

West Heath School

The New School at West Heath, Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1SR
Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is an independent co-educational residential special school situated in Kent, for pupils with emotional and social communication difficulties. The school provides places for day and boarding pupils between the ages of 11 and 19 years. The school offers residential placements Monday to Thursday during term time. The school has eight boarding houses located within the grounds of the school. They can accommodate up to 29 residential pupils. At the time of the inspection, there were 20 residential pupils.

Inspection dates: 28 to 30 January 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

Date of previous inspection: 5 December 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Young people enjoy staying residentially and they value the relationships that they have with staff and each other.
- Young people, including those with complex needs, make exceptional progress from their starting points.
- Staff work with skill, compassion and commitment to provide a caring, learning environment.
- The therapeutic and health team provides expert guidance and support to ensure that practice is well informed and makes a positive difference to young people's lives.
- Parents and professionals value and praise the quality of care and attention that staff give to residential pupils.
- The leaders and managers across school and boarding work effectively as a team to ensure that high standards are maintained.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- Ensure that residential care plans consistently capture and reflect the voice and views of residential pupils.
- Review the restrictions on internet access for residential pupils to ensure a good balance between the need to protect young people and the need to promote their independence.
- Ensure that the residential service responds promptly to maintenance issues that have an impact on the experiences of residential pupils.
- Ensure that information that is used if a pupil is missing from the residential provision or school clearly identifies their vulnerabilities.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Residential pupils talk in glowing terms about how much they enjoy their residential experience and the quality of the relationships that they have with staff. One said, 'I really look forward to staying there. I don't know where I would be without them – I see them as a family.' Another said, 'It's really homely – it doesn't feel like school.' Another said, 'My key worker is the best.'

Residential pupils articulate how the school and residential provision are making a hugely positive impact on their lives. One said that she felt that she had learned more in a week at the school than a year in her previous school. Other residential pupils said that they felt that being able to stay residentially helped their family relationships and, in some instances, they felt that they would not be able to stay with their families without it. Many young people make exceptional progress from their starting points. This considerably enhances their life chances.

Residential pupils said that they feel that boarding staff understand them, give them space when they need it and help them to regroup when they have a bad day at school. They describe the rules as being fair and that they are applied with 'nurture'. Without exception, young people spoke highly about the quality of the relationships that they have with staff. They are able to accept boundaries and improve their behaviours because they know that staff genuinely care for them and have their best interests at heart.

Parents and professionals praised the help and support provided to residential pupils. One parent described how her child had been out of school for two years due to concerns about his behaviour and mental health. He is now engaging in education and making 'amazing progress'. She said, 'Staff look at him for who he is and know what works for him.' She said that he is making friends and is safe and happy: 'He is able to be him.' Other parents gave similar feedback and described how the exceptional care and support provided by staff are helping their children to make remarkable progress.

The school nurse works closely with residential pupils to promote their health and well-being. She provides direct support to young people and guidance to staff. She ensures that health needs are met, and that staff administer medications as prescribed.

The school employs a clinical psychologist. She heads up a specialist education provision for young people who are stepping down from adolescent mental health wards. She provides expert advice and training to residential staff to help them to understand how best to meet the needs of young people with complex needs. Many of these young people have experienced disruption in their education and in their family lives. Several of these young people have thrived in the residential provision

and now benefit from stable placements, positive relationships, therapeutic interventions and nurturing care.

Each residential pupil has a detailed care plan that describes their journey into the service and their individual needs. The plan identifies clear targets to help them to make progress towards independence. These written records help staff to provide a consistent experience of care. They could be further improved by clearly recording the areas of need and type of support that young people identify for themselves as being important.

The physical environment is outstanding. Residential pupils have homely living quarters and extensive, picturesque grounds in which to explore and play. In a few instances, minor issues that have an impact on young people take too long to remedy. For example, one young person had to wait several weeks to get a key cut for his room.

The school has built an on-site youth club facility for residential pupils. This allows them to have a great communal space to mix, play games and do activities. This facility also has a suite of computers that residential pupils can use for homework and recreation.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

Young people reported feeling safe in the school and residential provision. They described how staff intervene effectively to help resolve disputes and conflicts. All residential pupils who spoke to the inspector said that they get on well with and value the friendship of their peers in the school.

The school and boarding site cover a large area, with open grounds and woodland. Staff closely monitor and supervise this space and the pupils to make sure that their whereabouts are known. They take prompt action to locate any pupil who is not where they are meant to be, and no residential students have run away or been reported missing from the site. The school has a document with key information on each pupil if they do go missing. However, this document does not always clearly record the vulnerabilities of each pupil to inform the level of risk that is present.

Staff manage challenging behaviour with skill and sensitivity. They are vigilant and know the residential pupils well. Physical interventions are seldom used and only as a last resort. Two young people who had been physically restrained reported that staff did this safely and that staff always get another member of staff who has a good relationship with them to intervene. All staff are trained in behaviour management techniques and are effective at resolving incidents and conflicts.

Residential pupils know how to complain and said that they felt that staff listened to them. The school takes complaints seriously and works in accordance with procedures when investigating and responding to them. One parent was very complimentary about the way that the residential staff had responded to her concern

that her child was being bullied. She said, 'Staff listened to my concerns and requests about how I wanted them to keep my daughter safe – they then went on to implement them.'

One parent was less positive about the response to her concerns. However, the school made use of an independent complaints panel to investigate her concerns and acted on the recommendations of this panel.

The designated safeguarding lead for the school and residential provision is experienced and knowledgeable in her role. There is excellent communication between both provisions. Staff take prompt action to address welfare concerns and this means that the welfare of residential pupils is promoted day and night. Parents and social workers reported that the school and residential staff work well in partnership with them to address any concerns.

Residential staff regularly update their knowledge by undertaking training in a range of relevant safeguarding areas. Each residential pupil has an individual risk assessment that identifies the support that they need to keep them safe.

Residential pupils are taught how to stay safe online and staff take prompt action to address any inappropriate use of the internet or social media. One young person felt that the filters used in school to restrict internet access were too restrictive in the residential context. He gave an example of wanting to research the cost of items on auction and shopping sites, but he was unable to access these. Staff were also unable to access a site that they had purchased to download films for the youth club.

All staff are recruited in line with safe recruitment practice and there are always sufficient staff on duty to provide good levels of supervision and support. The staff pay close attention and make careful assessments to ensure that residential pupils sharing a house can live together in safety and harmony.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The head of the residential provision is relatively new to the role. She is very experienced and holds relevant qualifications as a social care practitioner and manager. She has undertaken previous management positions in residential school settings.

Staff and residential pupils spoke positively about the impact of the head of the residential provision since taking on the role. She is visible and accessible to them, as she is there during the evenings and spends a lot of time talking to residential pupils. The head of the residential provision knows the young people well and understands the challenges that front-line staff face. She demonstrates excellent oversight of the quality of care provided.

The quality of the leadership and management across school and boarding is a strength of this provider. Leaders and managers are inspirational, ambitious and

influential in driving excellent standards of care. The principal and vice-principal of the school are actively involved in promoting best practice in the residential provision. The leadership team members work closely together to ensure strong links between school and the residential side. This ensures that they provide pupils with a seamless and mutually supportive experience of education and residential stays.

The school board of governors provides excellent oversight and independent scrutiny. They understand and celebrate the achievements of pupils in the school and understand the contribution that the residential provision makes to improving the lives of young people. They provide constructive challenge and promote learning across the school and residential provision in order to drive improvement.

The residential provision is inclusive, and the testimony of residential pupils indicates that they feel fairly treated, valued and taught to feel positively about themselves. Given that many of them have previously been viewed as 'troubled' or 'challenging', this is a significant achievement that is likely to have a great impact on their ability to build relationships and lead a successful life into adulthood.

Staff morale is high. They value the support and direction provided by leaders and managers. Leaders model best practice and pay close attention to the emotional impact of the work on staff. The residential provision has a strong learning culture and staff make use of reflective forums to share good practice and hone their skills to improve.

Leaders and managers ensure that staff have access to high-quality training and specialist support. This helps staff to develop a sophisticated understanding of the young people's individual needs and their lived experience of care.

All staff across the school and the residential provision articulate a keen focus on the needs of the young people. Staff communicate a clear commitment and passion to get things right. They demonstrate excellent knowledge of the needs of young people and considerable skills to deliver the support to help them thrive. There is a clear sense that the work undertaken by staff comes from the heart. This culture of high expectations and ambition for pupils is a testimony to the leaders and managers, who lead by example and model child-focused practice.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help,

protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

Residential special school details

Social care unique reference number: SC024063

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr James Nunns

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Lee Kirwin, social care inspector (lead)



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