

Gresham's Prep School

Inspection report for boarding school

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Inspector	Julian Parker
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Date of last inspection	12 June 2006

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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

Gresham's Prep is a fully co-educational school offering day and boarding provision for pupils aged between eight and 13 years. It is part of a family of three schools situated in the market town of Holt in North Norfolk. Each school has its own Head Teacher; the present Head of the Preparatory School was appointed in September 2003.

Gresham's was founded in 1555 by Sir John Gresham who, on his death, endowed the school under the control of the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers. The school continued to be governed by the Worshipful Company of Fishmongers until September 2004. It is now a charitable company.

In 1983, the existing Junior School was established as a separately staffed Preparatory School with its own facilities and extensive playing fields. Whilst the Preparatory School is closely linked to the Senior School and there is regular sharing of sports facilities, the Preparatory School functions entirely independently of the Senior School.

Boarding provision is flexible with a choice of full, weekly or occasional boarding. Girls are accommodated in Crossways House and boys are accommodated in Kenwyn House.

Summary

This report is of an announced full inspection undertaken as part of a three-year inspection cycle. The overall judgement of the service is satisfactory. Measures to help boarders enjoy and achieve, make a positive contribution and achieve economic wellbeing are all outstanding. The needs of boarders with particular requirements, for example, special learning needs are particularly well met.

Boarders health is addressed well. The safety of boarders is satisfactory with a recommendation being made concerning improving recruitment practice. The organisation of the school is judged as good acknowledging that monitoring systems have recognised and addressed identified practice and administrative shortfalls.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The inspection report of June 2006 identified that the Senior Management Team of Gresham's Preparatory School had addressed all of the recommendations made by the Full inspection, the amended report of which was issued in August 2005. The Interim Inspection identified no further recommendations and acknowledged that the planned improvements for the accommodation and boarding facilities were underway. This inspection confirms that the school continues to improve as far as is practical within the limitations of its site, the facilities and accommodation available to boarders and include the extension of Crossways house. Cultural and recreational facilities at the school continue to provide boarders with many stimulating and personal developmental opportunities.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The needs of pupils and boarders are being positively promoted through the delivery of effective services.

Information relating to the health and medical histories of each pupil is obtained as a component of the preparatory school's admission process through thorough consultation with parents. The issue of consent for medical treatment in emergency is not always sought by the Health Centre and this administrative shortfall could delay timely treatment in a medical emergency away from the school site. Health related information is shared between boarding house matrons and the school health centre ensuring that the particular needs or allergies of pupils are known and can be responded to safely. The Gresham's Health Centre is comprehensively served by contracted links with a local National Health Service provision. A General Practitioner holds a regular school surgery ensuring all Gresham's pupils have access to high quality medical care.

Boarding staff receive regular training in first aid and the administration of medication however these qualifications are not always supported by certification. The storage of medication in boarding houses is not as secure as is required.

All pupil's have access to information and guidance with regard to health and social issues. These are imbedded in the preparatory school's curriculum and through Personal, Social and Health Education lessons. Boarders are encouraged to form good personal hygiene habits, such as hand washing before meals and to present themselves smartly for all events where they represent the school.

Pupil's and boarders' religious and health related dietary needs are well met by the team of school catering staff responsible for the provision and preparation of all meals. All boarders are required to eat main meals in a central dining room but can also take snacks in their boarding houses. The school have been proactive in developing children's awareness of healthy eating and having a balanced diet by learning about the value of differing food groups. There is a high degree of satisfaction from pupils but some boarders have identified shortfalls in quality and choice of food on offer on occasion. Boarders' can comment about the meals available to them directly to the catering staff or through school council meetings. The catering manager uses the information gathered to inform changes to the menu and the school senior management team are addressing the broader issues of improving satisfaction at all mealtimes.

Boarders benefit from efficient and high quality laundering services. This is demonstrated by their smart appearance.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

At Gresham's Preparatory School pupils and boarders are encouraged to adhere to a code of conduct that promotes good behaviour in an environment where children are not inhibited from sharing their concerns with adults. Pupils and boarders are protected from bullying by the rigid enforcement of the school's policy and procedures for dealing with any type of intolerant or oppressive behaviour. Boarders confirm that they generally know how to identify bullying behaviour and confirm that is not tolerated by the school. Staff and prefects are vigilant and act decisively to prevent and address any such behaviour and by doing so protect pupils from potential harm. Boarders can all identify a person at the school they would tell were they being bullied, usually this is the House Master.

The school has effective procedures for responding to any alleged child protection concerns. All pupils and boarders know who they can approach to raise any matters that trouble them. All staff and prefects are briefed annually about the school's safeguarding responsibilities and how to practically identify any potential child protection concerns. The Head Master has established links with local social services department and Safeguarding Team for advice and consultation. Gresham's Preparatory school has produced an informative policy for safeguarding children that is fully endorsed by the Senior Management Team and School Governors and linked to the Local Safeguarding Children's Board guidance.

Policies relating to the school's expectations for conduct and the management of behaviour are made explicit to all pupils, boarders and their parents. In practice these expectations are extremely effective with the majority of pupils' and boarders' imposing high standards of conduct upon themselves. Prefects act as positive role models and do not give out sanctions. Prefects are fully aware of their responsibility in assisting with the maintenance of high standards and practical support for boarders at the school. The general standards of behaviour are very high, negating the need for the use of any physical restraint.

Gresham's Preparatory school has a clear complaints procedure and information about this is widely available to pupils, boarders and parents through parents information booklets, pupils guides and parents notice boards at the school entrance. Members of the school Senior Management team are visible at key times and easily approached by parents and pupils alike. Boarders' confirm that they know how to complain and to whom they can make any concerns known. This includes the valued use of an Independent Listener. House parents and boarding house staff are proactive in keeping boarders happy and quickly and effectively addressing any concerns boarders raise.

The school has effective fire prevention and detection equipment and procedures. Safe procedures are in place to protect pupils and boarders' through the regular testing and maintenance of detection equipment, extinguishers, fire alarms and other electrical equipment. Boarders have routinely scheduled opportunities to practise the evacuation of their houses at different times of the day. Boarders say that they feel reassured by these drills.

Boarders in both houses confirm that staff are respectful towards their needs for privacy while being responsible and attentive to their supervision, welfare and safety. Boarding houses, as far as is possible with their construction generate a family type atmosphere where individual space is respected. Boarders' do not feel intruded upon by staff and confirm that the school provides areas within the houses and grounds where they can seek quiet time.

The preparatory school utilises a rigorous risk assessment approach for all aspects of safety on the premises, grounds, behaviour and activities to ensure that any areas used by pupils, including boarding houses are free from avoidable or potential safety hazards. The school has effective and tested procedures in place to assertively manage any external risk to children such as intruders in the school grounds. Any identifiably high risk activities provided for pupils are well supervised and underwritten by assessed safety measures that are subject to ongoing review. Systematic recording supports the school's risk assessment approach thereby assuring the commitment to keeping all pupils and boarders as safe as is reasonably possible.

Staff recruitment and checks on other adults who have access to students, including gap student staff have not until recently been sufficiently thorough or recorded in a manner that fully

complies with National Minimum Standards or statutory requirements. This could have previously allowed unsafe adults to gain access to children. Underpinning recording practice is presently subject to major review and improvement. The school now operates a staff vetting procedure that supports its commitment to safeguard all pupils and boarders through full adherence with best practice guidelines and national minimum standards.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Pupils' and boarders' are able to develop interests in an impressive range of individual and group sports, activities and hobbies with staff guidance that encourages them to achieve educationally and socially. Pupils' are encouraged to understand environmental issues and support overseas charities through academic study and charitable fundraising events. Pupils say that they enjoy being active and achieving.

A key feature and substantial strength of Gresham's Preparatory School is the access pupils who board have to a wide range of activities. There is excellent provision of activities to occupy boarders free time on site and off. Educational and weekend recreational visits are regularly organised, risk assessed and always popular. Boarders confirm the tremendous commitment shown to them by all of the school house staff including the Head Master and his wife.

The school provides an environment where tolerance, equality and diversity is embraced. Boarders do not experience any discrimination. An acceptance and knowledge of other cultures, difference and ability is a very strong feature of the school. It is well evidenced by high calibre English as an Additional Language individualised teaching and the whole school approach to inclusive Learning Support. Staff and boarders go to great lengths to include and support children with particular needs who would otherwise, or in other schools, not fit in.

There are no evident onerous demands on boarders other than those they put on themselves to achieve.

Good studying provision, ample recreational areas and facilities are in place that enable and enhance boarder's experience of learning and play. The great majority of pupils embrace the wide range of opportunities offered to them by Gresham's and many day pupils aspire to board to maximise their opportunity.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Boarders are encouraged and enabled to contribute to the operation of boarding through a variety of school and house meetings. Opportunities include election to the school council and in house meetings. The school also has a Green Committee which addresses pupils growing ecological awareness. Day-to-day issues passed through the School Council include contributions to a food committee. Consultation is effective in amending menus that have included weekend provision and asking the Senior Management Team to address broader concerns about teatime. While pupils and boarders present a number of minor concerns about some mealtimes they do not reflect a poor standard overall of catering at the school.

Boarders are enabled to maintain private contact with their parents and families using either their own phones or the private telephone kiosk provision in school boarding houses. The school

provides monitored internet access and boarders can use office phones to call their parents. Boarders have access to helpline numbers they can call should they have a problem they feel that they cannot deal with using the in-school services.

New boarders are introduced to the school sensitively by being well supported by staff and their peers. New boarders have assigned guides to help them settle in to school and boarding routines through the first couple of weeks. Matrons are permanently vigilant of the likelihood of home sickness during this transition and have supportive strategies in place which include communicating regularly with parents. New boarders speak positively about how easy it was for them to integrate into Gresham's Preparatory School because 'people seemed to care about them'.

Boarders are provided with very good access to information and local facilities through the school library and supported visits into the local town. Pupils are familiarised with the Gresham's main school site where they routinely access additional activities and facilities such as chapel and swimming. By the time pupils are ready to make the transition to senior school they are familiarised and eager but regret leaving the prep school.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

The compact Gresham's Preparatory School site is impressive in its cleanliness and order and despite the age of some of the provision all areas are extremely well maintained. The maintenance and attention to detail by the schools support staff contributes significantly to its positive presentation in all departments.

Boarding is segregated into gender related houses, Kenwyn for the boys and Crossways for the girls. The quality of accommodation in the house dorms ranges from good to excellent. All boarders sleep in varying size dormitories that have been decorated and personalised to reflect the interests of their occupants. There is appropriate attention given to space and bedding, the use of bunk beds, combinations of age groups and the location of adults accommodation should they be needed out of hours.

The consistency of presentation of the houses permanently challenges House Masters and boarders and is addressed by the creative use of space, particularly for private storage space and the impact and interests of differing size year groups. Boarding is popular at Gresham's and this is reflected in the significant uptake of 'flexi-boarding' spaces on a regular basis and the girls boarding provision being extended, by a new build extension, to cater for changing need.

WC, bathing and changing provision is satisfactory in quantity, layout and maintenance for both boarders and day pupils. Boarding provision is not shared by day pupils and significant effort is made to promote individual privacy and hygiene. The schools development plan for improving older provision is actively being realised.

Boarders are provided with adequate, comfortable, communal recreational areas that cater for group activities such as watching DVDs and private pastimes such as reading and using the house PCs. There are differences in style rather than quality between Crossways and Kenwyn. Each have congregational areas where staff and boarders can share important daily group information.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

A suitable statement of the schools boarding principles and practice, that accurately represents the service is provided to parents, boarders and staff in a variety of formats. Boarders, for example, receive an updated diary every year that includes both academic detail and the schools codes of conduct and expectation.

With the Head Master being responsible for overall boarding practice there is a very strong commitment to the management and development of boarding as an integral part of the provision made by the school. Within the respective houses boarding is flexible, focussed and managed very well. The monitoring of record keeping in boarding houses is good

The focus of both House Masters/Housemistress and their teams is child welfare focussed and well able to meet the individual needs of children being looked after away from home. Liaison with house staff is very positively commented on by the boarders parents contributing to the inspection, a large proportion of whom recommend Gresham's very highly.

Supervision of boarders is recognised as unobtrusive and effective. Staffing arrangements are kept under review by the Head Master. Boarding arrangements are understood by staff and boarders and ensure that children receive adequate supervision during the day and at night. Older boarders have an opportunity to take a responsible role for components of orderly boarding living by being dorm captains or House Captain. This helps promote individual self responsibility and caring for others. It does not defer from boarding staff being responsible, easily available and contactable at all times.

There is clear organisation of staff that ensures that boarders are looked after by staff with written boarding responsibilities and a proven interest in this aspect of school life. Boarding Staff access effective induction and are given regular opportunities for enhancing boarding practice and performance. The review of their practice and training is not, however, consistently recorded, in a manner that fully evidences staff competence. Neither are the roles of spouses and partners of all boarding staff living on school premises confirmed in writing contrary to the requirement of standards that ensure boarders are cared for only by checked staff.

Equality and Diversity is judged as Outstanding. The schools commitment and understanding of overseas students and more particularly by its inclusive commitment to pupils with special learning needs. Pupils at the school confirmed their knowledge of difference and how to be tolerant with peers.

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):

- ensure that written parental permission has been obtained in advance for the administration of first aid and appropriate non prescription medication for boarders (National Minimum Standard 15.14)
- ensure that all first aid treatment is given by competent designated staff. Confirm this by certification of training (National Minimum Standard 15.7)
- ensure that prescribed and household medication is kept securely in an appropriate lockable metal cabinet. (National Minimum Standard 15.10)
- ensure that staff members do not begin work or residence at the school until satisfactory completion of all checks and receipt of references (National Minimum Standard 38.7)
- any role of spouses and partners of staff within boarding houses is made clear (National Minimum Standards 34.2)
- ensure all staff with boarding duties receive regular review of their boarding practice, with opportunities for continuing training in boarding (National Minimum Standard 34.1)