

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 students 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 four boarding houses, which are located within the grounds of the school. These can accommodate up to 18 residential students. At the time of the inspection, there were seven residential students.

The inspector only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 November 2024

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 last inspection: 23 January 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thrive in the residential provision of this school. They make exceptional progress in their educational, personal and social development. Staff at the school have a deep affection for, and a commitment to, the children in their care. Leaders have created an environment in which staff feel valued; this has given the team remarkable stability and consistency and enables the staff to provide excellent care for the children.

Children in the residential provision achieve excellent outcomes. For example, children who were struggling with engagement in mainstream education before coming to the school have come to love learning again. Children make positive transitions into further and higher education, as well as on to vocational pathways. Children are at the centre of the decisions that shape their lives; staff ensure that they tailor pathways to the individual wishes and needs of the children.

Children share warm and positive relationships with staff. Staff know and understand each child very well. This enables them to gain the trust of the children they work with. As a result, children value their advice and guidance.

Staff have achieved thorough integration between all the departments at the school including education, health, therapy and residential. Staff ensure that communication between the teams is flawless and comprehensive. This supports children with positive transitions and ensures that all the teams are providing a consistent experience for each individual child.

An exceptionally strong therapy service helps to support children with extremely complex needs to flourish. Children benefit from a dedicated centre for learning, staffed by a team of experts who support them to re-engage with learning.

Staff are highly skilled at identifying the progress made by children. They speak about each child's journey through the school with immense pride. Children come from highly challenging starting points and staff recognise that every small step can be like a giant leap for some children. Staff manage this sensitively and celebrate all the achievements of children.

Parents say that communication with staff from the residential provision is excellent. They say that the support that staff offer, not just to their child but to the whole family, is invaluable. A parent said, 'This is a real partnership with [name of child], family and the school, which really places [name of child]'s choices at the centre of everything.'

A dedicated and skilled maintenance team ensures that the residential provision is well maintained and welcoming. In a recent survey about the preferred use of

language, staff asked the children how they would describe the residential provision. They used words like 'home from home' and 'second home'. Children benefit from a wide array of activities and resources, both on and off site, which enrich their extra-curricular experience.

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

A skilled and well-trained team ensures that safeguarding is at the heart of everything that goes on at the school. Staff are doing exceptional work to embed learning around safeguarding into all aspects of the curriculum and residential life. This supports children to learn how to keep themselves safe and helps them as they move on to more independent settings.

Staff are vigilant, and their deep knowledge of every child enables them to spot concerns rapidly and take proactive steps to reduce risk whenever possible. Staff also work hard to keep families well informed, sharing any new or emerging concerns that could impact on the safety of children when not in the school environment.

Children say that they feel safe in residential. Staff work to support and nourish positive relationships between children and their peers. Staff have also launched positive initiatives to support children to engage with other children from outside the residential environment. Parents say they have absolutely no concerns about the staff's ability to keep the children safe from harm.

Staff form strong collaborative partnerships with external safeguarding agencies. Staff have made beneficial use of external experts coming into the school, enabling children to learn about a range of critical issues relating to their health, well-being and security.

Staff make effective use of the school's well-developed reporting and recording mechanisms to ensure that concerns are rapidly brought to the attention of safeguarding leads. Children also have a range of ways to raise concerns, including online reporting systems. Children use these confidently and staff address children's worries or concerns quickly and sensitively.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The senior leadership team has a clear and well-focused vision which places the child at the heart of everything that they do. Leader's role model effectively their shared ethos around high-quality individualised support. Staff engage with this vision with huge enthusiasm and dedication.

The principal gives equal priority to all aspects of the school. Her regular visits to the residential provision are highly valued by support staff. Children also say that they feel that she is approachable and that they can share anything with her.

Since the last inspection, leaders have continued to work on ambitious development plans for the school. The school has started a journey towards becoming a therapeutic community. Staff are motivated and excited about these plans. Staff say that this can only enhance and improve the provision.

The therapy lead is currently building on successful initiatives with research partners in higher education. This work is intended to enhance the school's understanding of the experience of both students and staff. They hope that this learning can help the school to further enhance the effectiveness of the student experience while also benefiting other schools and providers of support for children with complex needs.

Leaders also proactively reach out to other schools and providers to offer advice and guidance. Leaders recognise the current pressures in mainstream education on special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) provision and staff are well placed to offer additional support. In doing so, staff also enhance the outcomes of students outside their own school community.

Staff say they feel well supported and praise the quality of supervision and continual professional development. They say that they feel heard and that their expertise and experience are important to the school's leaders. They feel included in important decisions about the future of the school.

Leaders ensure excellent communication and collaboration with external professionals. Professionals have trust and confidence in the school. They can readily identify the positive impact that the school has had for the children that they support. Leaders' ability to nurture these relationships ensures that children receive coherent and consistent care across all areas of their lives.

Children say they have a voice and are able to identify trusted adults at the school, enabling them to put forward their views and suggestions about enhancements to the school experience.

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: Photini Bohacek

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector

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