

More House School

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Gavin Thomas
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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

More House School is an independent Catholic school occupying a large self-contained site in a rural setting on the borders of Frensham Common, Surrey. It is open to boys of any faith, aged nine to 16 with a developing sixth form available to post 16 boys. There are 12 aims which make up the school's mission statement.

The school provides individualised learning programmes for boys who have specific learning difficulties, dyslexia or some associated language based problems. These programmes are devised from a detailed, structured curriculum which incorporates a whole school approach.

Day places and full weekly boarding places are provided. Boarding facilities are split between the juniors in the Main House and the seniors in St Anthony's. A maximum of 106 boarders can be accommodated at any one time. The Main House, located on the first floor of the main school building, is split into five dormitories. The largest accommodating nine boarders and the smallest accommodating two boarders.

More House is registered and inspected by Crested (The Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexic Pupils). It appears in the Crested category of 'SP' Schools. It is also a member of the Independent Schools' Association and the Boarding Schools' Association.

Summary

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

This was an announced full inspection. All of the key national minimum standards were assessed under the Every Child Matters outcomes plus organisation. A total of 84 boys completed surveys for this inspection and approximately 20 took part in discussions.

The school goes from strength to strength benefitting all of the boys, day and boarders. Recent developments include extensive refurbishment and new provisions such as a lecture suite and cinema. The boys enjoy these new facilities and are also excited about the extent of extra curricular activities which have also expanded.

The views of individual boys are indicative of a school which is highly respected and appreciated. These views include: 'The staff at this school understand my needs', 'within a week of coming here, I was able to read. This has never happened to me before', and, 'I can now look forward to university because everyone here has helped me to achieve this'. All staff including visiting professionals, catering and domiciliary staff show commitment and passion to working with the boys and are very aware of their needs.

Some of the key strengths identified during this inspection include the holistic staff approach to ensuring that all boys' needs are consistently monitored, reviewed and evaluated. All staff play a vital role in communicating with the boys, the boys' families and each other. This helps create a positive environment which is also supportive and responds to changes and challenges consistently and effectively. The boys benefit immensely from the emphasis placed on core values such as trust, relationship building and confidence. As a result, the vast majority of boys leave this school with hope and expectations for a happier and more purposeful future.

Recommendations identified during this inspection do not directly impact on the boys' experiences or outcomes.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, the school governors were asked to provide written reports, demonstrating the outcome of their visits to the school as required under national minimum standard 33. This recommendation is met. The governing body has developed a system to ensure that these reports are now available. There are two very different styles of reporting. However, the governing body is aware through discussions from this inspection that the criteria as set out under national minimum standard 33.3 should be included in reports for visits undertaken at least every half term.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

Health or treatment plans are personal to individual boys. The content of these plans is clear and concise. The nurses are vigilant in monitoring plans with other staff and changes are made when required. The boys are very well cared for at the health centre. They do not shy away from this area and will often visit the nurses for non-medical reasons. This adds another dimension of how emotional health and well-being is a key feature throughout the school. The two school nurses are suitably qualified and have established very strong links with a visiting General Practitioner and a local surgery.

The management of medication is robust. Nurses ensure that stringent processes are maintained for the receipt, dispensing, administration and recording of controlled drugs. Risk assessments relating to the management of medication are carried out to ensure that practices are safe. This includes secondary dispensing of medications. First aid boxes are well stocked and a good system is in place for ensuring that sufficient trained staff are on duty at all times of the day.

The boys can rely on a very well-managed catering team who are proactive in developing and providing healthy and nutritious meals. The meals are freshly prepared and graded to help the boys understand the difference between healthy and high-risk foods. The selection of foods varies and now includes a pasta and salad

bar. The quality of meals is the same throughout the day and for some boys, their favourite day is Wednesday. The overwhelming majority of surveys indicated a very high satisfaction of the quality of food. The school has achieved the highest grade following a recent food safety inspection and a similar grade for a separate inspection of food safety and preparation areas. Records relating to catering are of a high standard and catering staff undertake a wide range of training including cooking skills and child protection.

Extensive work has been carried out to the dining room, kitchen and food preparation areas. This has made a vast difference in the organisation of meals and serving times. Everyone comments about the difference this is making, in particular the boys who say they no longer need to queue. The seating area in the dining room is larger and this also means that meal times are a much more pleasant time for the boys.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Confidentiality and data protection are clearly explained in a number of policies and procedural guidance. These are accessible to all staff and where appropriate, available via the school's website. In addition, the school ensures that the boys' privacy is protected through policies on the use of photographs. Boarders are given a number of choices for making contact with families. Several payphones are freely available and more private telephones are accessible on request. The boys do not identify privacy as being an issue including the use of bathing and toilet facilities. The school has received and fully investigated one complaint since the last inspection. Boarders would not hesitate in raising any concerns or complaints and say that they would talk to any member of staff. Details of external agencies are included in the student handbook. A number of boarders would prefer to use the school council to voice concerns or requests. A written policy is in place for ensuring that all pupils concerns are taken seriously. This contributes to an environment which is open and transparent.

Child protection and safeguarding is a key feature in all remits of the school. Safeguarding has been taken to a different level to keep abreast of issues linked to cyber bullying. In doing so, one member of the senior management team has attended external training which has since been cascaded to all staff. All boys now have access to an on-line reporting system if they have any concerns or worries about misuse of the internet or mobile phones. All staff except the independent visitor have undertaken safeguarding training in recent months. Evidence of safeguarding training is well documented and staff praise the appropriateness of recent training undertaken. Outcomes of discussions with boys confirm that they feel safe at this school. Some of the reasons being: staff who are always available to talk to; boarding staff who are helpful during the night if needed; and doors being locked at night. Staff do not assume that boys are safe and are, therefore, very vigilant and observant of behaviours which may indicate that intervention is necessary. In most cases, this relates to matters not connected to the school. However, the senior

management team ensures that all safeguarding concerns are documented and pursued through the relevant agencies.

A very low percentage of boarders said in surveys that sometimes they are bullied. However, from speaking to boarders they do not associate bullying with this school. On rare occasions, boarders say that they sometimes experience name calling and playground banter but staff are quick to intervene when this occurs. Extensive work is carried out with the boys across the school to raise awareness about bullying and to help boys understand this subject more realistically. This is achieved through work done in assemblies, projects and through one-to-one support. Where appropriate, staff also work extensively with the boys' families regarding matters outside of the school. This is an area of ongoing support and intervention. The school's 'Behaviour for Learning' programme takes into account a broad range of behavioural needs and strategies for helping boys cope and manage their behaviours appropriately. Policy and procedural guidance is in place for responding to incidents involving boys missing from the school at any time of the day. Currently, this is not issue. The boys are appropriately supervised during boarding times and staff are vigilant in monitoring the boys' whereabouts.

Physical intervention is extremely rare and records are in place for any incidents of this nature. Sanctions are usually in the form of loss of privileges or suspensions. All staff work consistently to prevent behavioural issues escalating. Responses are swift and early intervention pays off. For example, members of staff from the school's learning and development centre are now observing and interacting with the boys during break times. This helps identify where more intense areas of need are required. The 'Behaviour for Learning' programme is monitored vigorously by senior management. This programme also produces data which is used to celebrate achievements in the form of rewards events. On-site resources, including input from the school's behavioural therapist, contribute to supporting the boys through difficult situations.

Written health and safety systems are robust and help protect the boys, staff and visitors from unnecessary harm. Risk assessments are wide ranging and thoroughly scrutinised, particularly those involving the boys in off- site activities. Fire safety systems are sound and records show that fire drills are carried out routinely. However, two fire doors in one of the boarding houses were wedged open. Appliances throughout the school are tested by approved contractors and where possible, contractors carry out routine work during holiday time. Building contractors are thoroughly vetted and comprehensive safety arrangements are in place for contractors currently working on site.

The quality of recruitment and selection processes has developed significantly since the last inspection. Evidence of interviews, vetting and assessing suitability, such as obtaining enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks for new staff, are all clearly documented. The quality of recording enables the school to demonstrate the suitability of staff and visiting professionals to work with the boys. Visitors are carefully vetted on arrival at the school and do not access unauthorised areas such as the boarding houses.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

The whole school approach to supporting the boys' education is unquestionable. Staff from each remit work harmoniously to facilitate and make learning a fun but meaningful experience for each of the boys. This is enhanced through effective communication between staff throughout the school. Boarding staff are sometimes classroom based and teaching staff are involved in extra curricular activities. The learning and development centre is central to all aspects of school life providing a vast array of specialist support and intervention. The deployment of these resources results in excellent outcomes for individual the boys. The boys make glowing remarks about what they are achieving at this school. In addition to securing college or university placements, boys are also eligible for work experience at this school before leaving. This gives the boys an insight about possible careers they wish to pursue such as catering. Parents and boys make very strong comments about opportunities which enable the boys to excel academically.

Staff show an interest in the boys' welfare even when they have moved on. For example, contact is maintained or where appropriate, the school liaises with colleges and universities to ensure that the individual boy's needs are catered for. The recent appointment of a part-time careers advisor helps prepare the boys as they plan to move on from this school. Former pupils are often in touch with the school and this is one way in which staff get to know about the boys' academic achievements including scholarships and degrees. The boarding staff take prep time very seriously and this time is used wisely by the boys.

Support systems for the boys are wide ranging, practical and accessible. The school has an established mentoring scheme which has developed over the last two years. This scheme is very successful, enabling all boys to focus on specific matters with a named member of staff. This type of support is an example of how individualisation is promoted and valued. The independent visitor visits the school routinely and boys have the opportunity to contact this person in writing at other times. However, from talking to a number of boys, they do not appear to know who the independent visitor is. This means that the role may not be as effective as it could be. There are integrated strategies for support across the school. For example, the learning and development centre is accessible for advice, guidance and support to all boys and staff. Therapy is individualised and tailored accordingly. This includes a strong emphasis on sensory profiling and language processing. The boys respond extremely well to the various forms of therapeutic intervention. As a result, they thrive in an environment where high quality support is tailored to their needs.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Opportunities for consulting with the boys are creative and purposeful. The school council is instrumental in advocating on behalf of peers. One member of the school council said that their views are taken very seriously and their input helps to make a difference for the other boys. The boys are confident that they are listened to and staff will find time to talk to them. The boys enjoy the scope to participate in local, national and international events. One of their biggest joys is the connection with a link school abroad. The boys are very proud of their involvement and how they get involved more locally such as fundraising events to support their link school. In addition, they are now involved in a pen pal scheme. The boys are consulted on school matters including their education, diet, boarding facilities, social events, independence skills and extra curricular activities. Individual comments from the boys include: 'This school is fantastic, I am much happier here', 'I get to do things I would never have done previously', and, 'It's great mixing with other schools as this helps prepare me for moving on'.

Admissions and discharge procedures are carefully planned to ensure that the needs of the individual boys are at the forefront of decisions made. The senior management team is very mindful of the needs of the existing group of boys when considering new referrals. As a result, the matching process is balanced to ensure that this school is appropriate to meet a boy's holistic needs. The boys comment on the positive induction they receive. This includes the subtle but reassuring support shown by staff if they are experiencing signs of homesickness. Boys preparing to move on this year are excited about their future plans. They say this is because staff have given them a second chance to prove that they are capable of doing well. The boys welcome opportunities to develop skills to cope in a wider society. This includes the trust and support to use public transport independently; budgeting; meeting with the school's career advisor; and introduction to further education.

Care planning is individualised and takes into account ways in which the boys are coached, guided and supported in all remits of the school. This process is very focused and methods of planning vary according to individual need. The boys are fully consulted on their personal profiles and this encourages them to accept and take ownership of the targets and objectives set for achievement. Staff across the school are consistent in how individual boys are supported. These outcomes are monitored vigorously and any changes are done in consultation with the boys.

Staff are very good at making sure that agreed contact arrangements between the school and families are carried out. Communication with families or significant others is ongoing and well managed. The boys have no issues regarding arrangements for contacting their families. A number of phones and private areas are accessible to the boys. Private rooms are also available for boys to meet with their families at the school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The entire school premises are regularly being developed or refurbished to enhance and improve facilities and learning experiences for the boys. The older boys appreciate smaller bedrooms although the younger boys do not have an issue with sharing dormitories. The boarding facilities are designed to help older boys prepare for independence. For example, facilities are provided for cooking light meals and snacks. All areas of the school are well kept and pleasantly presented. Repairs and renewals are ongoing to avoid the boys' safety being compromised in any way.

Some boys are enjoying the gardening club as their vegetables are being used in meals at the school. This is an example of development since the last inspection, which some boys find stimulating. The layout of the school premises means that there is no overcrowding. Proper time can be given to boys individually or in small groups during lesson time, extra curricular activities and during boarding. Excellent links are forged between the school and the local community. This involves the boys taking part in learning and recreational activities.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The school's Statement of Purpose is combined with the mission statement. It clearly sets out details of provision and objectives. These details are accessible to families and significant others. The student handbook is issued to all boys on admission and this includes essential information about boarding arrangements. The student handbook and other useful information are also accessible in common areas around the school, including a seating area near the chapel.

Sufficient staff are employed to ensure the safety and supervision of the boys at all times of the day. The boys know which staff are on call at night and are reassured by their attitude and willingness to assist at any time of the day or night. All staff contribute to events occurring at peak times of the day such as extra curricular activities. This enables all boys including boarders to fully engage in a meaningful programme of activities outside of lesson time. Staff turn over is extremely low and relationships established between staff and the boys are sound. The boys refer to the staff as 'helpful', 'good', and 'fantastic'. Although this is a school for boys, the staff team is well balanced with male and female staff.

A well-managed system is in place for ensuring that all staff receive regular supervisions and an annual appraisal of their work. These meetings are well documented and enhanced arrangements for supervising new staff are in place. Lines of accountability are very clear and all staff are guided by a very experienced and stable senior management team. Policies and procedures relating to staff employment and conduct are up to date and accessible to all staff. The staff work extremely well together as one team. Each remit of the school is dedicated to the

needs of the boys. Their strategies for engaging with the boys are consistent and regularly reviewed for effectiveness.

The boarding team is led by a very experienced and suitably qualified head of care. There are very clear indications of how boundaries ensure a safe and caring environment. Equally, staff create a balanced environment whereby the boys can laugh, have fun and experience a real sense of enjoyment. From discussions with the boys, this is a strength which they recognise and value. The expertise within the whole staff team enables the boys to progress from feeling at low ebb, with low self-esteem and lacking confidence, to being able to laugh, gain confidence and look forward to adulthood. Staff have access to a programme of training events which are varied and relevant to their roles. Some staff are also working towards, or registered to undertake, professionally recognised qualifications.

Extensive records and systems are monitored periodically by the headteacher and senior management team and scrutinised for efficiency. The headteacher produces a range of reports demonstrating the operation and resourcing of the school. The boarding provision is included in these reports, which includes reports to the governing body three times a year. An annual school review is published and an official address is launched by the headteacher at one of the school's annual events. A combination of verbal and written reports keep the boys, their families, staff and significant others abreast of key events and outcomes. The governing body is represented by members contributing a broad range of skills and expertise. Governors visit the school frequently for routine or specific reasons. The reporting for visits as required under national minimum standard 33.3 is improving. Governors are now mindful that there is scope to further develop the reporting system. The times of visits to the school by members of the governing body vary and there is great interest in all remits of the school including boarding and welfare.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. The school's annual review is an excellent example of how diversity is embedded in the life of the school, resulting in remarkable outcomes for the boys. This school is led by the Roman Catholic faith. However, they welcome boys from other faiths and denominations. The Catholic faith is held with high regard and since the last inspection; some boys have been prepared to receive their first communion. This was arranged by the school Chaplain in consultation with families. The emphasis placed on individuality is significant throughout the school. The boys' learning and development are in no way compromised. Outstanding results are celebrated by existing and former pupils who aspire to new challenges and a real sense of purpose after leaving this school. Staff are very sensitive towards the needs of the boys and are persistent in how they interact with the boys to establish safe and trusting relationships. Extensive work is undertaken with all boys to help develop their knowledge and understanding about acceptance of backgrounds, cultures, faiths and different communities.

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 safeguarding training for all staff, including the independent visitor (NMS 5.8)
- ensure that positive steps are taken to keep children, staff and visitors safe from risk from fire; by reviewing the use of door wedges and the obstruction of fire doors in one of the boarding houses (NMS 26)
- ensure that the independent visitor is easily identifiable to the boys when she visits the school. (NMS 22.8)