

# Copthorne Preparatory School

Inspection report for boarding school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Liz Driver
<b>Type of inspection</b>	Social Care Inspection

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<b>Head/ Principal</b>	Chris Jones
<b>Nominated person</b>	Chris Jones
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	03/12/2007

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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**

Copthorne School is a co-educational preparatory school for children from the age of 7 to 13 years old. The boarding facility caters for up to 28 children, from the age of 9 to 13 years. Accommodated in dormitories situated within the main body of the school building, the children are grouped by gender.

The school was originally a private dwelling and was founded as a boys' school in 1902, with girls being admitted in 1980 for the first time. The school became a charitable trust in 1976.

The school is predominantly a day school offering weekly and flexi-boarding opportunities to its pupils. There is no weekend boarding. The school has numerous playing fields and other sports facilities.

### **Summary**

The overall quality rating is good.

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

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.

Boarding is a popular option for many pupils. Parents can leave children in the school's care confident that they will be looked after well and that resident staff will protect their welfare. Staff work hard to make boarding experience and enjoyable one, supervising fun activities and free time. Children enjoy the boarding experience.

The senior management team is effective with a wealth of knowledge and experience to support the staff and children. Children who board receive the appropriate support from trained and experienced staff to help them achieve progress, both academic and pastoral. Children can expect to receive outstanding health and food provision. The boarding house accommodation is satisfactory and is subject to upgrading in the very near future. Relationships between staff and children are excellent. Children feel at ease with staff and name numerous individuals they can talk to if they have a worry or concern. This is a happy school with happy children who enjoy the boarding experience.

Three recommendations for improvement have been made; two relating to fire safety and one to further developing systems in gaining boarders views.

## **Improvements since the last inspection**

At the last inspection the school was asked to ensure that personal, social and health education is delivered to all children at the school; this has been suitably developed. The school was also asked to increase the opportunities for children to express their views on boarding; this has been partly met with further development to be considered. Finally the school was asked to undertake an audit of all the boys' showers and washing facilities and action any repair, renewal or decoration; plans are in place for substantial upgrading of boarding in the summer months of 2011, including the boys' showers and washing facilities.

## **Helping children to be healthy**

The provision is outstanding.

Children experience very high standards of health care that enables them to access all aspects of school life. The matron runs effective and highly organised systems to ensure boarders' health needs are identified and met. Staff are extremely sensitive to physical and emotional difficulties children may be experiencing. All necessary policies and procedures are in place that underpin excellent staff practice. Records relating to health are comprehensive and well maintained. Both children and parents report back very positively about health care needs being met. Very positive feedback was also gained from children and parents about the skills and sensitivity of the matron and the boarding staff team. The school has a personal, social and health education programme that aims to provide the children with confidence and knowledge about life, citizenship and healthily living. This is now fully developed since the last inspection.

There are excellent systems for recording medication administered to individual children and for ensuring that personal records are held confidentially. The arrangements for first aid are very good and include regular first aid training for staff members. A high number of staff are qualified first aiders. Medication is held in the matron's office and boarders are not permitted to administer their own medication due to their age. Medication stocks are held securely in a locked cabinet. The matron has undertaken medication training and is competent in all aspects of medication administration.

Children speak very positively about the food provision at the school. Parents report positively too, apart from feedback regarding the quality of vegetarian food which the catering manager is fully aware of and has, and continues to make changes to address children's and parents views. This inspection found the food to be nutritious and varied with meal times being pleasant and enjoyable occasions. Children can freely return for seconds and many do. The catering department has received the highest award for food hygiene as a result of an environmental health inspection carried out in February 2011.

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

The provision is good.

Safety and protection is highly considered at the school with children enjoying school and boarding life to the full. Children feel safe at the school, with comments like 'staff look after us very well and keep us safe'.

Parents comment that 'the school staff take the protection and growth of the children very seriously and provide a safe and fun environment'. The school's policy for safeguarding is in accordance with local child protection and safeguarding procedures. There are three designated members of staff who take the lead for child protection issues, plus one governor. The whole staff team are trained in dealing with allegations or concerns with the lead staff confident in referring onto the correct agencies.

Children are well protected from bullying due to education, role modelling and high levels of staffing. There are very low incidence of bullying with no serious incidents noted since the last inspection. Children are taught to respect each other and any minor issues are quickly addressed. The culture within the school is that of a large extended family, this is enshrined in the school's core values that underpin the ethos of the school.

Throughout the inspection behaviour of the children was exemplary. The expectations for the children are evident with posters throughout the school buildings reminding children of what is expected of them. The school has all necessary policies in place relating to behaviour management, such as rewards, sanctions and restraint methods. Children are enthusiastic about the reward system in place. Sanctions are fair and consistent and very low in number. No physical interventions have taken place since the last inspection. Relationships between staff and children are caring and professional. Overall, the staff within the school are consistent and fair in managing the children's behaviour. By monitoring records the head is able to spot trends or patterns and any causes for concern. The use of disciplinary measures is made clear within handbooks for staff, pupils and their parents. The school works hard to ensure that parents work in partnership with them.

The school has a head boy and head girl who act as 'role models' and 'ambassadors'. The school has a house system and children are proud of their respective houses. The vast majority of boarders are flexi-boarders. Children and parents are extremely positive about flexi boarding and children they enjoy the occasions they do board.

Children who board at the school confirm that, if they had any issues or concerns while they are away from home, they could talk to many different adults at the school; from the matron to teachers to the headmaster. Helpline contact details are also available for children to use. A clear formal complaints procedure is available to boarders and their parents if they are unable to resolve matters informally. The policy is clear about the initial receipt of a complaint from a parent or third party, in

terms of who will investigate and then, subsequently, if it fails to be resolved. Parents and pupils are also made aware of how to contact external agencies if they remain dissatisfied. Parents can access the school's complaints procedures via the schools website and designated 'parent zone'.

Health and safety areas are addressed, in the main, to a good level with a robust health and safety policy in place. External companies are used for health and safety audits and fire audits, however confusion with fire extinguisher contractors has meant checks are overdue. This was being rectified during the inspection. Children know fire evacuation procedures, however, fire drills do not currently take place in boarding time; they do take place during school time.

Recruitment procedures are sound with all staff including GAP students safely recruited. Children said they feel safe in the boarding house. Security systems work well with the added protection of high staffing levels.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children receive extremely high levels of individual support. There is a wide range of people within the school children can talk to if they have a problem or if they need personal advice. The headmaster has an open door policy and this was evidenced during the course of the inspection. The head of pastoral care is qualified, experienced, easily accessible and highly regarded by children. Together the head of pastoral care and whole staff team are committed to ensuring children have access to the support they need as and when they need it. Parents and children feel safe and very well supported by a staff team they like and obviously enjoy spending time with. Children spoke freely about who they would go to if they had a problem; including the head of pastoral care as well as matron and other staff.

The ethos of the school enables all children to achieve and enjoy to their individual potential. Throughout the inspection children were observed to be happy and thoroughly enjoying the school day. They enjoy coming to school and the boarding experience they choose to access. Parent feedback was outstanding in relation to their children enjoying the school and boarding experience. The fact that the majority of children choose to board speaks for itself. Feedback such as 'boarding at the school is great for my child's confidence and independence' was replicated by many parents. Children feel that 'boarding is cool'.

There is a wide range of activities in the evenings for the children who board at the school. Staff are suitably qualified and experienced to run activities both on and off site. The children are encouraged to participate and in join in evening activities although this is not compulsory. Activities clearly help children to learn how to socialise and develop in a positive manner and enjoy new opportunities. Evening activities range from swimming, sports activities, indoor climbing or use of the schools facilities. Children have access to the extensive grounds, for which guidelines are in place, and good school facilities including a sports hall and indoor swimming

pool. Children speak very positively about the activities on offer with comments like 'the school has good activities'.

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

The provision is good.

Boarders are enabled to contribute to the school provision, however new ways to enhance their contribution are continually being developed. There is a suggestion box and children generally feel happy to approach staff informally with their views. Staff members value the contributions and views of the children. The school council enables boarder contribution to a degree, however a specific boarding forum would enable boarding issues to be discussed independently. The school has other systems such as head of school, prefects, house captains, form captains and monitors where boarders can raise ideas, concerns or wishes. Clear written info outlines the individual roles and specifies no powers to give punishments are given with these roles.

Children only board occasionally at the school and, therefore, parental contact is maintained on a very regular basis. Children have safe access to computers with internet access within the school, and there are quiet areas where children can use the telephone. Children are happy with these arrangements. Matron ensures that parents are kept well informed about significant issues relating to their children on a day-to-day basis. Parents are able to say goodnight to their children if they are on the premises, which parents find most welcoming.

There are clear procedures in place to enable prospective pupils/boarders to visit before deciding if to stay. During the inspection it was observed a pupil having a taster day. She had a buddy with her at all times during the day and was made to feel very welcome. She obviously was enjoying her day. The boarding provision, although small, is suitable to a number of parents and enables children to stay overnight and enjoy time with their friends. Parents feel that the strength of the provision is that it is 'an informal school based on family unit system, flexible and inclusive'.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is satisfactory.

Mainly children, although very small in number, choose to board. Parents like this facility and the flexibility of the school to enable this. Current boarding facilities are satisfactory, with substantial plans in place to upgrade provision during the 2011 summer holidays. Children, on the whole like the accommodation available but identify the need for some areas to be upgraded. The school's development plan identifies the need to revamp the boarding provision which the school is doing. The headmaster and governors show a clear commitment to ensuring the work commences this year.



Overall the boarding dorms need modernising with renewal of fixtures and fittings. The washing and toilet areas also need upgrading but do provide private facilities.

Children who board Monday to Friday have a lockable facility to store items of a personal nature in. Those children that flexi-board can leave such items in matron's office

## **Organisation**

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All children can access equal opportunities and are treated fairly and without discrimination. All religions and cultures are embraced and specific arrangements can be made for those children who may not wish to attend chapel. The catering department caters well for different cultural dietary needs and will ensure all appropriate practices are followed.

There is a good amount of information available for parents, staff and children about the school's principles and practice. The web based 'parents' zone' is utilised well with a very good amount of information made available to parents such as complaints and child protection policies plus weekly newsletters. There is a clear statement of the schools principles and practices also available for parents, boarders and staff.

The organisation of boarding meets the needs of the children who board. The high numbers of staff enable children to enjoy their time in boarding with appropriate supervision and protection. A large number of evening activities that day pupils can also engage in is clearly enjoyed by all children. Staff undertake induction training plus further appropriate training. GAP students also undertake induction. GAP students are very well looked after and enjoy their time at the school with children enjoying their company too.

The management team, although small is effective and open to development. Changes since the last inspection have enabled the school to develop its day provision and keep a small boarding provision active which meets a small number of parents needs. The headmaster is very well respected and offers an open door policy to both staff and children. Children spoke very positively about him, without exception.

School records are held manually and the headmaster regularly monitors the entries. The headmaster has a sound awareness of concerns, sanctions and praise that are appropriately recorded. The school has excellent risk assessments, ensuring that any identified risks are minimised. Off site and high risk activities are assessed before activities are agreed. These are monitored by the school bursar.

The school's governors take a keen interest in boarding and have designated areas of responsibilities which match their skills.

## **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 fired drills are regularly (at least once a term) carried out in 'boarding time' (NMS 26.3)
- ensure fire extinguisher checks are in place and consistently carried out (NMS 26.4)
- develop further the boarders contribution to boarding provision. (NMS 12)