

Woodcote House School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Karen Malcolm / Jackie Graves
Type of Inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	3 March 2010

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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

Woodcote House School is a family run preparatory school for boys aged between 8 and 13 years. Woodcote House has been in the Paterson family since 1931. The school's history dates back to 1816 and the school's principle is based on its history, longevity and popularity. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2009 who upholds the traditions and history of the school.

The majority of the boys that attend the school are boarders. The boarding facilities are traditional in design but maintain a homely and comfortable feel. The school provides a wide range of active and sedentary pastimes. It also facilitates a positive and constructive boarding experience for the pupils.

The school is set in thirty-five acres of well maintained grounds, which include sports facilities and equipment, a swimming pool and a shooting range.

Summary

At this announced, full inspection all the key standards were inspected. The outstanding recommendations made at the previous inspection in December 2006 with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) were also followed up.

There has been a change in leadership since the last inspection, which has not affected the ethos of the school and how it is run. The headteacher is also the head of boarding. He is motivated and enthusiastic in his approach, ensuring that the boarders are provided with the right skills to move on. Boarders enjoy their experience of living and learning at the school and value the opportunity to contribute to the school's ethos and community.

The staff work together, to promote and safeguard the welfare of the boarders. Boarders reported that they felt safe, happy and that they are listened to.

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 has taken positive action to implement all of the recommendations that were made at the last inspection undertaken by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. Improvements have taken place with regards to the medication procedures, updating policies and procedures, ensuring records of fire evacuations are maintained and training for all staff in child protection is carried out. One recommendation relating to recruitment checks has not been fully met. Therefore this recommendation is re-stated.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Boarders receive guidance regarding personal and social health issues as part of tutor groups. This is followed up informally on boarders request. Boarders said that there are a number of issues discussed in tutor groups relating from personal issues. They also said that they have various lecturers coming in, sharing their interests or life experiences with them.

Boarders health needs are met. The school has access to a named General Practitioner who visits the school twice a week. Good systems are in place for reporting health concerns to parents and carers. The nurse or the matrons can attend appointments with boarders when parents are unable to. Therefore boarders benefit from appropriate support and guidance when attending appointments or when they are ill.

Systems for the safe storage, administration and disposal of medication are robust. For example, there is a comprehensive medication policy in place and medication administration records are maintained and monitored regularly by the nurse. Risk assessments for supporting boarders with a disability are comprehensive. These assessments are reviewed and updated when any changes occur to ensure the right support is being maintained. Written parental permission has been obtained in advance for the administration of first aid and appropriate non-prescription medication. There is a definitive list of what non-prescription medication can be administered to the boarders, which parents know about. A written school record is kept of all significant illnesses, accidents or injuries. This is reviewed by the nurse for trends or patterns which may occur. The school is therefore transparent and open about the treatment and support they can provide to pupils who board.

The ethos of the school is that meal times are seen as a family occasion. Boarders benefit from a nutritious diet with fresh fruit at breakfast and vegetables available at main meals. The choice of main meals provided is limited to one main dish. Pupils and the headteacher said that if someone does not like what is on the menu, they can ask their parents or carers to write to the headteacher and an alternate meal will be provided. Pupils who are vegetarians or who have a religious or special diet, have their needs catered for separately. The school chef is updated termly of any changes to any pupils' diet. The chef informally discusses the menu with the boys at different meal times. The menu is updated as a result of these discussions. Boarders said that they are happy with the meals provided, especially roast dinners and fish and chips, which is a favourite. They also said that second helpings are always available. Issues regarding food can be raised with the school council. This forum is being reviewed by the headteacher and plans are in place to re-introduce the food committee.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The school promotes an environment where mutual respect and understanding are paramount. Bullying is not tolerated and any incidents are responded to promptly. There is an appropriate anti-bullying policy and records are maintained of any incidents that occur. Feedback via questionnaires raised some concerns relating to bullying. Boarders spoken to said that bullying is addressed promptly and having tutor groups to discuss concerns has been helpful and productive in resolving any issues.

Robust systems are in place for protecting boarders from abuse. All staff including ancillary staff receive safeguarding training and there are very clear procedures in place to guide staff if they have any concerns and how this will be managed. In addition the school has a 'Don't Worry' statement for use by pupils. This is displayed at various locations throughout the school. There is a lead child protection officer who has been recently appointed. Staff spoken to, were able to demonstrate their understanding of child protection procedures and accurately relay what action they would take if they had any concerns about the welfare of a boarder. The missing person policy is comprehensive and clear. It is known by all staff.

Good systems are in place for managing boarders' behaviour. Boarders spoken to, said that they felt the behavioural management system was fair. They were also clear about what was expected of them. Physical restraint is not used in the school. Relationships between staff and pupils are very positive, relaxed and humorous. Pupils respond to the school's routines and behavioural boundaries positively.

A clear complaints procedure is in place. This procedure is included in the staff and boarders' handbooks. There were no records of complaints received by the school relating to boarding. All boarders spoken to, were very complimentary about staff input and were clear that all staff are friendly, kind and look after them properly.

Boarders and boarding staff are very aware of emergency evacuation procedures. Boarders said that at the end of their bed they are asked to keep a selection of additional clothing to put on if any emergency situation occurs. Boarders spoken to knew the routine to follow at night, but they do not like undertaking a drill when the weather was cold. All fire fighting equipment and emergency procedures are regularly serviced. This enhances the safety of boarders and staff during the night and day.

Specific risk assessments are completed before any activity is undertaken. Outdoor and recreational areas are well presented and suitably risk assessed. During the warmer months, boarders are encouraged to take part in camping on the school grounds, which entails cooking breakfast on an open fire. The boarders spoke highly of this activity. All activities are properly supervised and there is always a qualified first aider supporting each activity when boarders are undertaking activities outside of the school premises.

Staff supervision of boarders is appropriate. There are clear procedures in place of how this is managed. Sensitive issues are addressed appropriately to ensure that no boarder is embarrassed.

The selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with boarders are carried out. All staff have Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks undertaken. The majority of the staff have been in post since 2001. However, some personnel records of staff employed before 2001 do not contain second references, qualifications or proof of identity. However, staff employed after 2001 were subjected to rigorous checks. There are clear procedures to protect boarders from unsupervised contact at the school with adults who have not been subject to the school's recruitment procedures. Spouses and partners of boarding staff who live on site have all appropriate checks undertaken.

Health and safety policies and procedures are in place. The fire and environmental risk assessments have not been reviewed for sometime. The assessments do not cover any new areas of risk that have emerged such as ensuring that there is adequate heating throughout the building and use of additional heating in dormitories. It is evident that checks on electrical appliances have been completed regularly. The system for the testing of portable appliance equipment brought into the accommodation by boarders is not currently sufficient to ensure that all equipment is adequately tested and safe to use.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The independent listener is also the GP for the school and has been the appointed listener for many years. Boarders when asked, said that they are satisfied that there are a number of people

that they can turn to if they had a problem or wished to talk to someone about a problem. The majority said that the first point of contact would be their tutor or any member of staff within the boarding house team.

The ethos of the school places an emphasis on family, tolerance and good manners. Although the school is based on Christian values, the school welcomes other religious denominations. The boarding staff are aware of their role for identifying and acting on any form of discriminatory behaviour. This is embedded throughout the ethos of the school.

All boarders have access to a range of areas where they can partake in recreational activities ranging from socialising to specific sporting activities. There is ample outside space for rugby, cricket and tennis as well as a range of other sporting events. There is a clear timetable of events which is seasonally updated. Boarders spoken to, said that they have plenty of time to relax and do other activities during the week and at weekends.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Boarders have the opportunity to contribute their views to the operation of the boarding provision. There is a school committee which meets termly. Boarders are also able to share their views in their tutor groups, which is the main forum used by most boarders. Therefore boarders feel listened to.

Every boarder has an email address and they are encouraged to contact their parents by using this. Formal letter writing is also one of the weekend activities that boarders undertake. A number of pay phones with facilities for incoming and outgoing calls are available for the boarders to use. These are situated in private locations.

New boarders receive suitable information about boarding routines and rules, prior to them coming into board. New boarders from abroad receive additional support. The school is aware that it may take some boys a while to adapt to boarding life. The school has devised taster packages, which enables boys to board for a couple of nights each week to identify if boarding life is for them or not. This provision has been successful.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Sleeping accommodation is in dormitories. These are suitably furnished and of sufficient size for the number, needs and ages of boarders accommodated. The boarders spoken to, said that the dormitories are comfortable and homely. They also said that being a boarder at this school is like having a sleepover party every night. There are clear strategies in place to ensure that boarders with disabilities are suitably accommodated, according to their needs and abilities. Boarders are encouraged to decorate their space with personal pictures or posters. Some boarding facilities have not been updated for sometime, but there are plans to upgrade these facilities in the forthcoming future. There are clear procedures on how pocket money is managed. Each weekend, boarders are given a budget to spend in the school's tuck shop. The shop is managed by the school's Prefects.

Bathing and toilet facilities in the boarding area are adequate and private. Boarders said that there is always adequate time to bathe and there is no rush or queues. The assistant matrons usually supervise this routine and boarders had no concerns.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The statement of boarding principles is available in the staff handbook and has been recently updated. The information reflects the practice of the school. A part of the headteacher's role is to monitor the school's records of risk assessments, punishments, complaints and accidents. The system in place was found to be comprehensive and well-managed. No incidents have been recorded.

Staffing levels meet the needs of the boarders and allow them to participate in a variety of activities outside of school hours. The rota for supporting the boarders after school is managed appropriately by the boarding staff, ensuring that boarders' safety is paramount at all times. There are adequate contingency plans in place to cover any sick leave or absences.

The senior management team and house staff have several roles and responsibilities within the school. The staff handbook contains copies of key policies and procedures to support boarding staff in their role. However, the handbook and individual personnel files do not contain job descriptions reflecting individual's duties. This includes the roles and responsibilities of spouses or partners. There are clear training opportunities for all staff including child protection. Staff spoken to, said that they receive various comprehensive training as part of their induction and further training relating to their work. Therefore, boarders are protected by staff who are appropriately trained and skilled to support them on a day-to-day basis.

The boarding accommodation is well organised and ensures a clear distinction between the boarding accommodation for junior and senior boarders. This enables staff to put in place clear boundaries for different age groups.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The ethos of the school promotes a positive understanding towards equality and diversity, which is embedded throughout the school policies and procedures. This is demonstrated through practice, including ways in which individuals are treated. The school is open to religious denominations and cultural differences. There is a strong sense of traditions throughout the school, which is known to both pupils and staff.

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):

- improve the choices of main dishes at main meals (NMS 24)
- ensure that staff recruitment is fully compliant with the requirement of the national minimum standard (NMS 38)
- ensure boarding accommodation is adequately heated and the fire and environmental risk assessments are updated to include the use of additional heating in the dormitories (NMS 40)
- ensure that risk assessments include the testing of portable electrical appliances brought into the school by boarders (NMS 47)
- ensure that all staff with boarding duties have job descriptions reflecting those duties. (NMS 34)