

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

This is an independent co-educational residential special school situated 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, 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. 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 is a good service with some outstanding features. Outcomes for individual children and young people are generally good and demonstrate individualised care and support that reflects a child or young person's needs exceptionally well. The majority of key national minimum standards have been met. Four recommendations have been made. These relate to policies and procedures; risk assessments; recording of sanctions, and the installation of external lighting in one part of the school grounds.

The overall quality rating is good.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The previous inspection resulted in four recommendations. These related to medication recording; the complaints procedure, appropriate notification of significant occurrences and staff access to log books so that they can record any incidents that arise after school hours. Senior staff can now access the main school building so that appropriate recording of incidents can be made. Senior staff are also monitoring medication recording on a more regular basis, to lessen the probability of errors. Ofsted has been appropriately notified of a recent safeguarding issue. Work has commenced on revising the complaints procedure however it was not available at this inspection.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The boarders live in a healthy environment, where physical, emotional and mental health care needs are identified and promoted. Care staff provide the boarders with guidance and advice on healthy living and personal care issues. Individual boarders have targets linked to healthy living such as weight loss and cooking healthy food. Two care staff have specific responsibility for co-ordinating and developing activities for the boarders.

As boarders return home each weekend, their parents or carers retain responsibility for ensuring that they are registered with a general practitioner and undergo any necessary dental and optical checkups. Care staff nevertheless monitor this and will assist parents and carers where difficulties in attending appointments arise.

Three of the care staff are first aid trained, and there are a further 25 staff in the school with a first aid certificate. Parents and carers are asked to provide all relevant medical information about their child, and also to give written consent for emergency treatment. Care staff stated that they feel they have established strong links with the local children and adolescent mental health team, and also that they can access other specialist services as required. The school has its own in-house professionals including counsellors and therapists.

There is a satisfactory medication administration procedure in place. Records examined were up to date and accurately maintained. Senior staff audit these on a regular basis. Boarders can self medicate provided care staff have completed a risk assessment and it is appropriate for them to do so.

All students are provided with adequate quantities of suitably prepared wholesome and nutritious food. The cook has gradually introduced students to the healthy eating agenda. Menus showed a variety of choice, including a vegetarian option each lunchtime. They are rotated periodically and students are consulted as to content. The meals sampled were enjoyable and well presented. In the evenings boarders eat in their individual boarding houses. Boarders decided on menu content and also can help shop and prepare meals with care staff. None of the boarders raised any concerns about the food. Care staff have undergone training in food hygiene.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Boarders privacy is respected. Information about them is confidentially handled, and stored securely. There are ample spaces for boarders to meet privately with staff, parents or professionals. Within the boarding houses each boarder has their own bedroom, to which they have a key. Boarders were seen to be respectful of each others rooms, and would not enter any without permission. There is a policy in place regarding when it might be necessary to search a boarders possessions.

There is a complaints procedure in place. The need for it to be revised was raised at the last inspection. Whilst this is in hand, the new policy was not available for at this inspection. A complaints log is kept. There have not been any recorded complaints since 2008. Boarders are informed of the complaints process, and stated that they knew how to complain, and were confident that any issues would be taken seriously.

There are systems in place in the school which aim to prevent abuse of students. These are known and understood by all staff. The in-house child protection procedures are consistent with the safeguarding policies of the local authority. There is a whistle blowing procedure in place. It requires updating but nevertheless has been shown to be robust and effective in practice. All staff receive safeguarding training, and the school has a number of designated child protection officers. There is a central record of child protection concerns and this is monitored regularly. There have been four entries since the last inspection. All have been appropriately documented.

The school has and follows an anti-bullying policy. Students and staff are familiar with this and it is effective in practice. One member of the care staff takes lead responsibility on promoting anti-bullying behaviour. Eye catching posters are displayed around the boarding accommodation. Incidents of bullying are recorded in a central occurrence log. It was possible to follow an audit trail in instances where bullying issues had been referred to boarding staff to deal with. None

of the boarders raised concerns about bullying, albeit one Ofsted questionnaire included a comment that sometimes name-calling takes place. The school does not have a risk assessment of the areas where the risk of bullying is the greatest.

The school's written procedures, which identify the action staff should take in the event a boarder leaves the school without permission, require revision so that they are brought into line with the national minimum standards. Staff confirmed that there have been occasional incidents where boarders have left the site. Staff are usually aware of this either due to the student's behaviour or because the CCTV cameras that monitor the extensive grounds will have picked them up. Should it happen then staff stated they will follow to try to persuade the boarder to come back. If this is unsuccessful then staff will discretely follow to ensure the safety of the young person. Staffing levels at the school are sufficiently high to allow this to happen.

Staff were observed to respond positively to appropriate behaviour, and provide constructive criticism where the behaviour of a boarder is unacceptable. Staff have access to written procedures on the control, disciplinary and physical intervention measures that may be used. Staff maintain reports of all incidents that lead to sanctions however they are not being maintained in accordance with the national minimum standards. An appropriate restraint log is being kept. A number of staff have undergone training in positive intervention techniques.

Positive steps are taken to keep boarders, staff and visitors safe from risk of fire and other hazards. Regular fire drills are carried out. These include evening drills specifically for the boarders and care staff. Records show fire alarms are tested usually weekly although there were some date discrepancies in the records. Fire fighting and fire detection equipment is tested bi-annually. There is a detailed fire risk assessment in place. This is slightly overdue for review.

Boarding houses carry out a health and safety check every month. The records of these indicate that repairs are not always promptly attended to. A new system has just been introduced to try to rectify this. Testing of portable electric equipment is up to date, and gas safety certificates are in place. Risk assessments for individual boarders are carried out by care staff and were provided for inspection. Care staff also carry out health and safety risk assessments of the boarding accommodation. There are a number of risk assessments relating to the school premises.

No new care staff have been employed since the last inspection. There is a recruitment policy in place which sets out the vetting that new staff must undergo before commencing work at the school. All staff have their Criminal Record Bureau disclosures repeated on a three-yearly basis. The local authority takes responsibility for vetting taxi drivers.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

The school's residential provision actively supports the educational progress of the boarders. Care staff periodically attend classes with boarders, whilst teaching staff regularly visit the boarding accommodation. Boarders have access to a computer in each of the boarding houses, and the IT suite in the school has recently been made available for boarders to use in the evenings.

There is a very strong post 16 programme. Staff have established positive and productive links with local colleges, schools and provisions where the young people can gain vocational or

education qualifications or undergo a work placed apprenticeship. All those on the programme have a detailed individual learning plan.

Boarders are given individualised support in line with their needs. Each boarder has a key worker, and key working sessions are undertaken monthly. Reports of these are kept, and staff link these sessions to the individual targets set for each boarder. There is a system in place for rewarding responsible behaviour. Boarders are supported to follow individual interests. Therapeutic techniques are used in conjunction with needs identified in care plans.

Boarders are able to participate in purposeful and enjoyable activities both on and off site. The school sits in extensive grounds which include a large sports hall and swimming pool, a cricket pitch and tennis courts.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

The boarders are encouraged and supported to make decisions about their lives, and to influence the way that the school is run. Regular house meetings are held and there is a boarders council. There is a key working system in place and staff support the development of independent living skills. Boarders contribute to the setting of targets.

Boarders comments about the school included: "I would like to work with children and help them just like the amazing staff at (the school) has helped me"; "I can't stress enough how much this school means to me and how lost I would be without it. It has changed and saved me in many ways"; "I love my friends, staff, family and most of all my school I now love life and am looking forward to my future that lies ahead"; "the school is excellent. Sometimes it can be hard but the staff try and sort it out" and "the school looks after me".

There is an admission procedure in place, and new boarders are provided with an informative guide to their boarding house. Efforts are made to provide a memorable day to celebrate students who are leaving. A celebrity speaker is usually engaged and the students receive awards to acknowledge their achievements, efforts and positive contribution to the school.

Boarders have their needs assessed in a variety of ways, including statements of special educational needs and care plans. The school also has a 'HEART' (health, education, assessment and revitalising therapy) unit in which each student is comprehensively assessed. The unit includes access to the services of a clinical psychologist and a counsellor. One senior member of the care team oversees all care plans, in consultation with the staff in each boarding house and the boarders themselves. These assessments are supported with a wealth of other information including day sheets, contact sheets, medical information, correspondence, reviews (where input is sought from parents), key working notes and a pen picture. An annual review is carried out, and boarders are encouraged to attend.

As all boarders go home every weekend, they are enabled to maintain close contact with family and friends. Nevertheless the school has recently installed a pay phone in private cubicle for those students who do not have a mobile phone and who wish to contact home. There is weekly contact between the boarding staff and boarders homes. A number of parents returned Ofsted questionnaires. These were positive and included comments such as: "the school works hard at developing self-esteem enabling children to enjoy what they can achieve"; "we find all the

facilities at the school are first class"; and "they fully prepare young adults and children with all social aspects of daily living".

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The boarders live in pleasant premises which provide sufficient space to meet their needs. Boarders were proud of their houses and happy to give the inspector a tour. There are many similarities between the houses but also subtle differences where the residents have chosen different fittings and furnishings. Boarders are consulted as to the general décor of their house and their individual bedrooms. Two of the boarding houses, although sited next to each other, are relatively secluded. External lighting around these is poor.

Some of the houses have recently been refurbished, and most have been fitted with new double glazing. This has been appreciated by the boarders. The largest boarding house has been closed since the last inspection due to its general unsuitability for purpose. This has led to boarders losing some leisure facilities, although staff have done their best to compensate. Plans to provide three new boarding houses, one of which would be used to replace the lost facilities have been submitted for planning approval.

The school premises are used for external functions and community based groups also hire out some of the sports facilities. The school is in the process of revising the availability of these facilities so as to enable them to be used more often by boarders. The boarding houses are set apart from the main school buildings therefore the care and the privacy of the boarders is not compromised by visitors to the site.

Positive links have been forged between the school and the local community. Nevertheless staff are striving to develop these further and further enhance the programme of social interaction.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is a strong ethos in the school to counter racism and develop a sense of community. Staff have access to a variety of policies and procedures that inform their practice. The gender, age and cultural mix within the staff group is appropriate to meet the cultural, religious and personal care needs of young people.

There is a clear statement of the school's care principles and practice for boarding students. This was revised in June 2009, and it contains all of the information listed in the standards.

Boarders are looked after by staff who understand their needs and are able to consistently meet them. The team is stable, with few changes since the last inspection. Staff are allocated to specific boarding houses which helps them to develop knowledge and understanding of each boarder in their house. There are permanent waking night staff, one to each boarding house. Staff receive regular supervision and an annual appraisal.

Less than 80% of staff have achieved a National Vocational Qualification at level 3, as recommended in the national minimum standards. Care staff without this qualification are enrolled with the local college and are expected to commence the course in the near future.

Staff are enabled to attend regular in-house training, including training in fire safety, stress management, food hygiene and safeguarding. Staff stated that they were confident that if they identified a training course that could further inform their practice, the school would support them in attending it. They have access to large volume of policies and procedures. These are periodically updated and signed off by the governors.

Children and staff enjoy the stability of an efficiently run boarding provision. Senior care staff carry out regular quality monitoring audits, and care staff are allocated individual and lead responsibilities for various aspects of the boarding provision. The senior management team oversees outcomes and responds to identified training and development needs. The school governors visit on a regular basis and reports of these visits were available for inspection. There is also a student services committee which has a positive role in quality assurance.

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):

- review and update the complaints procedure so that it contains reference to, and the contact details for, Ofsted (NMS 4)
- carry out a risk assessment of the areas of the school where bullying is most likely to take place (NMS 6)
- ensure that the procedure regarding boarders who are absent without permission is in keeping with the national minimum standards (NMS 8)
- ensure that sanction records are maintained in accordance with the national minimum standards (NMS 10)
- consider installing external lighting outside the boarding houses that are removed from the main area of the school. (NMS 26)