

Hurst Lodge School

Inspection report for Boarding School

Unique reference number	SC011259
Inspection date	25/03/2011
Inspector	Clare Davies
Type of inspection	Key

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Date of last inspection	22/01/2008

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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

Hurst Lodge School is a non-selective boarding and day school for pupils aged three to 18, located in Sunningdale, near Ascot, Berkshire. Historically Hurst Lodge was founded as a dance school and this remains a strong feature of the school today along with other creative and performance arts. The school has become co-educational since September 2010.

Hurst Lodge offers flexi-boarding in addition to weekly boarding, there are approximately 12 weekly boarders from eight to 18 years. The boarding accommodation is central to the school and located on the first floor. Boarders sleep in dormitories with girls of a similar age group, communal areas allow the girls to relax and socialise. Boarders can access the school's facilities and grounds.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced inspection to assess Hurst Lodge School against the national minimum standards for boarding schools. An additional inspection of the educational provision was undertaken by the Independent Schools Inspectorate a month before and will be reported upon separately.

The boarding provision is outstanding. Staff create a secure nurturing environment where pastoral care is strong. Boarders are supported in their social and emotional development as well as academic studies. The size of the school enables boarders to gain in confidence and accelerate their personal development. Boarders enjoy activities after their school day, making use of school facilities and off-site trips. Boarders and their parents express high levels of satisfaction with this school.

One recommendation has been made in relation to the recording of stock medication held.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were six recommendations made at the last inspection and these have all been satisfactorily met. All medication is securely stored and parental consent has been obtained for school staff to administer first aid. Staff recruitment ensures that all necessary checks are undertaken. Boarders and their parents are informed of the role of Ofsted and provided with contact details through the complaints procedure. The boarding accommodation has a small dining table and lined curtains have reduced the draughts coming from windows in the dormitories.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Across the school the health and well-being of boarders is promoted exceptionally well. The personal, social and health education programme is completely integrated into school life through the classroom, assemblies, catering, boarding and the many activities. Advice and guidance is provided at age-appropriate levels and due to this subject area being so well integrated across the school, staff are responsive to current issues and can provide sensitive support as matters arise in addition to the timetabled lessons. Training sessions for staff have equipped them to support pupils with their emotional difficulties and personal development. Some parents have benefitted from attending such training. The school has a good link with an independent psychological therapies service that provides staff training, advice to the principal, and can offer services to families and individual pupils.

The house parent takes responsibility for the medical care of boarders and this is supported by the fact that she is a qualified nurse. Policies and procedures have been reviewed to provide greater clarity on the management of health and medical needs. These documents are published on the website for parents to see. Parental consent is obtained for the administration of medication, first aid and other treatments as required for individual boarders. Protocols are in place for those with particular medical needs. This ensures that the boarder, their parents, the staff and health care professionals agree to a written plan on how to manage boarders' medical conditions. Medication is securely stored and records are made of any administration. One omission was noted in the records, this relates to the record of medication held not any failure to administer medication to boarders. Not only have the staff been trained in first aid skills, but the pupils follow a six-week course as part of their 'learning for life' programme. The health and medical welfare of boarders is monitored closely to ensure that the correct support is being provided. Observations of any changes in boarders' well-being are noted and discussed to consider any changes required to medication or emotional support.

The catering staff have an excellent understanding of what makes a balanced and nutritious meal and put this into practice offering an extensive range of food. The boarders take all their meals in the school dining room where there is always a choice of main dishes with vegetarian options and a salad bar. Boarders enjoy the food and feel consulted by the catering team as they sit and chat with boarders during mealtimes and contribute to the pastoral care provided. There are formal meetings of a food committee where pupils from across the school can discuss their likes and dislikes. The school has achieved a five star rating for food hygiene and catering practices, awarded by the local authority. Boarders have access to a small kitchen area where they can make drinks and snacks, bread making has been a very popular activity. It is planned that the development of the gardening club and the polytunnel will provide salad, herbs and vegetables to serve in the dining room. The resident pigs, chickens and bees enable children to learn about animals, their welfare and their role within the food chain. The small holding and the gardening club contribute to the school's commitment to sustainability.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The pastoral care is outstanding and the boarding provision offers a safe place for children and young people to be cared for away from home. Boarders and day pupils are encouraged to be kind to one another and consider the impact their behaviour may have on someone else, this ensures that bullying is not a feature at this school. In a recent survey pupils agreed overwhelmingly that the school deals with any bullying that occurs. The policy to counter electronic and digital bullying is comprehensive and meets the revised national minimum standard. All pupils are required to sign a school agreement for safe use of technology and the school network. Access to the internet is restricted and denies boarders the use of social network sites to promote their safety.

Staff are trained in how to respond if they are concerned about a child's safety or welfare and sound policies and procedures underpin this practice. The school has developed links with the local authority who provide advice and guidance on any child protection matters. The principal is the designated person to promote safeguarding within the school and has attended multi-agency training. All staff have received training on safeguarding and they sign a declaration confirming they have attended training and familiarised themselves with relevant school policies and procedures. This ensures that the staff member is adequately supported and that staff training and performance can be monitored effectively. There are eight safeguarding policies each one clearly refers to a particular area and includes guidance for safe working practices. By publishing these documents on the website the parents are fully informed. The school has a complaints procedure known to boarders and their parents, it provides contact details for Ofsted.

Boarders know what is expected of them and their behaviour through the code of conduct and reminders in class discussion, house meetings, assemblies and on an individual level if necessary. A boarder stated that there are only two rules; be kind and be safe. Rewards and praise are given to boarders with regular celebration of achievement in the boarding house and school assemblies. Should there be any misbehaviour, likely consequences are in the form of a discussion with staff or assisting with chores within the boarding house. Boarding staff create an open atmosphere of discussion with boarders, building up sound relationships. Boarders report that discipline is dealt with fairly. A boarder reported that 'we don't feel the need to push the boundaries'. Records confirm that serious incidents are rare and dealt with appropriately by the principal.

Matters of health and safety across the school site are managed very well with sound policies and a commitment from staff to report and respond to any possible hazard. The responsibility of safety is made known to pupils too and this is promoted by having pupil representatives at the health and safety meetings. The site is very well maintained and systems are in place for the prevention and detection of fire. Boarders have experienced evacuations from their dormitories and know what to do

if the alarm should sound. The school has a very good system of risk assessment covering the school premises, activities and off-site trips. These documents are regularly reviewed to consider any changes. Boarding staff take ownership of the risk assessments relating to boarding accommodation ensuring that every aspect of safety is identified and risks are minimised.

The school has a robust recruitment procedure and undertakes suitability checks before any member of staff can commence employment. Visitors are unable to access the school without checking in to reception, being issued with a badge and escorted around the site.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders get involved with after-school activities choosing from a range of interests in music, drama, dance, sports, gardening, cooking, art, textiles, swimming and many more. Off site, pupils can take part in horse riding, polo and ski club. Dedicated time is given to homework ensuring that some class work is completed, that there is practice with reading and spelling and more independent study for older girls. In the boarding environment there are additional activities planned and opportunities for playing cards, board games, knitting, sewing, cooking, swimming and going off site. The house parents are developing an enrichment programme that will provide fun activities and the development of life skills.

The boarders receive outstanding levels of support from a range of staff within the school and there is the option to approach an independent listener. The pastoral care is exceptional and boarders are very complimentary regarding the levels of support received from both boarding and school staff. Boarders state they like having a married couple as house parents, describing it 'like a family'. The house parents supported by one assistant ensures that boarders can receive consistent care in a nurturing environment and develop routines to assist in their personal development. Buddy systems and prefects promote support amongst the boarders themselves.

Staff from across the school contribute to the boarding life ensuring that boarders have a happy and safe experience at Hurst Lodge School. Communication is strong, supported by meetings and clear line- management responsibilities. Pupils with specific learning needs receive support from dedicated staff. To help boarders with their learning, boarding staff are in close contact with learning support staff and individual educational plans act as useful documents to identify what support is required and how it can be delivered. These plans provide useful information to teachers, boarding house staff and parents.

There is a strong commitment to equal opportunities and an environment where there is no inappropriate discrimination. The diverse academic ability of pupils supports how this school values individual contribution and celebrates difference. There are a small number of boarders from overseas who are integrated well into the school and support is provided for those who are learning English as an additional

language. The school works hard to ensure all pupils have the chance to develop their individual strengths and abilities. All boarders are treated as individuals and the staff across the school are sensitive to their different needs. Since September 2010 the school has welcomed boys though there is no provision for boys to board.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

There are formal opportunities for boarders to express their views through tutor groups, boarding house meetings, the food committee and the school council. There are good relationships between boarders and staff ensuring that informal discussion occurs regularly to gather opinions and suggestions. A promotional film of the school features on the website and boarders contributed with day girls to this stunning production.

Boarders can contact family and friends by using their personal mobile telephones, through accessing school email and using the boarding telephone. There is provision of internet access in the boarding houses and older boarders can access the school network in the senior study area. The school maintains contact with parents through telephone, email, the website and regular newsletters. Parents are encouraged to speak with staff regarding any concern they may have to ensure it is resolved quickly. During a recent survey parents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the boarding provision and the school in general.

New boarders have the opportunity to visit and this can be extended to a trial stay before they become a boarder. Junior and senior handbooks are very informative along with all the information on the website. The house parents talk through the simple house rules and safety measures within the boarding house such as the fire evacuation routes and the use of the kitchen appliances. Boarders of a similar age volunteer to act as a buddy to a new boarder to welcome and befriend them.

Hurst Lodge School actively makes a positive contribution to the wider community. Pupils perform at local events and visit older people in a care home. The school plays host to sporting events and a local football team. The integration of sustainability is supported through links with the Eden project in Cornwall and there are plans for the school to become more energy efficient.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The accommodation is in a good decorative order with comfortable furniture. The boarders state that they like their accommodation and are able to personalise their space with posters and photographs. The largest dormitory has been divided into smaller bed spaces by arranging the furniture to improve privacy for the younger boarders, older girls have a single or shared room. The sitting room has improved with a new kitchen area, small table and chairs and pleasant décor with soft

furnishings. Boarders describe the sitting room as 'homely'. The refurbishment of the bathrooms has been welcomed by the boarders, they report an improvement to the water pressure and temperature in the showers.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The video prospectus and handbooks provide an insight into the ethos and structure of the boarding provision. Comprehensive information is available on the school's website. The overall management of the school is undertaken by the principal and ably supported by the leadership team. The house parents promote a family environment and with other staff from across the school, they all contribute effectively to delivering high quality boarding provision.

Policies and procedures are of a very high standard, providing staff with clear guidance. There are sound systems in place to monitor the safety and welfare of boarders with clear record keeping and good channels of communication across the school. The house parents regularly complete a self evaluation schedule to assist in raising the standards. The staff handbook and job descriptions ensure that everyone knows what is expected of them. All staff speak highly of the support and communication they receive and they welcome the training opportunities made available to them. Training has occurred in fire safety, first aid, child protection, food hygiene, attachment issues and on some additional aspects of boarding.

Boarders respond well to the structure and enjoy their boarding experience at Hurst Lodge School. There are good levels of supervision, staffing is sufficient in number for the boarders' needs and boarders know where to locate an adult during the night if required.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. There are links with a children's charity in Somalia that promotes an awareness of inequality and difference. Pupils identify charities and make arrangements to support them through fundraising events. This non-selective school welcomes pupils with a range of academic abilities. Staff are representative from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds and there is a well- balanced mix of gender which enriches the community of the school.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Compliance with national minimum standards

The school meets all the national minimum standards, with the exception of any listed below. To ensure that the school meets the national minimum standards the school needs to...

- ensure that prescribed and 'household' medication is kept securely. In particular

keep a record of the amount of prescribed medication held to enable stock checks. (NMS 15.10)