

# Wells Park School

Wells Park School, Lambourne Road, Chigwell, Essex IG7 6NN

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Wells Park School is a residential special school for 50 pupils aged between five and 11. Forty of these pupils reside at the school for four nights a week. The residential accommodation is provided in four integrated houses located on the school site. The school is situated in a residential area of Chigwell, and caters for children who have emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. The residential provision was last inspected in December 2016.

**Inspection dates:** 19 to 21 February 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,** taking into account **outstanding**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The residential special school provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the school contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people.

**Date of previous inspection:** 13 December 2016

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- The children have developed warm, positive relationships with a highly motivated and dynamic staff team that knows and understands the children's individual needs.
- The children are treated with dignity and are taught to respect each other's differences. They are supported to help and encourage each other.
- The senior leaders and the strategic director continually strive to improve this excellent service, resulting in clear improvements and new initiatives.
- Excellent monitoring continues to identify key strengths and areas for further development.
- The children have fun and thrive in a safe and nurturing environment. Staff provide effective risk management that enables the children to have new and positive experiences with their peers.
- The children benefit from a wide variety of activities in the residential setting and the community that help them to build and maintain friendships
- The children are unquestionably at the centre of the school and residential setting. The children know how proud the staff are of their achievements.
- The children make excellent progress in developing their social and independence skills due to their time in the residential provision.
- The staff understand that transitions in and out of the residential provision can be difficult for both parents and children. There are excellent and supportive plans in place to ensure that transitions are smooth.
- A dynamic and forward-thinking management team ensures that staff are fully trained and supported so that the children continue to reach their full potential.
- Leaders and managers are innovative and creative in looking at ways to develop the staff team.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

The children make excellent progress because of their shared experiences while staying in a stimulating, nurturing and fun environment. The children clearly enjoy their experiences and enthusiastically talk about their achievements in the residential provision. Parents commented that their children have been able to make and maintain positive friendships, which they had not been able to do previously.

The children thrive and make good progress in their education because of the approaches used by the whole staff team. A star-chart system tracks and monitors each child, enabling proactive identification of potential triggers of upset, distress, anger and anxiety. Excellent information sharing between the residential and academic staff means that all of the staff are well prepared and well placed to detect early indicators of issues that may affect the children's readiness to learn. Consequently, low-key early intervention means that children are soothed and helped to manage their emotions so that they can benefit from their education.

The children have built secure, positive relationships with a highly skilled and dedicated staff team. The staff clearly want the children to have the best possible experiences. The staff are passionate about ensuring that this happens, and fully involve the children in planning their care and enabling them to have positive and new challenges in a safe environment.

The staff are extremely tactile with the children, and this supports the children to feel secure and cared for. The children were demonstrative in their affections for the staff after returning from the half-term break.

The children are not excluded from any of the staff offices because staff see the school and residential provision as belonging to the children. The children understand and respect this.

During the inspection, after-school activities included playing guitars and keyboards, board games and Lego construction. The staff spend quality time with the children, which supports the staff to identify any potential issues that may arise. The staff observe the children in a calm and non-intrusive way. They understand the children's triggers and areas of potential risk, and put strategies in place before an incident occurs.

The children flourish, developing their independence skills in line with their age, understanding and ability. A parent commented, 'It's like having a different child at home. He makes his bed, helps tidy up and wants to help. He's really proud of himself.'

Transitions are managed very well. The strategic director and another senior

manager visit the parents and the child at home prior to the child coming to the school. There is a comprehensive information pack for both parents and children, and forms that the staff help each to complete. These visits ensure that parents are given the opportunity to discuss how they wish their child to be cared for, and that children are able to ask questions before visiting. There is good evidence that the staff work closely with parents to support this process.

The staff anticipate that the children will miss some aspects of being at home. A member of staff brings her dog in a few days a week. Norman the dog has a message that is displayed in reception on the days that he visits. The children were observed stopping to pat Norman and have a chat. The children look forward to him coming in and this leads to conversations about their pets at home.

Communication between the staff and parents is excellent. A parent commented, 'My son Skype calls me on a Monday and I then speak to him every night apart from Thursday as the children go out on a big activity. He's always so excited to tell me what he's been doing.'

The parents spoken to could not praise the staff and the support that their children have received highly enough. A parent said, 'My son had been excluded from several schools because of his behaviour. I was really struggling as he was refusing to attend school and his siblings were afraid of him. He's a changed boy now. I can take him out and he is so well behaved, and his brothers can't wait for him to come home on a Friday. This provision has given me my son back.' The staff clearly know and understand the individual needs of the children and spend quality time talking to them and listening to their wishes and feelings.

Mealtimes are sociable experiences. The children are encouraged to eat a well-balanced and healthy diet. There is always a healthy variety of food including salads, fruit and yoghurts. The food is of a high quality. The catering staff have an excellent knowledge of children's dietary needs and fully cater for these. The staff eat with the children. The children were seen sharing food and helping each other, making plans for the evening and talking about their day. During mealtimes, there is lots of chatter and laughter and fun, and the children and staff clearly enjoy sharing their news.

The children are encouraged to lead healthy life styles. After school, they participate in a wide variety of activities such as time on the playground, volleyball and table tennis. The children have a good understanding of the importance of making healthy choices. The children participate in healthy Friday, during which they get to do an activity which is fun and healthy, such as yoga. The children spoken to said that they enjoy this time before going home for the weekend. One child commented, 'I have been doing yoga and I have learned how to breathe when I am angry, which keeps me calm. I do it at home as well.' Learning new coping techniques helps the children to manage when they become upset.

The children have been involved in making the rules and setting boundaries in the residential setting. This means that the children take responsibility for the way in

which they treat and respect each other.

The children are clearly central to the residential setting. Each flat is decorated to a very high standard and represents the different age groups. The flats are exceptionally personalised. There are photos of children and staff sharing activities in the school and residential setting. The children are involved in a camera club and their photos are on display.

### **How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding**

The effective implementation of safeguarding policies alongside the staff's understanding of the importance of reporting concerns mean that the children are safe. The designated safeguarding lead undertakes a safeguarding audit bi-annually, which is sent to the local safeguarding board. The safeguarding governor also undertakes regular audits. These actions ensure that the school and residential provision are working in line with their policies and procedures to safeguard the children.

All of the staff have undertaken safeguarding training, with regular purposeful refreshers. All safeguarding concerns are reported. The designated safeguarding lead works closely with the relevant agencies to ensure that required safeguarding actions are implemented. The safeguarding lead and strategic director have been able to successfully challenge the decisions made by other agencies when those decisions have not been in the best interest of the child.

The communication between all of the staff is highly proactive. Detailed handovers before the children return from school provide regular opportunities for the staff to share concerns and achievements. Any concerns regarding behaviour or safeguarding are discussed so that the staff are fully aware of any potential issues. At the beginning of the week, school-to-home books are read out during handover, which can lead to discussions with the children to support them if needed. This information sharing and subsequent discussion is effective in supporting the children to settle back into the residential provision.

The children know how to complain, and the staff are proactive in making sure that children have the opportunity to do so. The independent visitor and governors spend time with the children to gain their views, wishes and feelings. The children can record their concerns in a 'something's not quite right' book. There have been no complaints since the last inspection.

The children say that they feel safe in the residential provision because the staff look after them and keep them safe. The children could all name staff with whom they would speak if they were worried or upset. The children are confident that staff would listen to and help them.

The parents spoken to said that their children are safe. One parent commented, 'I know that he's safe, and more importantly he knows this. At his last school, he said that he didn't feel safe because the staff could not manage his behaviours. He now has the time and space to talk to staff who he knows care about him after an incident. It has made such a difference. He's finally getting an education.'

There are details for outside agencies that the children can contact if they do not wish to speak to the staff. An independent person who the children could all name visits regularly and spends time talking to the children. The governors also visit on a regular basis to gain the children's views. Consequently, the children have a variety of adults with whom they can speak.

The staff understand that the children need to have purposeful and meaningful experiences while learning to manage risks in accordance with their age, understanding and ability. The staff are not risk-averse. Therefore, the children have the opportunity to access a wide range of new and stimulating experiences in a safe environment.

The effective implementation of risk assessments actively ensures that the children are safe throughout their stay. These assessments are monitored and amended when necessary. When children first arrive at the residential provision, they stay in a single-occupancy room. The staff undertake a comprehensive risk assessment and talk to the children about who they would like to share a room with. This helps to ensure effective matching to safeguard the children.

The children's behaviour is exemplary. The children are taught to listen to and respect each other, and not to hurt each other physically or emotionally. During the inspection, the children were polite and welcoming. They spoke proudly about how staying in the residential provision has helped them. One child commented, 'I hated school and was excluded from my last two schools. I love it here because the staff get me and are always about to talk to. My mum says that she's very proud of me.' The children recognise the positive changes that they have made.

The children work in both school and the residential provision to gain tokens for good behaviour and helping others. These tokens can be spent in the token shop on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. Each half-term, the children discuss what activity they would like to do in their respective houses. The activities are then planned during the term. The children can save tokens for a big activity at the end of the term. During the inspection, the children were observed excitedly spending their tokens on their activities.

The staff rarely use physical holds in either the residential or school setting. Each hold is accurately recorded and there is considerable monitoring of the records of interventions. These records are analysed to look at emerging patterns or trends so that preventative strategies can be put in place before the need for a child to be held arises.

There have been no incidents of bullying. The staff are vigilant about any concerns involving bullying or discriminatory behaviours and are committed to challenging and openly discussing any potential issues. There have been no incidents of children going missing since the last inspection. The staff know what to do should this occur.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

Senior managers at the school and in the residential provision are dedicated and fully committed to providing effective and efficient leadership. Collectively, they ensure that the children have the best possible outcomes. The staff have high aspirations for the children and in turn the children have high aspirations for themselves. The staff understand that children progress through play, learning and having fun.

The headteacher and strategic director are an integral part of the school, and are available for children, staff and visitors. The headteacher and strategic director spend time with the children in the residential provision, having tea with them and catching up with them about their day. They greet children as they arrive at school on a Monday and support them getting into their taxis on a Friday. The senior managers know the children and support their weekly transitions to and from the school.

The senior managers strive for continuous improvement. They actively research effective approaches to behaviour management and working with the children. Some of the staff visited another outstanding school for one week to understand the strategies and operation of that school. The managers used and adapted what they had learned, and incorporated the good practice that they had seen into practice at this school.

The staff seek regular feedback from the children in a wide variety of ways. The children meet together after school and before activities, and the staff use this time to find out the children's wishes and feelings. There is clear evidence that children's ideas and opinions have been listened to and acted on. Some of the children have been involved in designing the new playground and were very proud to share the plans.

The care that the children receive is exceptional. The adults at the school and in the residential provision work closely together to meet the children's needs and enhance the children's progress.

Senior managers work proactively with the local authority, parents and local schools to support children to transition back into mainstream education. There is strong evidence of the work undertaken by senior managers with local authority schools to support the staff in working with children who have challenging behaviours.

The staff communicate exceptionally well with parents and carers. Those spoken to commented that they can speak to staff at any time, and if they were worried or concerned the staff would listen and help them.

Managers and staff receive regular, recorded supervision. The strategic director has supervision from a designated person from the local authority in order to support her in her role and keep her updated with any changes in legislation. There are weekly staff meetings and training sessions that support the staff in working with the children. These regular meetings ensure that the staff are kept fully updated about the children, and serve to further embed good practice. All of the staff have had an up-to-date appraisal.

Managers are innovative and creative in looking at ways to develop the staff team. Currently, the school is working with an accredited body to develop a national vocational award at level 3 that is tailored to the work that the staff do with the children. There is a clear aim to make learning meaningful for the staff and ensure that practice further elevates the quality of the residential care provided for the children.

The experienced, dedicated and highly motivated staff team works to enhance the life experiences of the children, who are central to everything that they do.

The school and residential provision is warm, welcoming and nurturing, and immediately puts the children and visitors at ease. It is run by a highly effective, forward-thinking management team that has a clear vision of how it wants to continue to develop, to ensure that children fulfil their potential.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the national minimum standards.

## **Residential special school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC018021

**Headteacher:** Matthew Surman

**Strategic Director:** Carole Mitchell

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Trish Palmer, social care inspector (lead)  
Sonia Hay, social care inspector



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