestions are given appropriate attention by the school. The head teacher also arranges regular prefects lunches, held in his study. This occasion provides an informal meeting between the senior boarders and the head teacher and this occasion is used to discuss day to day school and boarding matters. Boarders say that this is a very good time to speak to the head teacher about issues that are more general. They say that the head teacher is interested in their views about all matters in the school. The head teacher says that this mealtime offers a rich source of information from the boarders and further reinforces an openness in the school, demonstrating the value placed in the views of the boarders.

Telephones are available for all boarders to contact friends and families. As many boarders have parents overseas, the house parents ensure that time differences in other countries are considered in the contact arrangements. Email and postage facilities for boarders to contact their parents are also provided. Young people say that they would like greater access to email and web based contact mediums, but they add that they understand the need for restrictions.

All boarders that are new to the school are given appropriate information about the school and consultation takes place between the school, boarder and parents. Young people arrive at the school with different nationalities and languages. Staff however, have sufficient language skills to ensure that language and culture does not limit the support of the new boarder. Boarding staff are sensitive and knowledgeable about supporting young people away from home and monitor all new boarders carefully. In addition, a buddy system is in place and this provides all new boarders with a responsible peer to guide them through the boarding experience.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Boarders are able to store their personal possessions in lockable space or leave their property in the care of the house parents. Lockers are available, but these are rarely used for this purpose. Boarders say that they do not need to lock items away as boarders do not take one another's property.

The male boarding accommodation is in several large dormitories in the main school. This accommodation is adequate for the boarders. Boarders say that they are warm at night and the rooms are well ventilated. Bedding and the furnishings are adequate with space for personal time. The female accommodation has been more recently built and is a short distance from the main house. This accommodation is clearly more modern with ample space and common areas for the girls to meet. Both accommodations are very different and boarders say that they like their individual accommodation. It was noted that some repairs were outstanding in the girl's accommodation that should have been attended to. These areas were addressed during the inspection and appeared to have been previously overlooked. It was also noted that year 8 boarders are still using bunk beds on a regular basis and this must be also be addressed.

There are adequate washing and toilet facilities for all boarders, however it is noted that the boys shower room needs refurbishment.

Boarders are allowed to keep personal items in their rooms and decorate their area of the dorm. Electronic games and communication devices are kept by the house parents both for safe keeping but also to ensure boarders are not distracted from their studies or their sleep.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. A suitable statement of the school's boarding principles and practice is produced by the school and available to parents, boarders and staff. The mission statement details the broad aims of the school along with the more specific aims of boarding and the care of the boarders. Boarding areas are well managed and the house parents take primary responsibility to ensure that these areas are maintained to be pleasant and comfortable. Boarders are given a choice of which boarding area that they sleep in. During this inspection, boarders were choosing their 'boarding swaps'. Boarding swaps are typically planned around term times. Boarders say that they often swap to be with friends or have a change. Houseparent's ensure that swaps maintain mixes of different cultures and languages to support the integration of boarders. The female boarding dormitory is modern and the boy's dormitory older and more traditional. However, there are no distinct features that affect quality in either provision. Both dormitories have their own merits and the boarders say that are happy in both.

Risk assessment which addresses behaviour and conduct is maintained and overseen by the head teacher. Notifications are made for boarders that behave in a negative or concerning manner. Notification signals the first stage of assessment of the conduct of a boarder and key senior staff seek to address the behaviour or concern. All notifications are finally endorsed by the head teacher. Although behaviour and welfare is addressed effectively by this system, opportunities to discover themes and patterns of behaviour could be better managed. Periodic review and analysis of all notifications would provide evidence of concentrations or trends in recorded incidents.

When boarders are not in lessons or after school there are ample staff to supervised and support them. All boarding staff have job descriptions and clear instruction regarding their role. A detailed staff handbook is also maintained to direct staff in their duties and responsibilities for the boarders. All boarding staff undertake safeguarding training and additional training specific to their role. Training is reviewed periodically and reviewed more formally for all boarding staff during their staff evaluation.

External lodgings are not arranged by the school. It is stated to parents by the school that any lodging accommodating for pupils are arranged by the parents themselves.

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 that prescribed and 'household' medication, other than that kept by individual boarders able to administer and control their own medication, is kept securely (National Minimum Standards 15)
- Ensure first aid and minor illness treatment are given at school by competent designated staff (e.g. by or under the supervision of a qualified nurse or first aider). Any member of staff who agrees to accept responsibility for administering prescribed medication to a pupil should have proper training and guidance in accordance with DFEE guidance (National Minimum Standards 15)
- Ensure that there is sufficient time at mealtimes, taking into account any necessary queuing time, for boarders to finish their meals properly. Mealtimes should be free from unnecessary interruptions (National Minimum Standards 24)
- Ensure that the school has an effective system of risk assessment, with written records (including consultation with boarders) to identify and reduce risk to boarders from inherent hazards in the school buildings, activities or grounds, including hazards that boarders may access without permission (National Minimum Standards 47)
- Bunk beds (beds fully one above the other, as distinct from cabin style beds with desk areas or storage beneath) are only exceptionally used for boarders beyond Year 8 (National Minimum Standards 42)
- ensure that furnishing of boarding houses and other areas for boarders is suitable to the needs of boarders that are accommodated and it is comfortable and in satisfactory condition (National Minimum Standards 40)
- ensure regular monitoring of behaviour and records of incidents and concerns are in place to identify any issues requiring action (National Minimum Standards 23)