

West Heath

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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Inspector	Paul Taylor / Janet Hunnam

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.^{1,2}

Information about the school

This is an independent co-educational residential special school situated in Kent. The school provides places for both day and boarding pupils between the ages of ten to eighteen years of age. Many of the pupils have experienced various forms of trauma in their lives including bullying, bereavement, illness and abuse, and this has often led to the breakdown of a mainstream school placement. Specific conditions including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and Asperger's syndrome are also present in some pupils and most have a statement of special educational need. The school has six boarding houses.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1989/41/contents.

² www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/a00192112/boarding-schools.

Inspection judgements

Overall effectiveness	outstanding
Outcomes for residential pupils	outstanding
Quality of residential provision and care	outstanding
Residential pupils' safety	outstanding
Leadership and management of the residential provision	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

The key findings of the residential inspection are as follows.

- The residential provision of the school is outstanding. Residential pupils thrive within a nurturing environment which meets their unique needs. Residential pupils learn exceptional life and social skills, which significantly increase their self esteem and confidence. The residential experience provides an excellent preparation for independent life or transition to further education. Pupils enjoy engaging in a wide range of activities within their local community and on the school site. There are excellent, mutually respectful relationships between pupils and staff. The culture of empowerment helps residential pupils to maximise and achieve their full potential. Passionately committed leadership, a dedicated experienced staff team and innovative practice ensures excellent outcomes.
- There is a substantial range of extra-curricular activities. Residential pupils enjoy going bowling, out for meals, to the cinema, shopping and on a variety of other enriching excursions. They pursue a healthy lifestyle and benefit from an excellent quality of food. Their health needs, particularly their emotional health, is promoted to an excellent standard. Residential and school staff work effectively, in an integrated manner, to ensure excellent continuity of care. There is an individually tailored induction programme for residential pupils. This ensures a smooth, nurturing and successful transition for each pupil. The assessment of new pupils is rigorous and ensures that the school can meet their needs.
- Residential pupils have comfortable accommodation of a high standard which they can personalise to reflect their individuality. The school and residential premises are appropriately safe and secure. Comprehensive risk management systems, excellent health and safety arrangements and an efficient maintenance team ensure the safety of pupils. Both the school and residential staff maintain

excellent links with parents. Parental feedback regarding the school is overwhelmingly positive. The prospectus and website provides parents, prospective parents and others with comprehensive information about the school, its ethos and organisation. Residential pupils benefit from their own handbook, which clearly outlines what they can expect, the rules, routines and their rights. The school has a clearly written accessible complaints procedure.

- The leadership and management of boarding are outstanding. There is a culture of celebrating and empowering each young person to achieve their potential. Residential pupils contribute to their individual plans. Pupils respond well to the supportive, nurturing environment, which enables their personal development. They successfully engage in a wide range of activities, which contribute to their enrichment and development. Residential pupils benefit from a stable, committed and highly experienced senior leadership team. The multidisciplinary approach to care planning focuses on promoting the best outcomes for young people. There is excellent staff retention. There is a culture of continuous improvement, high expectation and excellence. Pupils receive care from a well-supported staff team. Staff receive ongoing training and support which enables them to deliver a high quality service. There is excellent promotion of equality and diversity. This runs like a thread throughout all care practices and documentation, ensuring each pupil's individual needs are known and met to an excellent standard. The school is continually reviewing practice to ensure it meets the needs of pupils. This is underpinned by comprehensive quality assurance and monitoring. There is an excellent understanding and implementation of the national minimum standards.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for residential pupils at the school are outstanding. They have extremely positive relationships with staff and successfully develop friendships with other pupils. Their confidence improves significantly while at the school and individual pupils told of making remarkable progress since being there. 'I would be in prison if I wasn't here' was a comment made by one pupil. Another said that, 'this school has turned my life around.' Residential pupils overwhelmingly enjoy their experience of boarding and take full advantage of what is on offer. Pupils spoke of wishing that the school could be open at weekends and during holidays. Pupils successfully increase their levels of independence with sensitive, well-planned support from the care staff team.

Residential pupils thrive in an environment where tolerance and understanding of each other is embedded in the culture. This leads to a setting where support is forthcoming from both adults and peers at times of distress or unsettled behaviour. The nurturing environment enables them to develop their life, social and coping skills to a significant degree.

Residential pupils benefit from having their views and opinions valued and promoted to an excellent standard. They are actively involved in the day-to-day running of their

houses and their views are seen as central to the running of the boarding provision. Residential pupils attend senior management meetings as well as meetings with the trustees. This ensures that their views are heard by all significant adults involved in the running of the school. They are able to influence decisions regarding issues such as menus and activities, and they are involved in the recruitment of new members of staff.

The school makes excellent provision for pupils' healthcare and they feel well looked after when they are unwell. A member of staff with specific responsibilities regarding health care and medication provides a highly effective service for pupils and ensures there is excellent liaison with health professionals and therapists. Pupils have their emotional and psychological health being particularly well promoted and nurtured. Healthy lifestyles are promoted across the school and pupils have a clear awareness of what that entails. The standard of catering is excellent and pupils provide unanimous positive feedback about the quality and variety of food.

Pupils benefit from excellently managed and planned transitions to further education or employment. Individual programs tailored to meet their needs and to address their anxieties ensure that they receive the support they require in order to move on successfully from the school.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the residential provision is outstanding. Pastoral support offered to residential pupils is effective and nurturing. The induction process involves new pupils having time in a specific part of the school, referred to as HEART, which provides therapeutic input and support and which enable pupils to transition into school at a pace commensurate with their abilities and vulnerabilities. This process is underpinned by close links between educational, therapeutic and residential care staff.

Residential pupils have excellent access to a variety of enriching activities which broaden their life experience and encourage their growth and development. Some of the pupils prefer to stay on site to take part in a variety of activities until their confidence is developed and they feel able to go off site with members of staff. The encouragement and support provided to the pupils enables their personal growth and confidence to improve significantly, and in some cases to a remarkable degree.

The school provides residential pupils excellent opportunities to take on roles and responsibilities and to have an active and valued voice in the running of the school. There is a school council and pupils also attend meetings with senior managers and trustees. Pupils are also able to take part in the recruitment process, thus enhancing their feelings of being able to have a say in important decision which impact on their lives. It is clear that the ethos of the school values and promotes the views of the pupils in a meaningful and effective manner.

The complex needs of the pupils are met very effectively. Detailed assessments with multidisciplinary input enables purposeful care plans and development targets to be put in place. This ensures that the staff team are able to implement bespoke detailed packages of care. These guide and enable them to promote each young person's well-being to a very high standard. The pupils are fully involved in the development of their care plans and all are aware of their targets and progress. They endorse their care plans and this ensures they are aware of the content.

Members of staff are able to ensure that all the medical needs of the residential pupils are known and met. The work of on-site therapists, and close liaison with other health professionals, such as psychologists and psychiatrists, ensures that the staff are guided and supported in delivering excellent health care and a healthy environment. Medication administration is robustly monitored and the residential pupils also sign for medication when they take it. This ensures that they feel involved in their care rather than being 'done to.'

Boarding accommodation is of a high standard, being comfortable and well maintained. Pupils are able to decorate their own rooms and this enables them to feel they have an investment of their living areas. 'It's just like home' was a comment made by a pupil.

Residential pupils are offered an excellent standard of food. Meals are healthy, nutritious and offer an excellent and varied choice. Meal times are well-ordered social occasions which are organised in a manner to support each pupil's needs. For example, smaller dining areas are available for pupils who find eating in groups difficult and members of staff are available to support pupils on a one-to-one basis at mealtimes if that is needed.

Residential pupils' safety

The school makes outstanding provision to safeguard residential pupils' welfare. It is clear that the safety of each pupil is of paramount importance. They report feeling safe and very well cared for. Staff are extremely vigilant and are able to observe any slight change in behaviour that may indicate that something is amiss with an individual pupil. This helps staff to take proactive action to follow up any concerns and ensure the pupil's well-being. All staff are trained in child protection. Staff are knowledgeable about child protection issues and are proactive in working with other agencies such as children's services. This approach ensures the safety and well-being of all the children in their care is promoted and protected. The trustees and external independent visitor check to ensure that the school is monitoring concerns or issues on a regular basis. This embeds the robust and detailed approach regarding this issue.

The school operates a robust and effective recruitment process which ensures that all adults who have contact with pupils are subject to all necessary checks prior to employment. Members of staff, who do not routinely have unsupervised contact with

pupils, such as cleaners, are supervised until all the checks are completed. A written risk assessment is not available in every case to evidence that the policy has been followed. This, nevertheless, has had no impact on any pupil's safety or well-being.

A very effective anti-bullying procedure and guidance ensures that bullying is addressed robustly. Residential pupils report that bullying is not an issue and that the sense of community ensures that any incidents are addressed by peers as well as adults. Pupils have numerous adults whom they can approach for help as well as peer mentors. Pupils have been involved in developing and writing the bullying policy and one pupil has received a national award for his part in developing anti-bullying strategies in the school.

It is rare for any pupil to go missing. If this occurs, very clear individual protocols are put in place to ensure the safety of the pupil.

There is an effective and comprehensive approach to managing behaviour at the school. This means that staff are consistent and fair in dealing with unwanted behaviours. On occasion the residential pupils can present behaviour that challenges the staff and routines. Members of staff are seen to be calm and consistent in their approach. Physical restraint is very rarely used, staff being very effective and skilled in de-escalating challenging behaviour and enabling pupils to understand why they are angry. Residential pupils say sanctions are fair and they understand why they are given. Any sanctions or incidents are subject to a robust review by senior members of staff and pupils are encouraged to voice their opinion about any incident. Positive behaviour is encouraged and celebrated. Residential pupils are seen to behave with tolerance of each other and to show insight into each other's challenges and problems. This leads to a culture where residential pupils can offer meaningful and effective peer support.

The safety of the school and residential provision is monitored very effectively. Fire precautions and fire equipment are checked on a regular basis. Fire drills are held regularly and all residential pupils are aware of the evacuation procedures. Thorough risk assessments are regularly reviewed, updated and endorsed after auditing by senior members of staff. These risk assessments include environmental checks as well as on-site and off-site activities. Detailed individual risk assessments address behavioural issues and vulnerabilities of the residential pupils. The school has effective security systems and all visitors are supervised when on the premises. There is also a CCTV system also ensures additional security, particularly at night.

Leadership and management of the residential provision

Leadership and management of the school is of an outstanding calibre and is a key strength and influence on driving and expecting high standards from staff and pupils.

Detailed monitoring systems and clear lines of responsibility ensure that performance is analysed with a view to sustaining high standards and improving on performance

and delivery. This is further promoted by the use of external professionals to oversee the school's internal self assessment. Forward planning is carefully thought through, ambitious and with an eye for detail to ensure that all aspirations are achievable, have clear lines of accountability and checked to see that they have been achieved or are on target to be achieved. An independent visitor undertakes unannounced monitoring visits of boarding and examines key issues such as complaints, sanctions and residential pupils welfare. Reports written as a result of these visits are detailed and outline areas to be addressed and improved. In turn, a senior member of staff develops action plans to show that issues identified have been responded to.

A very low turnover of staff responsible for boarding and care ensures that residential pupils receive consistent care. This stability enables residential pupils to develop very good relationships with the members of staff who care for them. They are also able to choose their own key workers. The experienced staff team receive on-going training which ensures they have the skills and knowledge to do their work to a high standard.

All policies and procedures are reviewed on a regular basis by the senior management team and by the trustees. This ensures that they are all up to date and relevant to practice in the school. Pupils' records are comprehensive and provide a story of each individual's journey through the school and their progress achieved. Records are stored securely.

The school is very aware of each pupil's individual needs and vulnerabilities. The comprehensive assessment process prior to admission and on-going review of each pupil's progress ensures that they receive bespoke packages of care aimed at meeting their specific needs. This enables residential pupils to make excellent progress during their time at the school.

Excellent contact is maintained with parents and carers of residential pupils. Key workers telephone home at least once a week to ensure that carers are aware of any concerns, issues or progress. In turn this enables carers to keep the members of staff up to date with home situations. Parents report excellent communication is maintained with the school. The school also ensures that placing authorities and other relevant agencies are kept up to date with any incidents of note or potential issues. This enables the school to be proactive in identifying situations which are developing so that they can place strategies in place before they escalate.

At the previous inspection the school was asked to ensure that the recording of sanctions was maintained consistently in all boarding areas. This has been addressed and senior members of staff check records regularly to ensure that sanctions are recorded and are appropriate. Additionally it was recommended that night care staff receive regular supervision. This has also been addressed, and all members of staff now receive regular supervision, training and appraisal.

National minimum standards

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What should the school do to improve further?

- ensure that there is written evidence and risk assessments to show that new members of staff, who do not have contact with pupils, are supervised when working on site until all the necessary pre-employment checks have been completed.

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



09/02/2012

Dear pupils

Inspection of West Heath

As you will know, Ofsted recently inspected the boarding at your school. The inspectors visited the houses, had meals with you, spoke to many of you, met with members of staff and looked at records. We also received questionnaires from some parents and most of the members of staff. We found that you were all very helpful and honest with us.

We think that your school provides an excellent standard of care for you. We think that you progress very significantly when you come to the school and that the staff work very hard with you to help you deal with your problems and to have a better chance for a positive future.

We think that your school is a safe place for you to live. We are particularly impressed by the relationships which you have with members of staff and your key workers. We also think that the support you receive from HEART is excellent.

Your school is very well managed and you have a committed and stable group of staff who look after you.

We are also very impressed by the activities which you can do and the fact that you can have activities in the school as well as the local community. We are impressed with some of the trips you take part in, such as camping and adventure training.

We saw you all trying to behave very well and thought that you were very tolerant of each other, even when people were having a difficult time. We are pleased that you can all telephone your home and loved ones.

We were very impressed by the feedback you gave us about how the school has helped you and the fact that some of you would like to stay during holidays and weekends.

Overall we are very impressed by your school and think that it does an excellent job to try and get what is best for you.

We really enjoyed meeting you all and wish you all the best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Yours sincerely,

Paul Taylor / Janet Hunnam