School and residential report

The New School at West Heath

Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks, Kent, TN13 1SR

Inspection dates	11–13 December 2013	
Overall effectiveness	**Outstanding**	**1**
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Overall effectiveness of the residential experience	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because

- Students make outstanding progress with their learning from mostly low starting points on entry to the school. They make rapid progress to fill in gaps in their previously unsettled educational experiences.
- The curriculum provides an outstanding range of opportunities for students to excel and achieve in areas of interest and importance.
- The outstanding quality of teaching is planned to ensure that each student is working consistently at a level of challenge appropriate to their individual needs.
- The personal development of students demonstrates rapid improvements in their emotional and social readiness to learn and to cooperate with the expectations of the school.
- The quality of the residential provision is outstanding.
- The school's leaders and trustees maintain an exemplary focus on the personal development and achievement of students. The monitoring and evaluation of the work of the school and of the residential provision are robust and accurate.

Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was conducted with one day's notice.
- The inspectors observed 19 lessons, taught by 18 teachers. Nine of these lessons were jointly observed with members of the school's management team.
- Discussions were held with a number of senior and middle managers in the school and residential provision, teachers, teaching assistants, residential care workers, students and representatives of the trustees.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, including schemes of work and teachers' planning, students' care plans, school policies and students performance data.
- Inspectors considered 27 responses from parents and carers to the online Parent View questionnaire, and held three telephone conversations with parents and carers.

Inspection team

David Young, Lead inspector	Additional Inspector
John Anthony	Additional Inspector
Janet Hunnam	Her Majesty's Inspector (Social Care)

Full report

Information about this school

- The New School at West Heath is located on a 35-acre site near Sevenoaks in Kent.
- The school provides residential or day school education for up to 128 boys and girls in the age range 10 to 19 years. There are currently 107 students on the school roll, of whom 29 are resident in the school's boarding accommodation.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs. Students are admitted with speech, language and communication needs, often with autistic spectrum disorders. The majority of students experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties associated with their individual needs. Many have been excluded from mainstream education for a period of time.
- The school has charitable status and aims 'to rebuild lives through education', providing a strong therapeutic approach to learning.
- A number of external providers are used to extend the range of vocational and pre-employment opportunities available to Key Stage 4 and post-16 students.
- The school was last inspected in July 2010, and the last full inspection report for the residential provision was published in January 2013.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further develop the quality of teaching to ensure that all lessons are brought up to the standard of the best.
- Ensure that individual risk assessments for students identify specific risk factors and risk reduction strategies.
- Take steps to identify and address any causes for concern among the staff, particularly teaching assistants, in order to maintain the strong ethos of teamwork and the focus on students' achievement.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement — Outstanding

Students make outstanding progress with their learning over time as a result of the exceptional quality of teaching across the school. Students demonstrate a wide range of attainment on entry to the school, most typically at the end of Key Stage 3. The majority of students have missed periods of schooling or suffered significant personal trauma during their previous educational experience. As a result, their levels of attainment are often two or three years below the national average on entry to the school. The school has exemplary arrangements in place for the tracking of students' progress, and records show the considerable achievements of the majority in English, mathematics and science.

The breadth of the curriculum, together with appropriate allocations of time, ensure that students are successful in achieving a wide range of certification in academic and vocational subjects. A particular strength in students' achievements is seen in the outstanding progress made in art and the performing arts. Outstanding individual performances in the school pantomime, performed during the inspection, illustrate the extent of development in communication and social skills achieved by many students. All students make sufficient progress to achieve success in external examinations, including functional skills awards, GCSE, BTEC vocational awards, and occasionally at GCE A level. These external accreditations represent outstanding progress overall, with many students exceeding the nationally expected rates of progress, particularly during Key Stage 4. All students move on to successful re-integration into mainstream schools, further education or employment.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development — Outstanding

Students' behaviour and the extent of their personal development, over time, are outstanding. The school is an orderly community in which students with complex needs are made to feel welcome and enabled to achieve. There are incidents of misbehaviour and some students struggle to manage their anxiety or to integrate readily into social situations. However, teachers and teaching assistants have excellent working relationships and share the responsibility for engaging students and enabling them to take an active part in their learning. Overall, students' engagement and interest during the inspection were at least good, and often outstanding, in every lesson observed. There were many examples of individuals and groups of students demonstrating extensive improvement in their emotional and social well-being since entering the school.

The school makes excellent provision for the moral, social and emotional aspects of students' development. The school's therapeutic centre, known as the HEART, makes an outstanding and powerful contribution to the manner in which students integrate successfully into the school. Here students are welcomed into an environment where their personal needs are evaluated, and supported by a variety of therapies for those who find aspects of the transition more challenging. The HEART continues to play an important role in the longer term support of more vulnerable students, ensuring they are given the additional time to adjust socially or emotionally to the demands of the school routines.

The quality of relationships and role models between adults and with students enables students to make strong personal friendships. In some cases, where they have not previously succeeded, they learn to develop respect and consideration for others. Students' overall attendance is below the national average, but shows significant improvement over time for many students. There are numerous opportunities in the curriculum, including the well-planned citizenship course, for students to learn about public services and institutions, including democratic processes and the workings of the legal system. The humanities curriculum contributes effectively to students' cultural development, with a number of themes which celebrate diversity and encourage respect

and tolerance for different cultures and religions. School assemblies, often based on topical themes with a strong multicultural dimension, also enhance students' awareness of important events in Britain and abroad. The school involves students in its very varied social calendar, providing them with good opportunities to contribute to the local community, including arranging events for local elderly citizens. The very effective combination of opportunities to perform publicly and to mix in varied social settings enables students to achieve personal and social success at a high level.

Quality of teaching — Outstanding

The quality of teaching is outstanding and results in outstanding achievement for students. The staff exhibit a common sense of purpose and work effectively towards agreed goals. The extent of planning for learning for individual students is exemplary; in the majority of lessons teachers prepare individual lesson plans for each student. The role of HEART is outstanding in preparing students for effective learning. Students are supported well with their learning through an exceptional system of tutor-group-based and specialist teaching assistants. The management of behaviour is achieved largely through setting appropriate work which interests and challenges students. All members of staff demonstrate excellent levels of skill and expertise in subject teaching and understanding the complex needs of the students. A further strength is seen in the quality of questioning by many teachers, uncovering new layers of learning and challenging students to justify their oral answers. Lessons proceed at a good pace and excellent use is made of visual resources, together with appropriate information and communication technology.

Procedures for the assessment of students' achievement and the tracking of progress are systematic and consistent across the school. Students receive continuous feedback about the extent of their progress and what they need to do next in order to improve. Assessment tasks and standards are derived effectively from the external course specifications at Key Stage 4 and for post-16 students. This ensures that staff have a robust understanding of the levels at which students are working and are able to adjust and re-focus targets as achievements are recorded.

Quality of curriculum — Outstanding

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding and contributes positively to students' outstanding achievement. It provides a wide range of subjects for all students and ensures that all have access to the full range of required areas of experience. There is an appropriate emphasis on core skills in literacy, numeracy, science and ICT. Arrangements for additional support with the teaching of literacy for any students who may have fallen behind are exceptional. There is an excellent balance in the range of subjects studied throughout the school; experiences in the humanities, design and technology, creative and expressive arts and physical education complement the appropriate emphasis on the development of core academic skills. Residential students have an extensive range of activities, both on and off site, available to stimulate and engage their interests, and develop and enrich their social experiences. They benefit from well-planned transition programmes and students develop their independence and life skills at a pace and level appropriate to their understanding and ability. Consequently, students are well prepared for the realities of life beyond the school and are given optimum opportunities to improve their life chances and succeed.

The school makes excellent, integrated use of external providers. The Key Stage 4 curriculum, for example, enables students to achieve success in horse and animal care, land-based studies, construction and building trades, beauty therapy, and catering and hospitality. These courses, whether onsite or with external providers, result in a range of accreditation, most typically at BTEC levels 1 and 2. Appropriate opportunities are in place for students to choose to continue with their studies in modern foreign languages into Key Stage 4. The post-16 curriculum caters particularly well for students who require additional time to secure the required levels of emotional and social independence to move on successfully to further education or employment. The school ensures

that a flexible personalised programme is provided for each post-16 student. For the majority, this involves a combination of school and college learning, together with work experience or community service. The majority experience success in level 1 or 2 vocational qualifications or, in exceptional cases, at AS or A level.

The curriculum is further strengthened through the availability of a variety of excellent enrichment activities, including The Duke of Edinburgh Award, cross-curricular themes, public performances, individual music tuition and international visits. The curriculum is successful in securing outstanding progress for students across the full range of their academic, personal and social development.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety — Outstanding

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of students are outstanding and contribute effectively to the maintenance of a safe and stimulating learning environment. The trustees and senior leaders have ensured that all the regulatory requirements are met. There is excellent organisation and a clear understanding of roles among the staff with management responsibilities. As a result, arrangements for safeguarding students are exceptional. All the required checks on the suitability of staff are completed effectively and recorded in the required single central register. Senior leaders, in both the school and residential provision, work together to ensure that staff training and procedures for child protection are robust and up to date. The school listens, responds and acts on the views and suggestions of students, thus empowering them, as they know their opinions are valued. Staff have a very clear understanding of each student's specific vulnerabilities and have effective strategies in place to support them. Staff are skilled in de-escalation techniques and physical intervention is rare. Consequently, students are able to consider their behaviour and develop an understanding of ways to manage their feelings and anxieties. Risks to students are identified, but are not individualised in sufficient detail to ensure that measures to reduce risk are fully considered to protect their well-being.

The overall effectiveness of the residential provision at the school is outstanding. Residential students flourish within a nurturing and empowering environment, which values their strengths and unique qualities. Students receive high quality, individualised support from a cohesive staff team who works together to deliver an excellent service which meets residential students' holistic needs. The principles of equality and diversity underpin all aspects of student care and support. Residential students demonstrate self-confidence, calmness and socially acceptable behaviour as they mature. They thoroughly enjoy their residential experience and feel safe at the school, which provides excellent opportunities for their personal development and fulfilment.

Robust arrangements are implemented to ensure the safety of the site and accommodation, and both policies and practice pay due regard to statutory requirements. Risk assessments for the premises, for fire safety and to manage the needs of individual students and activities are thorough and up to date. All the required routine checks on fire safety are completed and recorded in both the school and the residential accommodation. Staff are trained to the required levels in first aid, fire safety and food hygiene.

Leadership and management — Outstanding

The quality of leadership and management is outstanding in both the school and the residential provision. The school's leaders and trustees have ensured that all the regulatory requirements are met. Excellent teamwork is evident in the senior leadership team and strong efforts are made to ensure effective communication across the staff and student community. Senior leaders and the trustees share a clear vision and understanding of the school's purposes, and high expectations of what students can achieve are evident throughout the school. The quality of the school's evaluation and review of its practice is first class and results in highly effective development planning and identification of strategic objectives. The school's leaders have ensured outstanding

outcomes for students in both their personal and academic achievements.

Residential students benefit from dynamic leadership and management that continually drive forward improvement and the pursuit of excellence. Managers, staff and governors have a shared appreciation of the value of the residential provision as a central and important aspect of the school and its benefit to residential students, impacting extremely positively on their learning and social development. High levels of detailed monitoring, review and evaluation, together with an overall reflective approach, result in the service continually evolving to meet students' needs. Residential students benefit from staff who are highly trained, competent and committed to improving students' outcomes.

The trustees contribute effectively to the monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the school, and provide appropriate challenge to senior leaders. Responses to the staff questionnaire demonstrate a high level of support for the school, although some dissatisfaction was expressed, particularly by non-teaching staff, about a perceived isolation of the senior team from the staff. The great majority of parents who responded to the online questionnaire expressed positive views about their children's experiences at the school; they state that their children are happy and safe at the school and well cared for. The premises are suitably maintained and provide excellent facilities, including extensive grounds for games and recreation. The school provides all the required information for parents and carers, including appropriate procedures for the resolution of any complaints. The school's leaders have demonstrated an excellent capacity to maintain high standards and to implement the well-conceived strategic plan.

Outcomes for residential pupils	**Outstanding**
Quality of residential provision and care	**Outstanding**
Residential pupils' safety	**Outstanding**
Leadership and management of the residential provision	**Outstanding**

What inspection judgements mean

School and residential provision		
Grade	**Judgement**	**Description**
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and care and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education and care that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education and care it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education and care has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	131611
Social care unique reference number	SC024063
Inspection number	422728
DfE registration number	886/6079

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.
The inspection of residential provision 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.

Type of school	Residential special school for students with speech, language and communication needs and autistic spectrum conditions.
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	10–19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	107
Number of part time pupils	0
Number of boarders on roll	29
Proprietor	West Heath 2000
Chair	Stuart Crookshank
Principal	Christina Wells
Date of previous school inspection	6–7 July 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£18,781–£46,122
Annual fees (residential)	£49,717–£77,058
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