

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 10 and 20 years. The school offers residential placements Monday to Thursday during term time. The school has seven boarding houses, located within the grounds of the school. These can accommodate up to 29 residential pupils. At the time of the inspection, there were 20 residential pupils.

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 January 2020

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 28 January 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The quality of individualised care that the staff provide for students is extremely high. Staff dynamically assess needs to provide the greatest level of autonomy balanced against safety at any one time. Staff provide this highly nuanced care with patience and skill. Where students have changing needs, staff adapt the care to suit.

The quality of care is greatly valued by both parents and professionals. One father said, 'I have every confidence in their ability to keep my child safe; they are constantly making judgements about her safety and level of restrictions', and a social worker commented, 'Staff care for [name] as though he were the only child in the school'.

The impact of the residential provision on the progress and experiences of students can be profound. The activities enhance children's enjoyment of the residential provision, and staff use them also to address development needs and to help to meet targets.

Children and young people make progress in all areas of development, and this is well recorded.

The residential staff make a significant contribution to the support of education, including those students attending college. The excellent relationships with the local college, and the discreet provision of support for students while on its site, mean that placements are very successful. This is one example of excellent partnerships with other professionals to improve outcomes for students.

Children and young people are well prepared for their futures, particularly in regard to continuing education, social interaction and increasing independence.

Closed-circuit cameras are employed in the corridors of the houses and in vehicles on a routine basis. Managers have given considerable thought to the rationale for this use and they ensure that students, their parents or carers and placing authorities consent to it. Nevertheless, individual risk assessments do not provide any information about why and how the cameras enhance safety for either particular students or the staff looking after them. In some cases, if not many, therefore, their use is likely to be disproportionate as it lacks a formal review of suitability.

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

The staff's responses to students who go missing are good, as are their knowledge and practice of safeguarding procedures. The monitoring system employed by the school tracks issues well, ensuring that concerns are not dropped.

Staff members' interactions with and knowledge of students, their needs and progress are good. This provides the basis for students to talk about the challenges

that they face openly and to accept advice and support. The result is that they begin to manage these issues with increasing confidence.

Students know how to complain and believe that senior managers will respond to their concerns. This increases the likelihood of students raising safeguarding issues and leaders taking action to ensure their safety. A current area of concern for some students is a perception that the consequences for the same behaviours are not always the same. Managers and staff are working with them to understand that students may need different approaches but that these are still fair. This demonstrates their willingness to explain why changing things may not be straightforward.

Staff demonstrate a thorough knowledge of students, including potential risks arising from their diagnosed conditions or behaviour. Staff members are adept at managing these, yet the risk assessments are in many cases weakened by including generic measures of control. Staff may identify the risk factors well, but the specified controls do not always address them. Written assessments of child sexual and criminal exploitation are poorly developed, with little information about specific risk factors or the means to mitigate them.

Impact risk assessments vary in quality. Some are clear about how decisions are arrived at, but not others. One did not reflect the significant potential impact of known behaviours. Such disparities mean that the documents cannot be relied on either to evidence that risks are fully understood or to provide sound guidance to staff.

Staff do not clearly assess students' cultural and identity needs, particularly for White British students. This means that these are not well promoted in care plans.

There have been improvements to how quickly the maintenance staff effect repairs, leading to a homelier environment. However, the maintenance team and the residential staff do not coordinate routine health and safety checks between them. A duplication of work prevented a gap in records that would otherwise have been an issue, but poor monitoring of the contractors means that one of the houses has not had routine Legionella checks for six months.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers constantly look to improve the service. They have developed new policies and procedures to learn from practice, and have introduced new systems to record, analyse and communicate information across the school. Leaders give significant thought to disseminating learning, including outside of the school. Research conducted by the school staff on the impact of nutrition on students' education has recently been published.

A computer programme tracks students' progress, or otherwise, over time. Links to targets show that staff are actively working on these with the students. Sharing this information with the placing authorities at reviews provides effective feedback. Staff and managers work well with other agencies, such as the child and adolescent

mental health services and a sexual health nurse, to provide services that promote students' health and well-being.

Currently, the leaders are in the process of registering the provision as an attachment-aware and trauma-informed school, with consequent development of staff and work with students to enhance the provision.

The governance of the residential provision benefits from regular visits by a trustee and the recent introduction of an ex-student to the board of trustees. This helps the board to understand the life of students in the houses. However, the need for independent monitoring visits to be mostly unannounced has been overlooked as, since February 2019, all such visits have been announced. This potentially compromises the ability of the independent visitor to assess the experience of students in the residential provision. Nevertheless, his reports do challenge leaders and managers, who act on the recommendations made.

The independent visitor trustee with responsibility for the residential provision writes versions of the reports for students, which increases both students' awareness of trustees' roles and the observations' impact.

Although the elements of the annual written review of the residential provision are available, the managers do not collate them into a single report. This means that readers may see the various components in isolation, rather than as a whole.

Leaders and managers generally know the residential provision's strengths, but they have not identified the significant weakness of risk assessments. The generic approach to the control measures reduces their value as working tools for staff. Supervision, training and a supportive environment mean that staff are enabled to meet the needs of students.

Students' views make a difference, and they cited changes to the residential provision that had come about as a result of their opinions being listened to. Despite this, some students made suggestions to the inspector about what they would like to change yet had not made known to staff, at least one 'because it would never happen'. The managers, however, were open to the ideas. This indicates that they do not always effectively help pupils to make their views known about improving their experience of living in the residential provision.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 6.3 The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
- 20.2 Most monitoring visits are carried out unannounced. They include: checks on the school's records of attendance, complaints, sanctions, use of reasonable force, risk assessments, and where they exist, individual care plans for children; evaluation of the effectiveness of the care provided to children and whether they are safeguarded; assessment of the physical condition of the building, furniture and equipment of the school; and opportunities for any child or member of staff who wishes to meet the visitor (in private if they wish).

Recommendations

- That the use of closed-circuit television cameras within houses and vehicles are subject to individual risk assessments that identify how their use will safeguard particular pupils and/or staff working with them. Such assessments should identify how managers will balance the needs of pupils to minimise the impact on privacy. (Standard 5.8)
- Managers and staff should develop ways of effectively helping all pupils to make their views known about improving their experience of living in the residential provision. (Standard 17.2)
- The principal should bring together the elements required for a written annual review together in a single report. (Standard 20.4)

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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: James Nunns

Type of school: Residential special school

Telephone number: 0173 246 0553

Email address: principal@westheathschool.com

Inspector

Chris Peel, social care inspector

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