

Frensham Heights School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Gavin Thomas
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	11 November 2005

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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

Frensham Heights is a co-educational day and boarding school for students between the ages of three and 13. The ethos of the school is underpinned by the principles of co-education, rational thinking and an open mind, with an emphasis on personal development and responsibility, creativity, toleration and respect.

The school has three houses where boarding students live according to their age and gender. Hamilton House is for boys from Years 7 to 11. The main house is also for girls from Years 7 to 11 and Roberts House is a co-educational sixth form house for boarders and day students.

The school provides full and weekly boarding, as well as flexible arrangements for short-term boarders. All the boarding houses are supervised by resident members of staff and have day time house parents as well.

Summary

At this announced full inspection, all key standards were inspected. This is a good service with some outstanding features. The school does exceptionally well in upholding its ethos. In doing so, students including those who board, thrive in an environment which is motivating and one which is non-hierarchical between staff and students. Pastoral care is wide ranging. It is greatly appreciated by boarders and one of the key strengths acknowledged by parents. Staff in all remits of the school including the health centre, catering, counselling and education all strive towards consistency and work extremely well with senior management and boarding staff in promoting the effectiveness and success of boarding provisions. The staff teams in each of the houses are committed to maximising the supervision and safety of boarders at all times. This is also achieved through the robustness of risk management exercises. The quality of boarding houses has improved significantly. Changes are also made as a result of listening to boarders such as weekend facilities, introducing periods of 'quiet time' in the evenings and changes to the menu at weekends. The whole school including boarders now enjoy the benefits of an all weather playing area on the sports field.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The school was asked to improve health and safety processes in boarding houses, review boarders accommodation and to develop the quality of documentation. There are no recommendations outstanding. The safety of boarders has been enhanced by introducing revised safety procedures and addressing necessary repair works to the boarding houses. Records such as the staff training record has improved greatly with updated information on training undertaken by staff. Extensive work has been undertaken to improve boarding facilities and boarders can now enjoy the benefits of accommodation which has been refurbished to very high standards.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The school has recently reviewed the Personal, Social and Moral Education (PSME) programme and has raised its profile to be at the heart of learning. The programme incorporates health education and is supported by individual policies dealing with alcohol, smoking, substance misuse, relationship building and all aspects of sexual health. There are clear statements in the policies about support for young people and the consequences of disregarding the school rules. The PSME programme is delivered by tutors and specialists, including some outside speakers, the nursing staff and the school counsellor.

The medical centre is staffed by two nurses and offers 24 hour care. Records are secure and stored confidentially. Care plans are clearly linked to identified health needs and used effectively. All consents for emergency treatment, first aid and dispensing of homely remedies are in place before the students arrive. Written protocols are in place for communicating with the medical centre when medications are dispensed in boarding houses although there are times when communication with the nursing team is delayed until later in the day. Adequate numbers of staff have first aid qualifications at different levels throughout the school. The nursing staff are also accredited qualified trainers for first aid. Accidents, illnesses are recorded, monitored and information passed to relevant bodies as required. The monitoring of these records is robust and when necessary, entries are challenged.

Boarders can be accommodated overnight or isolated in the event of a contagious or infectious disease. The accommodation is adequate with separate rooms and washing facilities for male and female boarders. There is also provision for staff to remain in the medical centre overnight.

The vast majority of boarders are very pleased with the quality of food including choice, variety and portions. All students including boarders have the opportunity of commenting on the quality of food. These comments are reviewed by the catering manager and feedback is given. These comments are used to influence menu planning.

The atmosphere in the dining is very sociable and all serveries are self-service. The daily menus are clearly displayed with ample choice including soup, a well balanced salad bar, sandwiches, jacket potatoes, a choice of main courses and a dessert. Fresh fruits are also available. Catering staff are well managed and records such as menus, nutrition, food stocks and quality controls checks are in good order. The report for the most recent inspection undertaken by the Environmental Health Service is very positive and no recommendations were identified for improvement in food preparation areas. The kitchen and dining area is currently undergoing major refurbishment and this will enhance all of the dining area and some of the food preparation area.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Extensive work is undertaken to protect boarders from bullying including supervision of boarders, a very strong emphasis on pastoral support and counselling. Staff and boarders say that the anti bullying policy is effective in practice. A very large majority of boarders who completed surveys say that they have not experienced bullying. Very few boarders indicated incidents of bullying such as name-calling but are pleased with the way in which the school intervened and helped to resolve these issues.

Safeguarding policies are in place and widely known across the whole school. The safety and protection of boarders are enhanced through regular training and updates given to all staff.

The monitoring of safeguarding practices is effective and influenced through the roles of four appointed child protection lead officers who are suitably trained and represent different remits of the school. Boarders say they have no concerns about their safety and are very confident that staff would respond appropriately to suspected or known issues regarding their safety and wellbeing. Staff are familiar with the codes of conduct and procedural guidance in place such as carrying out room searches and acting on suspected or known allegations of abuse.

Positive behaviours are promoted through key principals such as respect for others, inclusion and celebrating diversity which underpin the school's ethos. These are enhanced through setting very clear boundaries and the success of a rewards system. A range of behavioural management policies are in place including the use of restraint and sanctions. Restraint or any form of physical intervention is discouraged and preventative work is undertaken with individual boarders to help them cope and manage different emotions. The use of sanctions is consistent in all houses and when appropriate, includes input from the headmaster which is in keeping with procedural guidance. Boarders are very aware of behavioural management procedures and an overwhelming majority say that discipline is generally fair.

Fire safety procedures are well managed including the frequency of routine checks on fire appliances and the fire detection system, frequency of fire drills and staff training. Boarders are familiar with fire evacuation procedures and response times are usually good. Written fire risk assessments are comprehensive and wide ranging. Fire safety is enhanced through visual checks carried out across the school. However, some designated fire doors in boarding houses are being propped open mainly during peak times of the day such as prep time.

Boarders' privacy is respected at all times. This includes ways in which boarders are supervised and the adequacy of provisions for ensuring boarders dignity when carrying out personal care tasks.

The effectiveness of recruitment processes takes into account boarders safety and protection. For example, outcomes of Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are obtained prior to staff taking up employment in boarding houses. Recruitment files are in good order and includes evidence of checks carried out and interview and selection processes. The quality of staff recruitment files have developed and improved significantly in recent years and this process is still evolving.

Appropriate arrangements are in place for ensuring the supervision of everyone visiting boarding accommodation but are not part of the staff team. This now includes a written agreement between the school and any adult not employed by the school but living with staff in the same building as boarding accommodation.

Overall risk management processes are robust and well managed. These processes are monitored and evaluated vigorously by designated members of the senior management team including the bursar and the health and safety committee. Risk assessments are accessible to all staff. These take into account the environment, personal safety and activities. Crisis management plans are in place for safeguarding all students including boarders, staff and visitors in unforeseen circumstances and emergencies.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Support given to boarders is excellent. This includes the dynamics of each house team and a supportive tutoring system. Boarders say that they can speak to any member of staff for assistance or guidance and they are also encouraged to take responsibility for their work and any decisions affecting their social development. The integrated sixth form is viewed by boarders as an important step in their adult life.

All students including boarders benefit immensely from the range of activities and therapy facilitated by the school counsellor. This includes meditation and addressing bereavement with sixth form boarders. Training in listening skills is being offered to students who are undertaking peer mentoring roles.

Boarders comment positively on the strong relationships built within their houses, with the staff and their friends. This strong sense of family life in the houses is a testimony to the commitment and expertise of all staff involved in boarding and pastoral care. Boarders' lives are enhanced through the school's commitment to equal opportunities and to enable the diverse population of boarders to learn and grow with each other in the secure and caring environment they experience. All areas of the curriculum and recreational activities are accessible to all regardless of gender or race. There are no large minority groups in the school but many nationalities are represented. The school has no religious affiliation but world religions are studied in religious education and students are supported to practice their chosen faith or attend local religious venues.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The school council is the formal opportunity for boarders and day students to influence change. It meets approximately eight times a year and is chaired by the students. The council is responsible for setting the agenda and writing up the minutes. Boarders are pleased that their views have influenced changes such as the timing of meals and menus. Boarders are encouraged and supported to contribute their views at house meetings and other informal opportunities. The sixth form boarders are very positive about how their views and comments are taken into account. For example, they have set up new sporting activities, influenced social events on Thursday evenings and nominated charities for the school to support.

Boarders have no difficulties contacting parents and overseas students are enabled to make calls at an appropriate time when there is a time difference. The school does exceedingly well in working in partnership with the parents. Where practicable, parents are invited to visit the school to support their children at special events such as musical recitals, plays or other activities.

Processes for introducing boarders into the school are well managed and includes the opportunity to visit the school and spend a night at their discretion. Students who had taken advantage of the over night stay say that this is a worthwhile opportunity. The sixth form speak warmly of the team-building and challenges programme at the start of the year. This they say, sets the tone of a co-operative and independent lifestyle that is the hallmark of the school. Boarders enjoy sound relationships with staff in all houses and appreciate the whole school approach to helping them think ahead and develop into self reliant young people.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Administrative processes for the handling of boarders' personal finances are well managed. Older boarders are also encouraged and supported to manage their finances independently. Boarders say they are pleased with the provisions for the storage of personal possessions.

Significant developments to boarders' accommodation have been achieved over recent years with the prospect of further developing provisions as identified in the school's management plan. Boarding provision is exceptional, in particular the purpose built house for sixth formers including day students and the house for younger male boarders which has been renovated. Boarders occupying the main house also enjoy the benefits of an environment which has been completely refurbished. Boarding houses are cleaned and maintained to high standards. Boarders say they are very pleased with standards of accommodation and living space.

Sleeping accommodation is furnished and maintained to exceptionally high standards and overcrowding is not an issue. An overwhelming majority of boarders enjoy the benefits of single or twin rooms. Careful consideration is given to appropriate sleeping arrangements for new boarders. Consideration is also given to individual requests regarding boarding arrangements. Accommodation for staff, their family and visitors' is separate from boarders' accommodation. Privacy for staff and boarders is not compromised by these arrangements.

The ratio of toilets, shower and wash facilities in all boarding houses exceed the national minimum standard. All facilities are very well presented, appropriate to the age of boarders and free from offensive odours. Boarders say that facilities are sufficient in numbers to prevent queues at peak times of the day. Adapted toilet and shower facilities are available in the sixth form house for disabled people.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The statement of boarding is described in the school's prospectus. A review of this statement is underway to include more details about boarding provision and recent developments such as accommodation and staffing.

The leadership and management of boarding is strong. The deputy headteacher responsible for boarding is suitably qualified and has substantial experience including a wealth of knowledge about this service. The monitoring of staff performance and outcomes for boarders is effective. This is undertaken by the senior management team, various committees and the governing body. Senior boarding staff are suitably experienced and demonstrate a commitment towards the safety and welfare of boarders and colleagues.

There are no major discrepancies regarding the quality of provisions in each of the boarding houses and each house reflects the needs and age and gender of boarders.

The monitoring of school records is robust and effective in practice. This is undertaken by the headteacher, deputy headteacher, bursar and other delegated members of the senior management team. There are excellent examples demonstrating how the monitoring of records influences change and outcomes for all students including boarders. For example, the PSME programme has been reviewed and support groups are developing in response to trends and patterns of behaviours and needs. The pastoral care committee is also a recent initiative to expand on current support systems in place. The deployment of staff has also been reviewed for peak times of the day to further improve the supervision of all students.

Boarders are supervised by dedicated teams of staff in each house. Staffing levels are appropriate and staff who work across different remits such as education and boarding say that this adds value to their relationships and interactions with students who board. Staff are dynamic in their approach and speak enthusiastically about the boarding aspect of school life. They speak extremely positively about the quality of management support and the school's approach towards consistency and transparency when supporting boarders. Boarders say that they value the headteacher's 'open door' policy and finds this very beneficial. The vast majority of parents surveyed gave very specific examples about their satisfaction with the leadership and quality of staffing of boarding houses.

Safety is paramount for boarders leaving the school site. Guidelines are clearly communicated to boarders and written procedures are comprehensive.

The management and supervision of staff is efficient and very well organised. These duties are shared with senior staff including the deputy headteacher and bursar. Induction for new staff are thorough and takes into account the different roles and responsibilities. A dedicated induction process is used for gap staff who say that the process is beneficial and relates very well to the ethos of the school and boarding provisions. Employment documentation such as job descriptions are issued to all staff and those which are specific to boarding are being updated.

Gap staff are appropriately supervised and summarise their experiences at the school including their involvement with boarding as being purposeful and has exceeded their expectations. The training for all staff is constantly being reviewed and updated to keep staff abreast of good practice. This includes training specifically to boarding and welfare.

Boarding staff have access to a handbook which contains a wealth of information. Staff say that written procedures are effective in practice. This is monitored at senior management meetings.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The ethos of the school embraces individuality, culture and warmth. Students including boarders are from a number of different countries and the varying cultures and diverse backgrounds are celebrated. Individual needs, preferences and faiths are accommodated without prejudice. A large majority of boarders say that having peers from different nationalities gives their lives an extra dimension and their friendships are enriched by this experience. International nights with food tasting, music and national dress are remembered affectionately and different foods are prepared to take account of the student body.

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):

- review the written protocol to ensure that medications administered in the boarding houses are communicated more promptly and consistently with the nursing team (nms 15)
- undertake a review of designated fire doors being propped open in boarding houses during peak times of the day. (nms 26)