

# 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 February 2018.

**Inspection dates:** 7 to 9 January 2019

**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:** 19 February 2018

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Children have developed highly positive relationships with an accomplished and dynamic staff team. The staff interact exceptionally well with the children.
- Children have excellent opportunities to succeed academically and socially. The children make significant progress because of their experiences in the residential provision.
- The children clearly enjoy their time in residential, and they feel safe. All of the children said that they can speak to staff if they are worried or upset.
- Excellent safeguarding practice underpins everything that the staff do. Training is of a high quality, and the staff have exceptional knowledge of reporting and recording any concerns.
- Residential and academic staff work hard to build and sustain highly positive and supportive relationships with the children's parents.
- Staff are not risk-averse. They give children the opportunity to play and be children through nurturing positive experiences in the residential provision and access to community-based activities.
- Excellent monitoring continues to develop. It identifies the strengths of the residential provision and areas for further development.
- The senior managers continue to drive the provision forward by sharing and implementing research-based practice to enhance the experiences and progress of children.
- A forward-thinking and dynamic senior management team listens to and values staff's opinions and ideas and supports them to develop new ideas that help the children to progress.

## Inspection judgements

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

Children flourish and make excellent progress because of this exceptional school and residential provision. The headteacher, strategic director and senior staff are enthusiastic about and fully committed to improving the children's lives through new and exciting experiences. Together, these staff continually strive to further develop the service and the experiences and outcomes for children, who are clearly at the centre of their practice.

Children have clearly built strong, secure and positive relationships with a highly dedicated and motivated staff team that provides them with consistent care. Warm, genuine relationships were observed throughout the inspection. Staff are appropriately tactile with the children. The children were clearly pleased to see the staff after returning from their Christmas break. There was an atmosphere of excitement, with the children keen to share their news with the staff and each other.

There is a wide variety of activities available to the children, both in the residential provision and in the community. The staff spend quality time with the children. There is a great deal of laughter and genuine warmth between the staff and children.

Mealtimes are fun and sociable occasions. Children are encouraged to share food and listen to each other, and to have good table manners. The children take turns to set and clear the table, which helps them to develop a sense of responsibility. Meals are nutritious. The catering staff provide a healthy, well-balanced diet. Salad and fresh fruit are always on offer. The children have some input into menus through their representation on the school council.

Staff help children to develop their independence in accordance with the children's age, understanding and ability. Parents said that the residential provision has given their children confidence, and that the children often use their newly developed independence skills at home. These skills help to prepare children for adult life.

Staff have an excellent understanding of children's health needs. Comprehensive healthcare plans guide staff to help them to meet individual needs. Medication procedures are meticulous. The staff take a respectful approach to dispensing children's medication.

Staff are accomplished at recognising and understanding children's patterns of behaviours, and can defuse and deflect incidents before they escalate. Bullying is not an issue. The staff are quick to respond to any potential difficulties in peer relationships.

Transitions are managed very well. The strategic director and a senior member of staff visit each parent and child in the child's own home prior to the child coming to the school. A comprehensive information pack for children and

parents is provided during the first home visit. Parents and children visit the school prior to the child's admission, and can ask staff any questions that they may have. Parents said that this process is reassuring, and gave them the opportunity to begin to build relationships with staff prior to their child attending the school and residential provision.

Parents gave exceptionally high praise for the senior and residential staff in respect of the support that they have given to their children. A parent said, '[My child] has finally been accepted. Because of this, he has been able to grow. His behaviour has improved. For the first time, he has friends.'

Children are involved in the running of the residential provision. Staff gain the children's views through conversations at mealtimes and via the school council, as well as through visits from an independent visitor. Children have input into menus, activities and the decoration and furnishing of their residential houses.

The residential accommodation is decorated and maintained to a very high standard. Each house is individualised, and the age range and personality of the children is clear in each house. Children are encouraged to personalise their bedrooms by bringing in personal items from home and choosing posters for their rooms. There are photos throughout the residential provision of children enjoying a wide range of activities. Norman, the school's dog, is still a big part of the children's stay. Children have an opportunity to talk about the pets that they have at home.

Children's manners are impeccable. The children are welcoming, kind and thoughtful, making sure that visitors are comfortable and looked after. This ethos runs through the whole school.

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

The safeguarding of children is a high priority at the school and in the residential provision. Proactive and creative safeguarding practice means that all children have a sense of safety. Staff report concerns to the designated officer, and said that they are confident that any concerns are investigated appropriately.

When risks to children are not being adequately addressed by other agencies, there is rigorous challenge and appropriate escalation by the strategic director and designated safeguarding lead. In one recent case, the school's intervention resulted in the child being appropriately safeguarded through a child protection plan.

The safeguarding lead reports to and attends core groups and child protection conferences and provides challenge when risks are not reducing for children. In examples seen during the inspection, these actions resulted in children being better protected by the relevant agencies. There is prompt liaison with external professionals when particularly vulnerable children are absent from school. A proactive approach, including home visiting, ensures that absence from school

is quickly resolved.

Leaders and managers continue to maintain highly effective partnerships with external professionals. A social worker spoke very positively about partnership working with the school, citing clear and frequent communication as a strength.

Children said that they feel safe. They spoke with confidence about how to complain, and how to tell adults about problems. The children are confident that if they have any concerns, the concerns will be addressed.

Handover is effective in ensuring that important information, including information about significant events during the school holidays, is shared between academic staff and residential staff. This information sharing ensures a smooth transition for children between school and the residential provision.

High staff ratios and rigorous monitoring systems mean that potential risks to children are recognised and proactively addressed. When children's needs are not adequately addressed, concerns are escalated to the safeguarding lead through a formal notification process. Highly proactive support for parents, including home visits and supporting parents to access services, ensures that children are protected from neglect and other forms of abuse.

All of the staff and governors have undertaken safeguarding training. The safeguarding lead undertakes a biannual safeguarding audit for the local authority. The audit record is reviewed by the safeguarding governor.

All identified risks to children are known and understood by staff. Comprehensive risk assessments guide staff in reducing harm or the risk of harm. The children's sleeping arrangements are risk assessed as some children share bedrooms. The risk-reduction strategies ensure that children are safe, and provide contingency plans. The comprehensive risk assessments are reviewed following significant incidents to reflect current risks and provide mitigating actions.

Frequent contact with parents includes home visits to resolve specific challenges for children. Parents value a weekly chat book that is updated by residential staff. Parents said that the new format of parents' evenings, which include having a meal at the residential house, helps them to have insight into the experiences of their children.

Helping children to make the right choices at the right time has been linked to children's wider safety. The school has provided internet-safety awareness sessions to staff, parents and children. The school has ensured that all staff and governors have undertaken training and are fully conversant with the 'Prevent' duty. The school helps the children to develop their awareness, for example through a prominent display on the risks of radicalisation.

Children have clear structures, routines and boundaries that help them to understand expectations and to feel safe. The children work to gain tokens for good behaviour and helping others. Positive reinforcement and incentives encourage good behaviour.

Physical interventions are used as a last resort and only to safeguard and protect. Each hold is recorded. A more comprehensive monitoring system has been implemented since the last inspection. This monitoring enables senior staff to break down each hold to days, times, staff and the activity of the child. This means that trends and patterns are easily identified, and extra support can be put in place to reduce the need for children to be held.

No children have gone missing since the last inspection. Individualised protocols provide guidance for staff in the event of an incident. 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.

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

Knowledgeable, committed and enthusiastic leaders and managers lead this residential provision. They have high aspirations for children and themselves, and they continue to drive the residential provision forward. The strategic director has been in post for a considerable time and is spoken of highly by professionals, staff, children, parents and governors. Leaders are ambitious for the school and for the children who attend.

The teaching staff and residential staff contribute to children's annual reviews, and children are helped to contribute. Consequently, the children understand the progress that they have made, the targets that have been set and the areas that they need to develop.

The headteacher and strategic director are an integral part of the school. They visit the residential houses daily and catch up with the children and listen to their news. They greet children on Monday mornings from the taxis and support the children into their taxis on Friday afternoons. The headteacher and strategic director have an exceptional understanding of children who find the transition from home to school and vice versa difficult. Excellent plans of support enable a smooth transition.

The staff receive regular, recorded supervision. They have daily house meetings to plan the shift and discuss any issues that might arise with the children. Information is shared through daily handovers and weekly staff meetings. There are clear discussions about children, practice, training and staff development.

Staff have all undertaken relevant training, including a level 3 vocational qualification. Since the last inspection, a senior member of staff has completed an Open Degree BA (hons). All staff are undertaking a level 3 social pedagogy course. The school understands the importance of having appropriately qualified staff working with the children.

Parents said that communication between the academic staff and residential staff is excellent. Parents are kept fully updated on issues relating to their child.

The care that the children receive at school and in the residential provision is

exceptional. Leaders and managers continue to research approaches that help to provide staff with a greater understanding of behaviours and enable the children to progress. Leaders and managers adapt good practice that they have seen in other schools, and they are keen to share good practice that they have developed to support schools and other agencies.

New monitoring systems are more robust. The monitoring systems show that the children using the residential provision have progressed socially and emotionally.

The school governors undertake regular monitoring visits, and the children are consulted as part of this process. The governors are a visible presence at the school and are known to the children.

## **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/teacher in charge:** Matthew Surman

**Strategic Director:** Carole Mitchell

**Type of school:** residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Trish Palmer: social care inspector (lead)

Brenda McInerney: Her Majesty's Inspector, social care



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