

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 social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school provides places for day and boarding pupils between the ages of 10 and 20. The school offers residential placements from Monday to Thursday during term time. The school has five boarding houses, which are located within the grounds of the school. These can accommodate up to 22 residential pupils. At the time of the inspection, there were 15 residential pupils.

The inspector only inspected the social care provision at this school. The inspection was part of an aligned inspection with Her Majesty's Education Inspectors

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 May 2022

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

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

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: 1 February 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Life at the school is significantly enhanced for those children who access the residential provision. Not only do children make progress educationally, but they also develop their independence and self-care skills. They are supported by a staff team who show love and nurture and have a deep understanding about those in their care. Parents are positive about the personalised support for children. One commented, 'Staff know how to support every child, and this has helped [my child] to grow and become more independent.'

Children who have only recently started in the residential provision have already started to make progress. Diligent planning has ensured that these children fitted into their house seamlessly. They have developed good relationships with the children already living there and are learning to cook and improve their self-care skills. One child's mother was positive about her child's experience and the progress they have made after such a short time.

Children who have accessed the residential provision for longer have made significant progress from their starting points because of the skills they have learned. One parent was keen to tell the inspector, 'If my child didn't have residential they would be laid in bed doing nothing. They now communicate with me and hug me. They used to feel imprisoned at home. My child was existing three years ago and now they are living.'

Staff are skilled at supporting the children they care for. Children benefit from the rich variety of resources available at the school. The school therapy team helps inform staff practice and, when required, external specialists help staff to develop further. For example, staff have recently completed gender diversity training with a specialist agency. This has created a safe environment for children to explore their gender and identity without fear of discrimination or judgement.

An active student council gives children a forum to take their ideas for change to leaders, but also allows children to develop communication skills such as public speaking. Children raise things they wish to change; leaders listen, explain how their ideas will be considered and encourage children to be a part of the process. This empowers children and makes them feel valued.

One of the recommendations made at the last inspection related to the maintenance of children's bedrooms. Staff have acted on this, and each child has a clean, well-presented space to use. Staff have creatively used a play tent in one child's room, which has positively supported the child to improve their night-time routine and sleep pattern.

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

Children are happy and feel safe during their time at the residential school. Since the last inspection, there have been no physical interventions, or instances of children going missing or causing harm to themselves. Children look forward to their time in residential school and enjoy the time they spend there.

There is a strong sense of community in which children share warm relationships, not only with each other but also with staff. Children often visit other houses and spend time with their friends and play games. Planned activities in the local community allow children to have fun while learning socially acceptable behaviour.

When risks emerge in relationships between children in the home, staff are alert to these and responses are clear, consistent and well timed. Staff know children's plans and know how to respond. If external agency responses are not satisfactory, leaders ensure that they are challenged. This gives children a sense of belonging and they feel well cared for.

Since the last inspection, residential leaders have supported the school in managing complaints regarding staff practice. When concerns have arisen in school, residential leaders have quickly informed the local authority designated officer and ensured that the process is transparent and information is passed quickly. Actions from investigations are identified and staff benefit from lessons learned and training when required. This improves staff practice across the school and gives a better skilled team to enhance children's experiences.

Staff sensitively support children, physically and emotionally. This support transfers seamlessly between day and night staff, who have a shared approach to providing children with high-quality, consistent care. Children feel able to seek out staff at times of need at any time of the day or night. One child frequently seeks out day and night staff for reassurance. This allows them to feel loved and valued.

Children are supported to better understand risks in the community. Skilled staff use student meetings and informal chats at dinner and breakfast times as opportunities to discuss current affairs and community risks. This gives children opportunities to explore these topics in a non-judgemental space and have a better understanding of the world around them.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders are passionate about the children in their care. They speak lovingly and knowledgeably about the children and are ambitious for their futures. Successes are celebrated and children strive to achieve as a result. This has led to children who are preparing for upcoming exams opting to stay in the residential school to prepare, in preference to studying at home.

Residential leaders have successfully created a culture of acceptance. Leaders are present and children feel comfortable to seek out leaders and share laughter and affection with them. Children feel able to explore the person they wish to be without fear of discrimination, regardless of their ability, gender or race. Their treatment by leaders models a culture of mutual respect which staff and children embrace.

Proactive leaders have responded positively to areas of improvement identified at the last inspection. This has meant that staff are clearer on their roles in safeguarding children and as a result reporting has been quick and effective. Children's bedrooms are better maintained and personalised. This has enabled one child to settle when previously this was problematic.

Staff were keen to express the positive impact support from leaders has on their performance. Through a thorough induction, regular training opportunities, supervisions and appraisals, staff feel they are clear on their roles. Staff reported that leaders are available to them when required. This support extended to night staff who, at the last inspection, did not feel as well supported. This has enabled children to benefit from a positive team who are happy, well trained and committed to enhancing children's experiences in residential.

Leaders are passionate to improve the children's experiences. Children are consulted on the food they eat and the things they do while at residential. Regular meetings and informal chats enable children to request improvements and managers act on their suggestions. For example, there are currently plans in place to create an allotment and to ensure that bicycles are available for children to enjoy.

Recruitment of staff has improved since the last inspection and more robust checks reduce risk from known people. Leaders have also reflected that this has helped them to better understand a staff member's starting point, thereby better informing their induction planning. Staff are therefore not only appropriately vetted for their roles, but they are also better supported to gain the skills needed to support children.

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: Mrs Photini Bohacek

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Inspector

Matt Nicholls, Social Care Inspector

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