

West Heath

Inspection report for residential special school

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Inspector	Margaret Lynes
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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

At this announced full inspection, all key standards were inspected.

This is a service with many good features. The boarders' welfare is enhanced by the good relationships that exist between staff and young people, and between young people and their peers. Young people are encouraged to eat healthily and take regular exercise. The boarding team works closely with their educational colleagues in order to meet the full range of young people's needs. Staff are well supported by the vice principal who has a strong commitment to and focus on improvement and achievement.

Part of this inspection looked at the progress the school has made with the recommendations made at the last inspection. These related to improvements to the accommodation, communication; staff training and development; staffing policy; key working and documentation. The school has taken appropriate action to resolve these.

This inspection has resulted in four recommendations. These relate to updating the complaints procedure, the recording of sanctions and medication, and informing the regulatory body of any safeguarding issues.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last report contained 11 recommendations. These were for the school to ensure accredited medication administration training is regularly updated and implement systems to continue to monitor staff competence; to reinstate regular liaison between the residential team and the catering manager; to ensure all parents and relevant third parties are fully aware of the school's complaints procedure; to establish a mechanism to ensure contracted staff receive basic child protection awareness training; to ensure care plans hold clear and specific behaviour management guidance tailored to the needs of the individual; to ensure close and effective communication is held between departments in the event of sanctions being applied; to ensure the recruitment policy and procedure is strictly adhered to in all cases; to conduct a review of all pupil's key

working sessions and take appropriate remedial action to rectify any shortfalls found; to improve upon the provision within Sleep House through renovation or relocation; to write and implement a clear staffing policy; and to 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. The school has taken action address all of these recommendations.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The boarders are enabled to live in a healthy environment where their individual needs are identified and promoted. The school has signed up to the Healthy Schools Programme, which covers a wide range of topics including drug education, emotional health and wellbeing, healthy eating and physical activity. Each of the boarders has a detailed medical record, and they are registered on a temporary basis with the local GP.

The school has a number of qualified first aiders, with further training planned for more staff. It was good practice to note that students are also enabled to obtain a first aid qualification. Parents are also enabled to attend courses at the school, in subjects such as stress, self science, self awareness, anxiety, assertiveness and anger management. There is a one-bed sick bay in the school. Should a boarder be unwell outside of school hours, but still able to remain in school, they would be looked after in a designated sick bed in one of the girls or boys houses as required.

The last report contained a recommendation that the school ensure that medication training for staff is regularly updated and that systems are put in place to monitor staff competence. The school has acted on this recommendation and all staff, where appropriate, have received refresher training. Regular audits of medication records are carried out, along with spot checks. Examination of some of the medication administration records showed that there were discrepancies in some cases between the amount of medication recorded at the end of the school week, when the school closes, and that checked at the start of the following week. The school is not responsible for medication that is taken home by students at the weekends, nevertheless its own records must accurately reflect the reason for the discrepancy. Staff were noted to have inappropriately used Tippex on medication records. As part of the development of independent living skills, some students are permitted to co-sign for their medication.

The students are provided with healthy and nutritious meals which meet their dietary requirements. The overwhelming majority of the boarders commented positively about the lunch time meal. The meals sampled were well presented and appetizing. Menus are regularly rotated, and there is always a vegetarian option. Boarders also liked the evening meal system in place where each house prepares its own evening meal, and boarders are involved in planning, shopping and cooking for it if they wish. One boarder commented that they loved the meals, but found the lunchtime portions too small; while another noted that the vegetarian option usually contained cheese, which would not suit those with allergies to dairy produce.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

The boarders' privacy is respected and information about them is confidentially handled. Policies and procedures are in place relating to privacy and dignity, and the school prospectus makes reference to the key values of Privacy, Dignity, Independence, Choice, Rights and Self-Fulfilment. Each boarder has a key to their own bedroom. None raised any issues or concerns in this area.

The school has a policy on complaints, concerns, suggestions and compliments. It is outdated in parts as it refers to the Commission for Social Care Inspection as being available for advice. The Statement of Purpose also contains information on how to complain. In this respect it is also out of date as it refers to the National Care Standards Commission. Boarders are provided with forms to complete if they want to make a complaint or suggestion. A central log is kept and was found to be up to date and regularly audited. The boarders indicated they knew how to complain.

The welfare of the boarders is promoted through ongoing staff training, good record keeping and close liaison with the Local Safeguarding Children Board officer. All new staff receive training in child protection as part of their induction. Staff receive regular refresher courses and are expected to complete the NSPCC distance learning course. The school has two designated child protection officers, who work closely with each other. One takes the lead for boarding, the other for the day school. A central child protection log is maintained. Entries were well documented and there was evidence of regular audits. When child protection issues have arisen the school has followed all appropriate channels other than notify Ofsted.

The school has an anti bullying policy in place. There are eye catching posters regarding bullying and racism on display around the school, and students are provided with a colourful and informative leaflet about what to do if they are being bullied. A peer mentoring programme is just about to commence. The majority of boarders who returned a questionnaire said that they were not being bullied.

Staff reported that they have not had numerous problems with boarders absconding. Each care plan contains behaviour management guidance and a risk assessment, so that if a boarder does absent themselves without authority, staff know what action to take. Appropriate records are maintained regarding sanctions. Episodes of restraint are kept in stapled booklets which hold up to four individual entries. These are clearly indexed, although staff were not always completing the front sheet for each booklet. Boarding staff are not always able to access these records, and therefore not able to record incidents in the appropriate fashion. The boarders were aware of house and school rules, and also the punishment that would be imposed if the rules were broken. Staff were observed to assist the boarders develop appropriate behaviour through constructive criticism and the maintenance of boundaries.

There is a policy in place regarding health and safety. The estate manager confirmed that all necessary maintenance checks are in place and up to date, including gas, electric and fire systems, plus risk assessments. This helps to ensure that the boarders live in an environment that provides physical safety and security. One senior member of staff oversees health and safety, with each member of staff responsible for their own immediate area. Regular checks are carried out in the boarding houses and around the grounds. There is CCTV and 24 hour security staff. Health and safety is a standing item at senior leadership meetings.

The need for the school to ensure it adheres at all times to a robust recruitment procedure was highlighted in the last report. Improvements have been made to the recruitment process. The file of a newly recruited member of care staff was examined. It contained all of the required documentation. It was noted that the member of staff was allowed to commence work at the school prior to a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check being received, however, they were not allowed any unsupervised access to children until the check was received.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The boarding provision at the school plays an active and vital part in supporting the educational progress of the students. Boarding staff have time in their working day to enable them to attend lessons to observe and support the boarders. Each boarding house has a teaching assistant attached to it, to help strengthen the link between education and boarding. Weekly feedback is provided from the boarding provision to the school and vice versa.

The boarders have ample opportunity to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities both on and off site. The school sits in beautiful countryside, which provides the boarders with extensive grounds in which they can roam. There is a large sports hall and swimming pool on site, along with a cricket pitch and tennis courts, and a well equipped games room for the boarders is situated in one of the boarding houses. Boarders receive a weekly allowance so that they can participate in an external activity.

It was previously recommended that the school review all students key working sessions and take appropriate remedial action to rectify any shortfalls. Written records of regular keyworking sessions on the files examined indicated that this had been done. The boarders are given individualised support in line with their specific needs. All students are encouraged to socialise and support each other. Parents commented positively on the level of communication between the boarding staff and themselves. They receive a weekly phone call to update them on the achievements of their child, and any problems they may have encountered. An independent visitor visits the school twice each term. There are posters around the school to tell students when the visitor is coming in and who they are. The visitor provides the school with a report of each visit.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The boarders are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives, and to have a say in the way that the boarding houses are run. There are a variety of ways in which the young people can express views, including a boarding school council. There is a policy in place for staff to follow regarding consultation with the boarders.

The school produces an attractive and informative newsletter, which is full of positive things about the students and their achievements. It also contains useful information on topics such as dealing with a teenager in mental distress. Informative presentations have also been prepared by staff on subjects such as eating disorders, teenage depression and self harm.

Nine of the 13 boarders who returned questionnaires said that they had a say in the way they live at the school. Boarders were very pleased to have been consulted about the redecoration and refurbishment of their boarding houses, and spoke enthusiastically about the various colours they had chosen. The school carries out an annual satisfaction survey. The results are analysed, and the last one produced a very positive response.

There was also a positive response within the Ofsted questionnaires. Thirteen were received, with the majority saying they were satisfied with the school; they liked the meals; they thought they were well cared for; they felt that there was always someone to help if they were unwell and they did not consider they were bullied. Some parents also completed questionnaires. They

were all positive, and included comments such as "the boarding placement changed our lives"; "my daughter's needs seem to be paramount to the school"; "I am grateful my son goes to this school"; "we are invited to attend the school, courses are offered and our opinions are listened to and respected". Positive feedback was also received from two professionals, one of whom stated "the school has exceeded my expectations".

There is an admission procedure in place, and clearly defined admission criteria. The school also holds a special day to celebrate students who are leaving. The day is marked with a celebrity speaker and students receive awards to acknowledge their achievements, efforts and positive contribution to the school.

Each of the boarders' files examined contained a care plan. Part of care planning includes target setting. These targets are displayed in a manner to make it easy for students to understand. Scores are given and a tally kept which is translated into money. The targets are set out following the Every Child Matters agenda. Keyworkers discuss them with boarders on regular basis. The principal is in the latter stages of setting up a project with placing local authorities in which each child placed at the school will have an individualised programme, set out in a timetable format, which can be adapted as the child progresses. This will link in with the new 'HEART' (health, education, assessment and revitalising therapy) unit in which each student will be assessed. The unit will include the services of a clinical psychologist and a counsellor.

The school has a post 16 programme which supports students to attend local colleges, or, in some cases, plans and supports individualised further education programmes for students for whom college is not suitable. The programme is run by a senior member of the school staff with a team of teaching assistants. Some boarders spoke of how they were looking forward to moving into the programme.

The Statement of Purpose contains reference to maintaining contact between home and school. Parents who returned questionnaires commented that they were pleased with their weekly contact from staff in the boarding houses. Appropriate contact records are kept in the boarders' files.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The previous report contained a recommendation regarding one of the boarding houses and the need to improve the facilities within it. Whilst the school has taken steps to refurbish it, the decision has now been taken to close it as a boarding house and use it for teaching purposes instead. The house in question is the only one attached to the main school building. The school is seeking permission to built an additional three new boarding houses, all in keeping with the current buildings.

A refurbishment programme is underway in the other boarding houses. The boarders were very pleased to have been consulted as to décor and furnishings. Each of the houses has its own identity and the boarders were proud of them.

There are specific recreational facilities in the boarding house that is to close. Unless suitable alternative options are found when this boarding house closes, the boarders will lose these important and well used facilities.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The Statement of Purpose sets out what the school provides for its students and the manner in which care is given. It describes the range of pupils the school accommodates, and lists staff and their experience. The statement also includes the school's organisational structure, the facilities and services for boarders, the arrangements to protect and promote the health of students, fire precautions, arrangements for religious observance, contact between home and school, methods of control and discipline, a copy of the United Nations charter of rights for children, the action to take if students are absent without permission and how to make representations and complaints.

Staff to boarder ratios are usually a minimum of 1:4, but many of students are looked after on a 1:1 basis. There is a member of staff on waking night duty in each house, who is supported by security staff and the vice principal who lives on site during the week. The Statement of Purpose indicated that the night staff were sometimes recruited without prior experience with this client group. This was discussed with head of care who stated that no new staff were left alone on a night shift until they felt ready, and had been able to shadow more experienced staff.

The current training programme for the boarding team has been expanded. Staff now have a continuous professional development programme, with the opportunity to undertake National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or other appropriate training, including Team Teach. Staff spoke positively about their training opportunities. Staff also confirmed that they receive regular supervision. The vice principal confirmed that over 80% of the boarding staff have achieved an NVQ at level 3, while the head of care has an NVQ at level 4.

Monitoring of the boarding service provided is carried out in a number of ways. A morning briefing is held so that any issues in the boarding houses overnight can be discussed and staff made aware. The principal stays overnight at the school several times a week, while a governor may also spend the occasional evening in the school. Regular visits are carried out by a representative of the student services committee. Similar visits are also made by the independent listener, and an annual monitoring visit is carried out by the local authority. The principal provides a written report for the governors biannually.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Working to this agenda is implicit within the ethos, culture and practice within the school. The gender, age and cultural mix within the staff group is appropriate to meet the cultural, religious and personal care needs of young people.

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):

- investigate any discrepancies in medication that arise between the boarding closing at the end of the week and reopening each Monday; and keep a written record of any such investigation and the action taken where necessary. Staff must refrain from using Tippex on medication records (NMS 14).
- review and update the complaints procedure so that it contains reference to, and the contact details for, Ofsted (NMS 4).
- ensure Ofsted is made aware of any safeguarding issues that arise (NMS 5).
- ensure boarding staff have access to log books so that they can appropriately record incidents of restraint (NMS 10).