

The New School at West Heath

Welfare inspection report for a residential special school

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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 just over 100 day and boarding pupils between the ages of 10 to 18 years of age. At the time of the inspection there were 28 students residing at the school, Monday to Friday. 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 present in many pupils and most have a statement of special educational need. The school has seven boarding houses. The residential provision was last inspected in February 2012.

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 overall effectiveness of the school is outstanding. Outcomes for students are stunning, with students making progress in all aspects of their lives, due to the residential experience, including educational attainment. There is a shared ethos of mutual respect and celebration of achievement which permeates the culture of the school. A recent investors in people audit noted that the school's high expectations applied to staff equally as to students. Students show excellent progress in social skills, developing empathy, managing their own behaviour, communication and in their personal self-esteem. One student said, 'we get opportunities no other kids get. They are so good at building our confidence through the work they do.' Parents say they have seen remarkable changes in their children. One parent highlighted the success of the school with their child, 'They have become the nice person that was hidden inside. They have greater confidence, are caring and are now able to make friends. It makes us very proud.'
- The school provides a safe nurturing environment for students. The positive behaviour management systems are excellent and the approach to bullying is detailed comprehensive and positive. There is zero tolerance of bullying and students are confident in using the complaints or anti bullying systems that they and their parents helped to design. Both the victims and the perpetrators receive support throughout and the whole process is used as a learning experience. Victims feel properly supported and engaged in the resolution of their issues. Perpetrators are encouraged to learn about difference and to respect others. The tight management of these incidents provides an overview which ensures that the whole school benefits from post event analysis of outcomes.

- Students learn different ways to resolve difficult situations by staff's skilled application of their neuro-linguistic training. One student described how staff help them to resolve situations, 'They present us with choices to continue as we are, or to take another route. Their choice is so logical you have to take it.' Staff share common approaches with students and apply what works consistently, aiding students understanding of their behaviour and positive engagement in its resolution. Parents say staff share these approaches with them and listen to their advice about what works. Consequently there are few restraints and parents say that positive behaviours are replicated at home.
- Student's safety is of paramount importance to the managers of the school. Staff understanding of safeguarding issues is excellent and is supported by the comprehensive policies and regular training. The vice principal care is a trainer for the Kent Safeguarding Children Board and delivers training in other settings, as well as engaging other schools in the in house courses. Student's safe care is further enhanced by their influence in staff selection. The school renews Criminal Record Bureau checks every three years as an example of their enhanced safeguarding. Students confirm that they can see the independent visitor describing his visits, 'he is lovely. He is really approachable and easy to talk to.' Students' safety is enhanced by this external scrutiny of the school and its attendant provision of an independent contact for the students.
- Policies for protecting students from cyber bullying are exceptionally well constructed. Students confirm that staff implement these policies ensuring that they are not simply blocked from sites but learn how to stay safe when using them. One student described how the approach works, 'there is a computer safety code we have to follow. The boarding staff tell us about it and so do the school. We are always monitored on social networking sites but like everything we have to build up trust. Then they bring in external groups to work with us, like the police and refocus. We do a lot of work on this.' The outcome is students who are aware of the risks in telephone messaging and computer sites; and are aware of how to stay safe and minimise risks.
- The leadership and management of the school is outstanding. The management team set high standards and are excellent at celebrating the achievements of staff and students. There is a shared understanding of the positive ethos of the school driven forward by the dynamic managers and trustees. Parents and students feel fully engaged in the management of the school and cite numerous examples of their contribution to this. The environment is pleasant well equipped and rigorously maintained. Site safety is unobtrusive but effective. Overall the school is excellent and the impact of management is summed up in the recent investors in people assessment. 'This is a very different school to mainstream but what I encountered was feedback that was positive and uplifting. Everyone felt that they worked to the best of their ability and had received every encouragement to consistently raise their performance for the good of each and every student.'
- The school has a well-resourced therapeutic service which in every respect is at

the core of the school's operation. The services ensure that from induction to leaving the students receive a service tailored to their personal needs. In addition to directly aiding the students, the 'Heart' department provides intensive training to staff, which equips them to deal effectively, sensitively and consistently with the complex and challenging behaviours of the students. There is excellent communication between all departments of the school ensuring a consistency which aids the understanding and engagement of the students.

- Parents stress how excellent the school is at communicating with them, listening to their views and engaging them in the running of the school. Parents say that they have contributed to the creation of policies on bullying and are now helping to rewrite policies on equality and diversity. Parents say their views are heard and acted on increasing their confidence in the school. Parents also stress that they are prepared long in advance of meetings to assist them in putting forward their comments which are incorporated into the care plan.
- The school provides excellent support to pupils in preparing for the transition out to local colleges, work or university. Many students would struggle without the fantastic outreach support and assistance provided by the school. Students struggling with family or placement breakdowns benefit from close partnership working with fostering services supported by the local authority. This allows students to continue to benefit from their engagement in the residential and educational support until they are ready to complete the move to independence.
- The school is committed to learning and improvement, in both students and staff. Staff rotas are adjusted to ensure that all staff can participate in training. This allows groups, such as night care staff, to continue their professional development and improve their delivery of best quality care to students. The recent investors in people audit commented, 'the way that people within leadership and management roles communicate, advise, mentor, coach, take ideas and maintain working relationships and retain and improve morale is consistently at a high level.'
- The school has successfully addressed the previously identified area for improvement. All staff now commence work after all recruitment checks are in place. All national minimum standards are met. To further improve the school is asked to enable all residential staff complete the neuro-linguistic programming training. Further the school is asked to use students residential target information, to accurately modify targets and produce reports on their performance against these targets.

Outcomes for residential pupils

Outcomes for students are outstanding. Students display appropriate warmth, affection and friendliness towards staff and to one another. Students say that they like all of the staff, 'There is not one of the staff I would not go to for help.' Students develop through these relationships and enjoy a relaxed comfortable environment

which they describe as, 'a community.' One student explained the relationship between staff and children, 'There is no big staff kids divide. Staff are really good at keeping boundaries in place and still making it feel homely.' Students stress how much support they give to each other and receive from one another, 'Thing about here is we all help each other. Some of us are mentors but we will help whether we are one or not. Thing is we can be more straightforward with each other than staff and that helps.' Students address their complex communication and relationship difficulties successfully building friendships with this support.

Students make consistent progress in addressing emotional and social difficulties through their boarding experience. One student saying, 'what we do works. All students here improve. Everyone is happy here, everyone.' The boarding experience allows students to assume a range of responsibilities which aid their own personal development whilst also assisting others. Students outlined these areas which include peer mentoring, house meetings, boarding council, school council and direct contact with staff. There is a strong culture of respect, fostered through the structured respect and anti-bullying programmes. Students broaden their understanding of other cultures and religions through this.

Social workers comment very positively on the benefit from the residential experience one saying, 'they have really turned his life around in all areas. He has really benefitted from boarding. He has improved in his confidence, self-esteem and communication.' Evaluation of educational results shows improved attainment levels for students using the residential provision.

Students involve themselves in a wide range of activities during boarding. Many activities are planned to aid the student's development as well as meet individual interests. Students improve social skills and develop their physical fitness through their engagement. One social worker says, 'before his time in boarding he could not use public transport but now they have got him doing that to attend the youth club.' Some students use the boarding time to address weight issues with a combination of diet and exercise. One parent praised the improvements in her child, 'he is very aware of healthy eating and exercise and gets help from the boarding staff with this.' Meal times are relaxed friendly times where students continue to develop friendships and respect for others and their individual cultural differences.

Transition planning is excellent and students benefit from the strong focus on their specific needs in particular their social and communication difficulties. Students start learning self-help skills early in their boarding life and continue these into the newly developed semi-independent house. The new house is described by one social worker as, 'just brilliant.' A social worker commented on one student's experience there, 'he had extreme communication problems, poor self-confidence and low self-esteem. They have changed that completely.' Students gain a wide range of self-help skills and staff application of risk assessments gradually increases their independence.

Quality of residential provision and care

The quality of the school's boarding provision for residential students is outstanding. The integration of new students is expertly managed, engaging parents, prospective students, boarding staff and therapeutic staff in a carefully planned induction process. Staff focus on the particular needs of each student ensuring that; as well as identifying the educational needs, they also address diet, health needs, preferences, cultural needs and any religious requirements. Students actively assist in the settling in process and mentor new arrivals. Staff ensure that therapeutic interventions are closely co-ordinated with any external agencies, such as children and adolescent mental health services, ensuring that the student maximises benefits from all supports.

Students actively enjoy a wide range of after school activities. The students make excellent use of the, on site facilities, engaging in a variety of activities which stimulate, entertain, exercise, and educate them. Students are encouraged to participate in off-site activities including local youth clubs, Duke of Edinburgh schemes. Using these activities for fun students also improve their social integration, enhance their social skills, self-confidence, communication skills and self-esteem.

Students excitedly describe how well staff involve them in the running of the school. Students were able to list changes which they had brought about in the whole school and in the individual houses. Students receive training to prepare them for these roles within the school. Students say that they have revised out of date welcome booklets for new starters, changed activity planners and menu planners meeting individual communication needs. Staff encourage students to make choices wherever possible and to engage in activities which develop their responsibilities for others. Significant examples include, recruitment of new staff, presenting ideas to trustees meetings and engagement on school councils. One student says, 'when you go around the school you will see everyone respects one another.' Students are clear that the school implements their ideas increasing their sense of self-worth and value.

Students have many complex needs including significant communication and social interaction issues. Detailed assessments, by the multi-disciplinary team, aid the construction of effective care plans. Recent inclusion of speech and language assessments in these care plans has improved the effective engagement of residential staff with students. Students are fully engaged in the production of their care plans and all reviews of them, allowing them to feel in control of their own lives. Students say, 'other schools just tell you what to do. Here they give you a choice and get your views on what to do for you.' Parents say that the school ensures they are aware of all care plans ensuring that they meet the specific care needs of their child.

Health care planning ensures that staff know and can meet, all of the needs of the students. The addition of a registered nurse has enhanced the health care on offer. Students benefit from sensitively delivered sexual health programmes and assistance with smoking cessation. The on-site therapeutic services aid students in addressing

their complex issues and aid their social development and engagement in school. Medication is appropriately managed and students act as dual signatories to its issuing. This empowers the students and enhances the homely feeling of the residential settings.

Meals are nutritious, balanced and varied. Individual dietary needs are met within the menu to ensure that students can continue to meet medical and cultural needs without standing out from the others. Meals times are relaxed, friendly and expertly managed. As a result student's health and sense of self-worth improves.

Residential settings are comfortable and reflect the personalities and wishes of the students living in them. Students say that they have keys to their rooms and staff respect their privacy. Houses are decorated as students want them. Parents and social workers comment on how clean and tidy the boarding houses always are. Students say that the school is like a big family and the houses like little families.

Residential pupils' safety

The school achieves outstanding standards in providing safe care to students. Students benefit from the safe selection of suitable staff with all appropriate clearances and qualifications, supporting the provision of a high quality service. The safe selection of staff and confidence of students in this process is greatly enhanced by their meaningful involvement in the interviews and appointment decisions.

Trustees take the safeguarding of students exceptionally seriously and consider safeguarding in their committees and regular scrutiny of monitoring visits. This ensures that the students' safety is firmly embedded in the ethos of the school. The school works closely with the local authority, ensuring that policies are current and in line with national and local protocols. Students benefit from staff application of comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures, designed to meet their complex needs. All staff receive training in child protection and safeguarding prior to working with the students. Staff apply this training in their practice, enhancing the safe care of students and improving their understanding of how to stay safe.

Students stressed the excellent assistance they have received in learning safe use of new technologies and communication systems. One young person saying, 'they do a lot of work on computer and telephone safety, in school and in boarding. The thing which makes it stick though, is the external speakers, police and ex-offenders, who make it real.' The result is students learn how to safely use the internet.

Risk assessments are robust and encourage excellent planning for activities. The result is a culture, amongst staff, of safely expanding life experiences for students through carefully managed but challenging activities.

The school operates a highly effective positive behaviour management approach, designed to meet the individual needs of each student. All staff work in a consistent

manner with students, using shared language, to avoid confusion and encourage positive outcomes. Central to the approach is a combination of interventions from the therapeutic centre with a very strong focus on a neuro-linguistic intervention. Students understand the approaches and say that staff give them choices which lead them to make the correct decisions to defuse any escalating situation. Not all residential staff have completed this training. Staff present as calm and assured in dealing with very challenging situations. The result is a low number of restraints and a view from students that staff listen to them and help them to learn how to relax and how to avoid conflict.

Desired behaviours are targeted and monitored throughout the day. There is a close correlation between both the school and the residential settings to ensure a consistency in approach. Positive achievement is recorded and rewarded, although better use could be made of performance data, to visually show students how they are progressing.

The school has an excellent anti-bullying approach, covering all areas in standards. The approach seeks to support the victim whilst providing guidance and education to the perpetrator. The close monitoring of this positive approach ensures that the victim is constantly engaged and their views incorporated into the resolution.

The school has effective arrangements for monitoring and managing all health and safety issues. All relevant checks are in place for services and electrical equipment. Detailed audits of the entire site are incorporated into the development plan and are monitored through an on line system. Student's safe care is enhanced by this meticulous approach. Site security is robust and well managed. Fire drills are held regularly and all students are aware of the evacuation procedures and have practiced them. One social worker said, 'They are very on the ball with health and safety. Your identity is checked when you arrive and you are escorted everywhere.'

Leadership and management of the residential provision

The leadership and management of the residential provision are outstanding. All senior staff share a common understanding of the direction and ethos of the school which they effectively communicate to staff, students and parents. The school has a detailed improvement plan which sets achievable targets and is closely monitored by the senior management team. The vice principal care works in conjunction with the other department heads and the principal, ensuring effective management of the residential setting as an integral component of the school. The vice principal care implements his detailed development plans, tracking achievement and progress against national standards and local priorities. A recent investors in people assessment noted, 'Many staff commented on the highly positive ethos of support available and all felt that their immediate manager and the senior team were doing a great job.'

The school has a staff team which provides a diverse mix of staff, well trained and in

sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the students. Many students have complex needs which the school ensures staff are fully trained to meet. Residential staff complete comprehensive induction training and all, including night care staff, have a minimum of a suitable level 3 qualification. All students involved in mentoring programmes receive comprehensive training and induction to the role, increasing positive outcomes from this support network.

Students and parents are strongly engaged in developing good practice in the school. Parents say that their views are valued and ideas are incorporated into new policies. Current joint parent, pupil, staff, reviews are into bullying and equality and diversity policies ensuring they address the diverse backgrounds of the students. Trustees are actively involved in these regular reviews and stress the benefits of this approach to ensuring policies meet the wide ranging needs of the students.

Parents and social workers praise the excellent communication from the residential setting which ensures they are fully engaged and aware of the student's progress. One parent said of this, 'there is brilliant communication from them. They make sure we know about everything that is happening in school but also help us to work along the same lines. We use the same rewards, same sanctions and phrases. They are always available to give us help as well as our child.' This close working partnership allows the school to transfer learning from the residential setting to home and other social settings.

The initial all-encompassing assessment is regularly updated and ensures care programmes meet the highly personal needs of each student. Social workers praise the engagement of students in their care planning with one saying, 'reviews are excellently organised with thorough detailed reports. Most importantly they incorporate the pupil's views very well.' This not only allows students to make excellent progress but fully engages them in ownership of the change. One student saying, 'I know they have helped a lot but I put my positive change down to me.'

The previous recommendation in relation to new staff has been met by a change in policy. All new starters now have all necessary pre-employment checks before commencing employment. This ensures the safety of students.

National minimum standards

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

What should the school do to improve further?

- Ensure all residential staff complete the neuro-linguistic programming training.
- Use residential target information to accurately modify targets and report on student's success.

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.



12/12/2012

Hello again

Inspection of The New School at West Heath

You may recall you met me recently when I visited your school to see how well you are cared for. I wish to thank all of you who made me so welcome during my visit. A number of you spent time talking to me and were kind enough to invite me to meals in your houses. One of you is deserving of a very special thank you for the delicious if rather enormous meal you cooked for me. Whilst I was there you told me that your school was friendly, relaxed and very welcoming. I agree with your assessment. One of you told me it is outstanding and that is also the judgement I reached. I was very impressed at how much you influence in the houses and in the school and saw evidence of policies , procedures and décor that had been influenced by you. I heard from your parents about how much progress you have made academically and socially. I was impressed by the generally calm atmosphere and when disagreements happened by how well you worked with staff to resolve them. I have asked the school to complete training programmes with residential staff. In addition I have suggested they use information from your target rewards to show you how well you progress over each term. Once again thank you to all of you who contributed so much to this inspection.

Yours sincerely,

Angus Mackay