

# West Hill Park School

Inspection report for boarding school

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<b>Inspector</b>	Gaynor Moorey
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<b>Head / Principal</b>	Alastair Ramsay
<b>Nominated person</b>	Lord Poole
<b>Date of last inspection</b>	17 October 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 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

The school is an independent co-educational preparatory school for children from two and a half until 13 years. The boarding accommodation is available to young people from seven to 13 years. There are currently approximately 18 boarders, most of whom go home for one day at the weekend. Flexible boarding is also available.

The school is set in 26 acres of grounds. It offers nursery, pre-preparatory and preparatory education. The grounds include a woodland, playing fields, horse riding school, floodlit astro-pitch and an indoor swimming pool.

### Summary

At this announced inspection all the key standards were assessed. The school provides an outstanding level of care for the children who board there. Each child's individuality is valued and respected and the ethos in the school ensures that those who board there are nurtured and developed both academically and socially. The strong leadership of the school and systems operated therein ensure that all the children have their welfare promoted and protected. A formal programme of training and supervision is provided for all staff working in the boarding provision including the gap students. The size of the school ensures that all the children can be monitored and supported closely and that there is 'always someone to talk to.'

Boarders live in comfortable accommodation and benefit from a wide range of activities. The boarding ethos of the school is professional but also relaxed, open and homely and there is an emphasis placed on respecting each other and showing courtesy and manners to everyone.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

### Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection the school received three recommendations two of which were connected with the upgrade and improvement of play and boarding areas. Both of these have been addressed and the areas have received some renovation. The other recommendation was to develop guidance in case of a child going missing. There is now a policy and guidance to influence practice in both the school and boarding areas.

### Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The school offers clear guidance to the pupils on the promotion of healthy living and lifestyles. Other health issues are discussed in personal, social, citizenship and health education within the school day and the children can approach members of staff to discuss any personal issues or problems. Appropriate information is provided to the children on issues such as illegal substances, sexual health, and other social issues. This information is shared sensitively and commensurate with the children's development and understanding, bearing in mind that some of the children join the school at the age of seven.

Thorough health records are developed for the children. These contain information such as health histories, allergies and specific health needs, vaccination records as well as any issues

which may affect a child's emotional wellbeing such as bereavement or divorce. Specific health plans are kept for children who have identified health needs such as anaphylaxis or enuresis. Sensitive information is shared with members of staff on a 'need to know' basis and all records are kept securely stored.

There are clear and comprehensive policies and guidance with regards to the monitoring and promoting of the children's health to ensure their health needs are met. Within the questionnaires and in conversation the pupils identified they feel cared for and are helped when feeling unwell. Staff within the boarding house are trained in first aid and the administration of medication. The administration and storage of medication is closely and robustly audited and monitored. Records are thorough and up to date. Clear records are kept of medication coming to the school and a stock take is maintained to ensure that all the records tally. Medication is kept securely stored.

The children have access to a doctor at the local surgery. Other health appointments are also in place if they are needed, these include opticians, dentists or other specialist input. This helps to ensure all health needs of the children are met.

The nurse provides caring and sensitive attention to children who present themselves to her. She is very aware that some children may at times require reassurance and a kind word rather than medical attention. Support offered to the children is nurturing and attentive. The school nurse notifies parents or guardians of any illnesses or injuries and clear records are kept of any accidents. The sick bay is situated next to the nurse's room.

The standard of catering in the school is outstanding. The catering for the school is managed by the chef who is in charge of the catering department. The staff are trained appropriately for their roles. The kitchen is regularly cleaned and visited by the environmental health officer. Meals are sourced as much as possible with local produce and most of the food is home made. The menu is prepared on a four weekly basis and offers five choices for each main meal including a vegetarian option. Unanimous feedback from the children, members of staff and parents stated that the food is of a very good standard. Additionally, the catering staff are very aware of specific dietary needs for any particular children and ensure that these are met.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The size of the boarding operation in the school means that there are always staff around to support the children and that any incidents or niggles between them are quickly noted. The school has a policy to protect and give guidance about bullying. The school involves the children in anti bullying activities and teaches about bullying in its personal, social and health education. The children when asked did not identify bullying as an issue but said if anything happened the staff would sort it out. The children are encouraged to live as part of a close community and to look out for each other.

The school has three members of staff who are responsible for the monitoring of child protection and who train and disseminate information about child protection to all members of staff. There is a child protection policy in place for the staff to follow and this contains clear guidance with regards to reporting issues of concern and how to respond to disclosures by children. All members of staff and gap students have child protection training as part of their induction and the child protection co-ordinators ensure that all members of staff receive refresher training

and reminders about their role and obligations every term. All members of staff have access to the local child protection and safeguarding procedures. A file containing child protection records was seen and any incident or disclosures have been dealt with appropriately. The level of awareness about child protection issues and the adults' responsibility to keep the children safe, ensures that there is an excellent commitment to keeping children safe from abuse.

The children are very clear as to what behaviour is expected from them. Guidance is provided in the form of a handbook for boarding. Disciplinary measures are seen as an opportunity for children to discuss and address their behaviour rather than as a punishment in themselves. The school has a behavioural management system in place to promote positive behaviour. All sanctions are recorded in the record book kept by the senior matron and this is also used for monitoring purposes. Sanctions of a more serious nature are recorded in a record kept by the head teacher. The school also has a book in which to record any incidents that involve staff handling the children in a physical manner. The school celebrates achievement and helps the children to be reflective and responsible for their own behaviour.

The children have numerous opportunities to voice their opinions and complaints. It is clear that most of the children are confident to express their views both in writing and verbally. This means that any complaints or issues can be passed on to various members of staff including the head of boarding and head teacher. The children are responded to when they raise issues and feedback from them confirms that their views are taken seriously and acknowledged.

Boarders and staff alike are protected from risks to their safety and wellbeing. A robust and comprehensive programme of risk assessment identifies and addresses any known or perceived dangers. Such risk assessments are regularly reviewed and when necessary, amended. The whole environment is risk assessed for potentially hazardous areas and situations such as asbestos, the air conditioning, water supplies, swimming pool and the chemicals used there. The house is surrounded by lighting and the outside doors and stairwells are alarmed and doors have coded locks. The children are clearly kept safe and safeguarded while boarding at the school.

When trips are carried out away from the school site, robust and individualised risk assessments are completed. These risk assessments are not only completed by the member of staff responsible for the trip or activity but are checked by the bursar and head who are responsible for the organised trips. The children living at the school are encouraged to take part in activities which encourage their confidence and experience and in this context are able to take calculated and sensible risks.

Records confirm that frequent testing of fire equipment and alarms are carried out and that fire drills occur regularly in both daylight and at night. Fire risk assessments are in place to ensure the school is safe for the children to live there.

Children living in the school have their privacy respected. They are able to shower, wash and change privately in the bath and shower rooms and dormitories. Staff supervision is discrete, ensuring that the younger children have easy access to assistance and guidance if needed, but not impinging on older and more able children.

The school operates a rigorous and robust recruitment process which ensures that all adults working in the school in whatever role are subject to references and Criminal Record Bureau checks. The bursar oversees the compilation of detailed and thorough staff records and

telephones references to ensure their veracity. The head teacher also examines the recruitment records to ensure their accuracy.

There are clear guidelines and expectations for visitors to follow. All visitors must wear a visitor's badge when on the premises and sign the visitors' book. There are two student aged young people living on site who do not work at the school and safety checks are in place for them.

The boarding accommodation is set within the school, no one has access to it unless they are meant to be there. The boarding house is alarmed and a system is in place for the last checks of the day. The boarding living areas are for the exclusive use of the children who live at the school and are not shared. Children are safeguarded at the school from any inappropriate adults or intruders.

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

The provision is outstanding.

Children in the school are offered a wide and varied range of activities and lots of specific areas and play areas in which to undertake these activities. There is a strong belief in the school that there is always something at which each child can excel, whether this is academically or in sport, drama, music and hobbies. The school provides the pupils with a wide range of activities in the evening and weekends. Boarders confirm that the weekends are busy and there is one activity a weekend where they are taken out to different places such as Thorpe Park, the beach, country parks, splashdown swimming pool or the cinema. The pupils said they are never bored and always have something to do and someone to play with.

The children have a wide choice of adults whom they can approach with any problem and this includes an independent visitor who not only visits the school but is available by telephone. The children can also access independent telephone help lines such as Child-line. Additionally the children are very aware that they may approach their form tutor, senior matron, nurse, gap students, head teacher and his wife or any other teaching staff in the school. The wide range of adults available, combined with the small size of the school means that advice, guidance and reassurance are readily and easily accessible. The school will arrange for outside specialist support including counselling or any other health service. All the children feel that they are listened to and that there is 'always someone you can talk to.'

The school has children from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Difference is celebrated and seen as an opportunity to learn about different cultures and religions. Cultural and religious issues are taught to the children and opportunities are given to children from different backgrounds to value and enjoy their culture while being integrated into the school community, which is Christian based. Children from different religious backgrounds are given the opportunity to attend religious ceremonies and the school facilitates this. The children's diversity is respected through dietary, religious and cultural needs being met. The school undertakes special meal days and celebrates cultures by holding such occasions as African welly dancing day, Greek day, international food week, harvest festival, helping out at the local disabilities college and confirmation celebrations.

The size of the boarding operation ensures that those children who for various reasons are struggling to fit in are supported and monitored so that they do not become isolated. The school works hard to ensure that all pupils are treated as equals with out any imbalance of power. The school looks to promote all of the pupils' skills and talents.

Clear guidance is in place for members of staff to follow with regards to appreciating and acknowledging different cultural and religious backgrounds and this ethos is spread throughout the school.

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

The provision is outstanding.

The children have numerous opportunities to share their views on how they feel they are being cared for and what they would like to improve. Formal forums include the school council, boarding house meetings and the suggestion box. Thorough minutes are kept of the meetings which contain full agendas. Items on the meeting minutes showed where the children have made suggestions such as for a school hooded top and its design, décor of the boarding houses and activities. The children said they were able to make decisions about what happens at the weekend.

Children boarding in the school are able to contact parents and friends via telephone and email. Children whose families live abroad and in different time zones are allowed to telephone their parents at times that are convenient to the children and their families. Emails and telephone conversations are carried out in private and the right for children to have privacy during these times is acknowledged and protected.

The process of inducting new boarders is sensitive and nurturing, especially for the younger children. All new boarders are given a handbook before they arrive at the school. The handbook describes what they are to expect at the school, the routines and rules as well as what support is available to them if they need it. The overseas pupils said they are given a buddy when they arrive to help to understand the routines and timetable for school. To underpin this process, members of staff regularly contact the parents of boarders to update them on their child's progress and how they are settling in.

The school has a community feeling to its every day life. This is underpinned by the children having adults to whom they can speak to and relax with, especially in the evenings. The children speak highly of the head teacher and his wife, the matrons as well as the nurse and gap students. The atmosphere and interaction is relaxed and respectful.

It is clear that the views of the children are valued and listened to and that the relationships between the staff and children ensure that respect and tolerance are key values in the school.

### **Achieving economic wellbeing**

The provision is good.

Children are able to keep personal possessions secure in lockable spaces provided by the school. Additionally they all have their own bedside cabinets and lockers for storing clothes. Any valuables and mobiles are handed in for safe keeping. The school provides a comprehensive pocket money system which is run by the senior matron. The children are encouraged to think about how much money they need to take out and spend.

The dormitories are spacious and comfortable. There is a collection of both bunk beds and single beds and each child has storage space. The children are able to personalise their own space with posters and pictures. The dormitories are kept tidy by the children and are kept

clean by the domestic staff. The common room is a shared space for all boarders and was seen to be a homely, comfortable space.

There are adequate numbers of sinks and showers available for the children. The pupils are able to shower privately in the boarding area. Members of staff have separate toilet and shower facilities.

There is a team of staff who meet regularly to discuss the refurbishment and repairs needed throughout the school. The boarding house is on a rolling programme of renovation. Where the boarding house has been renovated it was seen to have been undertaken to a high standard.

## **Organisation**

The organisation is outstanding.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The different backgrounds of the children living in the school are celebrated and enjoyed and seen as opportunities to learn about each other. Each child's individuality is acknowledged and valued, whether this be a cultural or religious difference or an individual ability to excel in a specific area. The acknowledgement of the importance of difference and how this can enrich everyone's experience is embedded in the school.

The school has a very well presented and attractive prospectus which clearly outlines the ethos and what children and parents can expect. All the children and parents have a handbook which is also very clear as to what living at the school entails and what the routines, rules and systems are while at school. The school also has a website which can be accessed for any information carried within the prospectus.

The size of the boarding operation and the fact that boarding takes place in one part of the building means that the organisation of boarding is consistent and safe. Boys and girls have clearly demarked separate boarding facilities, however the standard of accommodation is very similar.

The staff responsible for boarding provide a good balance of supervision for the children. The supervision of those boarding is discrete and does not impinge on privacy. The level of supervision does vary, bearing in mind the young age of some of the children and their need for guidance and prompting in some areas.

The safety of the children who board is protected by having a robust risk assessment process which is checked by those responsible for the boarding area. All members of staff liaise with each other on an informal and formal basis. Through this process staff create an environment where children are supported, cared for and safeguarded.

Records are checked and endorsed by the member of staff responsible for them and are then checked and endorsed by the head teacher. This ensures that the head teacher is very much involved in the oversight and management of the school while sharing and delegating responsibilities. Records which the head teacher monitors include those related to safeguarding the children.

There is a comprehensive staff handbook which outlines policies and guidance with regards to boarding and the welfare of children in the school. New members of staff have a clear induction

process and this involves training in child protection and the emphasis on duties of care and supervision for those children who board.

The level of communication between all members of staff in the school is excellent. Each child's needs, concerns and idiosyncrasies are known to the staff. The staff team is managed and supported by a senior management team who are experienced and knowledgeable, and who provide excellent oversight of the running of the school.

## **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**

There are no recommendations.