

West Heath

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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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

The New School at West Heath is an independent co-educational residential special school situated in Sevenoaks in Kent. The school provides places for both day and boarding pupils in key stages 3, 4 and post 16. With just over 100 students on the school roll, pupils are placed by a range of local authorities and around one third are weekly boarders. Many of the pupils have experienced various forms of trauma in their lives including bullying, bereavement and illness, and this has often led to the breakdown of a mainstream school placement. Conditions including ADHD, Asperger's syndrome and epilepsy are also prevalent and most students have a statement of special educational need. The school has six boarding houses set in spacious secure grounds. It first opened as a school in 1932 and is now governed by a Board of Trustees after reopening in 1998, following funding from Mohamed Al Fayed. According to its prospectus, the school aims to "rebuild lives through education" and "offer a specialised and individual approach to its provision of education".

Summary

This announced key inspection was conducted over two days by one inspector. All of the key National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools were inspected, along with a number of others under the economic wellbeing outcome group. The recommendations made from the previous inspection were also explored and found to be mostly implemented. Time was spent interviewing key personnel and residential pupils, reading documentation and inspecting the residential accommodation. The residential and teaching teams work collaboratively to deliver a seamless approach of ongoing care to the residential pupils. Staff know them well and forge positive, appropriate relationships, whilst implementing clear behavioural boundaries. Shortfalls have been identified within the staying safe outcome group and these are reflected within the relevant section of this report and are followed up by new recommendations.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

Since its last inspection, the school has worked hard to implement the majority of the nine recommendations that were made. Additional time has been set aside to hold formal progress meetings between residential and teaching staff. This is having a positive impact upon care planning. A new case recording policy provides clear guidance for the completion of ongoing written records and the detail within risk assessments is more specific. Development plans for the boarding provision are progressing well and reporting systems for maintenance needs have improved. A revised and updated recruitment policy has been written and the induction programme for new staff includes visits to all departments. Supervision records for staff now hold greater details. In addition to the recommendations, the school has introduced a new behaviour management reward scheme, which is currently enjoying positive results. Funding has been secured for the creation of a new car park and provision has been refurbished to further develop post 16 residential provision.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Clear policy and procedural guidance on health and medication is in place for residential care staff to follow. Safe storage ensures medication is secure and written records show that residential pupils receive the medication they require from appropriately trained staff. Although such administration training has been provided within the last two years, there are no immediate plans for refresher training and the current auditing mechanisms in place do not include the ongoing monitoring of staff competence in this area. Appropriate referrals are being made to external health care services and all residential pupils have access to a local GP practice. Written parental consent for medical treatment is held on all care files and parents are also asked for their consent for the administration of homely remedies. There is a sufficient number of first aid trained staff on duty at any given time. Whilst there is minimal use of 'controlled medication', administration records show that on occasions, residential pupils act as the second signatory, as opposed to two members of staff. All key medical and health information is clearly recorded within care files; this includes allergies and special dietary requirements, which are communicated to the catering manager. The catering provision during the school day remains as a particular strength of the school. Pupils and staff commend this provision, for its quality and choice. The catering manager knows all the pupils well and regularly consults with them about the food provision. The main kitchen is spacious, well equipped and cleaned to a very high standard. There are no outstanding requirements from the environmental health department. Dining areas are beautifully decorated and well equipped. A survey of residential pupils has recently been conducted and the information received is being used to inform the care teams in terms of pupils' views within the residential provision. All of the houses are sufficiently equipped in terms of kitchen and dining equipment and care staff have received food hygiene training. Residential pupils assist with weekly menu planning and are encouraged to prepare their own snacks and drinks independently. The care team does not currently liaise with the catering manager in terms of menu planning and this can lead to the duplication of the same or a similar meal being provided for lunch and dinner.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Policy and procedural guidance on privacy and confidentiality is implemented in practice by the staff. Confidential information is safely stored and shared appropriately. Pupils confirm the working practices of the residential team afford good privacy and there is clear guidance to follow in the event of a bedroom needing to be searched. Pupils know how to make a complaint and the documentation for this process has been written and designed in a pupil friendly format. Written records demonstrate that complaints from pupils are effectively responded to within the school's prescribed policy guidance. A number of parents say they are unsure of the complaint procedure themselves, however, the majority report they have no cause to instigate this process. Staff across all disciplines know and understand the school's child protection policies and procedures. The policy is clear and training, including regular updates, is routinely implemented. Whilst the school conducts criminal records bureau checks on contracted staff, for example, the catering team, it does not supply them with basic child protection awareness training. Neither does it check with the contractor that this has been provided elsewhere. The school's stance on anti-bullying is strong and it serves to protect pupils, many of whom have been bullied in previous settings. Pupils report low level instances and say any occurrences are swiftly resolved. Systems are in place to effectively monitor all such incidents, in terms of venues, times and those involved in an attempt to effectively reduce the low number of instances that do occur. A system of peer mentoring from Year 11's is currently underway and this further supports new pupils in terms of countering bullying. Over

the last year a small number of significant events, relating to the protection of pupils have occurred. Whilst these have been appropriately managed, not all have been notified to Ofsted. The Head of Care has more recently implemented a clear system to ensure this omission does not occur in the future. Unauthorised absences from school are rare and there are clear systems in place to manage occurrences, should they arise. The school prescribes clear and explicit values in terms of its preferred style of behaviour management; emphasis is placed upon rewarding positive behaviour and although positive handling methods are taught to staff, much greater emphasis is placed upon the use of de-escalation techniques, in an attempt to only use physical interventions as a very last resort. Written records demonstrate this happens in practice. In addition, the sanctions which may be used in response to negative behaviours are also clearly described and records show that those in use are appropriate. Although residential staff are explicitly clear about the school's overall behaviour management systems, there is a lack of individually prescribed behaviour management plans within each pupil's own care file. In one instance the methods of behaviour management in place appear to conflict with advice received from other involved professionals and there is little written evidence to support why this is the case. Additional documentation describes this individual to be particularly vulnerable, whilst the response to a behaviour exhibited has the potential to present even more risks. Generic risk assessments are conducted with regards the entire school site and funding has now been secured to improve the safety of the car parking area. Pupils know the fire evacuation procedure and this is regularly practised. Hot water temperatures are suitably restricted and the premises are secure. The recruitment policy and procedure has been reviewed and updated since the previous inspection. The guidance is explicit and clear and serves to protect pupils. Through the sampling of personnel files, one example shows an employee commencing with their post before the prescribed checks had been received. Although appropriate management action has been taken as a result of the responses received, this situation may have been avoided if the school's own guidance had been strictly implemented.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Sound links exist between the residential and teaching provision. Regular handovers and multi-disciplinary meetings ensure information is shared and care plans reflect a good balance of educational and social targets. Teaching staff say the care team work hard to ensure pupils receive good support with their homework and are encouraged to be up and ready to start the school day in good time. Within the houses, pupils can access the resources they need for the completion of homework and good handovers ensure the residential team is aware of the assistance it needs to provide. The individual needs of pupils are known and they receive services that are appropriate to their own presenting needs. This includes making referrals to external agencies, such as counselling and therapy services. An independent listener conducts regular visits and literature on numerous help line and information services for teenagers is displayed throughout the school and residential provision. All residential pupils have a key worker and there is written guidance in place that describes this role. Those staff members spoken with confirm that individual key working sessions occur regularly, however written records demonstrate this is not always the case.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Pupils are effectively listened to and they are given numerous opportunities to contribute their views on the running of the school. Forums include a student council, ongoing dialogue with the catering manager and weekly house meetings. Pupils say their most negative comments concern activity provision and they have used the forums available to raise this issue. Consequently, two rooms within Sleep House have been refurbished. One houses a wide screen projector, upon which films and play station games can be played and this room houses ample comfortable seating. The other room has been transformed into a games room and both were being fully used during the time of this visit. A separate budget exists for the residential pupils to access external leisure facilities but this has not been reviewed for a number of years. There are occasions whereby off site journeys are limited by the number of designated drivers available on each shift, despite the school possessing very good transport provision. Relationships between staff and pupils are positive and pupils confirm they have a range of adults they feel they can talk to. Care files show good evidence of clear initial assessments and ongoing reviews of plans of care. Prospective pupils are only offered a place if the school feels it can meet their needs. Pupils are able to maintain regular contact with their families throughout the week and written records show ongoing dialogue between key workers and parents.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is satisfactory.

Residential pupils are able to obtain the personal requisites they need during their time at school. They bring in their own clothing and personal items from home, although large amounts of money and items of high personal value are discouraged. Individual lockable space is provided for each pupil and where necessary, the care team will 'look after' and distribute pocket money sent in from home. The provision for post 16 pupils continues to expand and there are plans for even more development. A self contained cottage within the school grounds is now ready for occupancy and a recruitment campaign to staff this facility is underway. In addition, the school is currently liaising with a local college and the local authority with a view to obtaining off site, semi - independent accommodation. The five colt houses within the grounds offer good quality homely accommodation. Residential pupils have their own bedrooms, which they are able to personalise and they enjoy sufficient private and communal space. All of the residential pupils have a say in terms of the equipment and decoration of their own house, hence they are all very different inside. These houses are warm, well maintained and offer good privacy in terms of bathing and toilet facilities. Conversely, Sleep House remains as a poorer provision when compared against the other houses. This provision has been adapted from an end part of the main school building and is essentially a main corridor with a number of rooms off it. There is a ground and first floor, the lower houses the two games rooms and offices belonging to the Head of Care and Residential Manager. The school considers those accommodated here to be in the most need of staff support and intervention, hence it makes sense to be closer to key personnel. Given the stark contrast in the quality of this provision against the other houses, for example, general decoration and the condition of the toilets and bathrooms, a number of those living here say, "it is the worst house for the worst pupils". The games rooms have been recently added in an effort to give this provision greater appeal, however the general poor condition of décor and furnishings does little to inspire some of those living here.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The school's prospectus, along with its website is informative and clear, as is information aimed at the pupils. Policies and procedures continue to be reviewed and are ratified by the student support services committee. Heads of departments are suitably qualified and experienced and a varied training programme is in place for all staff of the school. There is a strong input in terms of teaching communication methods and understanding conditions, such as Asperger's syndrome, whilst less material has been in place more recently with regards to other diagnosed conditions prevalent within the school. Duty rotas reflect adequate staffing cover across the provision, although the school does not have a clear written staffing policy. One example was noted during an evening of extreme staffing shortages, whereby a decision on how to support the houses overnight was not evidenced through written risk assessment and there was no prescribed staffing policy to refer to. Clear lines of responsibility and accountability are known throughout all staffing disciplines and suitable deputising arrangements are in place. Care staff confirm they have sufficient time made available for handovers and to attend training sessions. They also speak positively about individual supervision meetings and records show these happen in practice. Monitoring systems are effective and the student support services committee remains actively involved with all elements of provision. The school continues to be financially viable and prioritises developmental plans in a systematic and measured way, whilst providing ongoing progress reports to the Board of Trustees.

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 accredited medication administration training is regularly updated and implement systems to continue to monitor staff competence. Review the practice of pupils acting as the second signatory for controlled medication (NMS 14).
- reinstate regular liaison between the residential team and the catering manager with regards menu planning.(NMS 15).
- ensure all parents and relevant third parties are fully aware of the school's complaint's procedure (NMS 3).
- establish a mechanism to ensure contracted staff receive basic child protection awareness training (NMS 5).
- ensure care plans hold clear and specific behaviour management guidance tailored to the needs of the individual (NMS 10).
- ensure close and effective communication is held between departments in the event of sanctions being applied (NMS 10).
- ensure the recruitment policy and procedure is strictly adhered to in all cases (NMS 27).

- conduct a review of all pupil's key working sessions and take appropriate remedial action to rectify any shortfalls found (NMS 22).
- improve upon the provision within Sleep House through renovation or relocation (NMS 23).
- write and implement a clear staffing policy and support any decisions about staffing changes through written risk assessment (NMS 28).
- continue to expand and broaden the current training programme in place for the residential team, to accurately reflect the needs of those accommodated by the school (NMS 29).

Annex

Annex A

National Minimum Standards for residential special school

Being healthy

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children live in a healthy environment and the health and intimate care needs of each child are identified and promoted (NMS 14)
- children are provided with healthy, nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs (NMS 15)

Ofsted considers 14 the key standard to be inspected.

Staying safe

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children's privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled (NMS 3)
- children's complaints are addressed without delay and children are kept informed of progress in their consideration (NMS 4)
- the welfare of children is promoted, children are protected from abuse, and an appropriate response is made to any allegation or suspicion of abuse (NMS 5)
- children are protected from bullying (NMS 6)
- all significant events relating to the protection of children in the school are notified to the appropriate authorities by the head of the school or designated person (NMS 7)
- children who are absent without authority are protected in accordance with written guidance and responded to positively on return (NMS 8)
- children are assisted to develop appropriate behaviour through the encouragement of acceptable behaviour and constructive staff responses to inappropriate behaviour (NMS 10)
- children live in schools that provide physical safety and security (NMS 26)
- there is careful selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers, and monitoring of visitors to the school to prevent children being exposed to potential abusers (NMS 27)

Ofsted considers 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 26 and 27 the key standards to be inspected.

Enjoying and achieving

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- the school's residential provision actively supports children's educational progress at the school (NMS 12)
- children have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities within the school and in the local community (NMS 13)
- children receive individual support when they need it (NMS 22)

Ofsted considers 12 and 22 the key standards to be inspected.

Making a positive contribution

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives and to influence the way the school is run; no child should be assumed to be unable to communicate their views (NMS 2)
- children have sound relationships with staff based on honesty and mutual respect (NMS 9)
- children experience planned and sensitively handled admission and leaving processes (NMS 11)

- children have their needs assessed and written plans outline how these needs will be met while at school (NMS 17)
- in accordance with their wishes children are able and encouraged to maintain contact with their parents and families while at school (NMS 20)

Ofsted considers 2, 17 and 20 the key standards to be inspected.

Achieving economic well-being

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children can wear their own clothing outside school time, can secure personal requisites and stationery while at school, and are helped to look after their own money (NMS 16)
- children about to leave care are prepared for the transition into independent living (NMS 21)
- children live in well designed and pleasant premises, which provide sufficient space and facilities to meet their needs
- children live in accommodation which is appropriately decorated, furnished and maintained to a high standard, providing adequate facilities for their use (NMS 24)
- children are able to carry out their personal care in privacy and with dignity (NMS 25)

Ofsted considers the key standard to be inspected.

Organisation

The intended outcomes for these standards are:

- children, parents, staff and placing authorities have access to a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding pupils (NMS 1)
- children's needs, development and progress are recorded to reflect their individuality and their group interactions (NMS 18)
- there are adequate records of the staff and child groups of the school (NMS 19)
- children are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to meet them consistently (NMS 28)
- children are looked after by staff who are trained to meet their needs (NMS 29)
- children are looked after by staff who are themselves supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the children's welfare (NMS 30)
- children receive the care and services they need from competent staff (NMS 31)
- children and staff enjoy the stability of efficiently run schools (NMS 32)
- the governing body, trustees, local authority, proprietor or other responsible body monitors the welfare of the children in the school (NMS 33)

Ofsted considers 1, 28, 31 and 32 the key standards to be inspected.