

# 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 day and residential special school in Chigwell. It is maintained by Essex County Council. The school caters for children aged between five and 11 who have complex emotional, behavioural and social difficulties.

There are 57 pupils on roll. There were 40 residential pupils at the time of the inspection. Residential pupils board between Monday and Friday for four nights. The residential accommodation is provided in four integrated houses located on the school site.

The head of boarding has been in post for under one year and is working towards a relevant qualification.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

### Inspection dates: 1 to 3 March 2022

**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:** 3 December 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

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

The residential provision has an exceptional impact not only on the children who board but also the local community and other social care and education providers. The staff are tenacious in their commitment and actions to help children to achieve their full potential.

Progress is exceptional from children's starting points, including children who have not been in education for some time. Children make impressive progress in their behaviour, learning, relationships and communication. Staff swiftly identify the children's priority needs and provide targeted support. This has led to a child improving their weight management and diet.

Staff demonstrate passion, dedication and tenacity in their care practices. The atmosphere at the school is one of warmth and kindness. Interactions between staff and children are excellent. Staff are exceptionally gifted at providing boundaried yet affectionate care. Children know what is expected of them and this helps them to gain a sense of safety and security. When needed, staff give children low level prompts to defuse behaviour and give them chances to put things right. Staff work hard to successfully create an environment in which children thrive.

The children are involved in charitable work such as supporting a food bank which is set up on the school site. The children have recently helped a local resident to celebrate their 104th birthday. The school has fully embedded community links. The children's engagement with the community helps them to gain a sense of pride and improves their self-worth and that of others.

Support from staff extends to parents and helps them to mirror positive responses to children's behaviour. One social worker described the residential provision as 'perfect', with staff consistently going above and beyond expectations for the child. Parents unanimously said that their children have made tangible progress in their time at the school and in residence. Parents said that progress is evident for children who have only been at the school for a short time.

One parent said, 'The school has not just given our son the education and support that he deserves, but the staff have given us as a family help and support. I can honestly say that the school staff have gone beyond any expectations that I had. This is not just a school, but a family.'

Children and their families are fully supported through the introduction period at the school. Staff visit the children in their family homes to gain an understanding of the children before they join the school. Children have an opportunity to visit the school and, when helpful, have short stays before they start. This substantially reduces anxieties for children, some of whom are away from their families for the first time.

Staff say that children in residence make greater progress compared to children who attend school daily. Staff recognise improvements in attendance, the establishing and maintaining of friendships and improved literacy and numeracy. Staff read with the children in the morning and evenings. In addition, the reward system requires children to build their understanding of numeracy. Children view learning tasks as fun activities.

Children love being in residence. They unanimously say that the staff make residence 'great'. Children said that they have lots of opportunities to try different things and appreciate that these would not necessarily be accessible to them if they were not in residence.

The school has its own radio station with specialist equipment which children can use. The radio station is fun, integrated throughout the whole school and children of all ages are involved. The radio station promotes positive messages about the environment and children can make requests and play their favourite songs. Children put on a Christmas performance. Due to COVID-19 related restrictions, the performance could not be attended in person. Instead, staff adapted and videoed it and sent it out to parents, children and social workers to watch.

The staff have high aspirations for children. The structured activities are devised to stretch children's capabilities and grow their confidence. At a local adventure centre, the children engage in a programme of adventure training, including learning bush craft and animal care. Children experience camping and are involved in the development of the school's farm. Children readily acknowledge that being a part of the school has helped them to improve their self-esteem.

Children's achievements are continually and consistently celebrated by staff. Awards, certificates and pictures of celebrations are visible throughout the school and residence. The positivity at this school is infectious, not only for children but for adults too. Staff have held birthday parties for children who have never experienced a party before. Children benefit from enriched experiences that contribute to their progress.

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

Safeguarding practice is exceptional and keeps children safe. At times, the school has also improved the safety and well-being of the children's families. Safeguarding concerns are frequent and at times complex. However, this does not dilute the effective responses and management of concerns. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is an asset to the school and the children. The DSL is tenacious and has made numerous re-referrals when she has felt that responses from partner agencies have fallen below standard. On occasion, this has led to multi-agency collaboration that has substantially reduced risks and improved the safety of children. Without the DSL's tenacity, these outcomes would not have been achieved.

The DSL makes calls to a parent at weekends to check on their well-being, delivers food parcels to parents to ensure that children are fed and supports families with their benefit and housing enquiries. The DSL knows the children and their families exceptionally well. Despite several difficult conversations with parents, the DSL has been able to foster good relationships with them. These relationships have enabled parents to understand that the school truly has the children's best interests at the heart of its practice.

Staff have a clear understanding of safeguarding and whistle-blowing procedures. Education and residential staff work as a collective to share concerns about children in their care. These early and proactive detection systems lead to children getting support swiftly.

Staff are acutely aware of the importance of online safety and are consistently professionally curious. Staff readily identify concerns discussed by the children. Staff's swift actions support children when they have become unsafe online. The education and residential staff work exceptionally well together to ensure that they have a full understanding of online risks.

Children said that they feel safe at school. Some children have made many disclosures to staff. This is testament to the trust that they have in staff to help and support them when they feel scared.

The reinforcement of positive behaviour is well embedded. There is a clear reward system which is consistently applied by the staff. This is a motivating factor to improving the children's behaviour.

Restraint is used reasonably and proportionately. The child's view is sought and staff are provided with a debrief. There is excellent analysis of the themes and trends in physical restraint. This enables staff to consider effective responsive actions to reduce the use of restraint. The data shows that restraint has significantly reduced since September 2021.

Risk assessments are sophisticated and are complemented by distress management plans. Combined, these plans provide staff with clear guidance on how to support a child in crisis.

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

The head of care is innovative and creative. She shares the school's outstanding practices through the advice and guidance that she provides to other education providers. The head of care is reflective and open to challenge. Her practice is underpinned by a strongly embedded trauma-informed theoretical approach. She models this approach to the wider team. This enhances the staff's practice and improves outcomes for children. The staff are highly complimentary about the head

of care's leadership. Staff said that she is accessible and supportive and has children at the centre of all her decision-making.

A psychotherapist spends 15 hours a week at the school. She has a significantly positive impact on children's progress and outcomes. Staff benefit from her experience and guidance and gain a psychoanalytical understanding of the children's behaviours. The psychotherapist has worked directly with families, which has led to stabilisation of children so that they can continue to access school and residence. The psychoanalyst meets with all families before children start at the school and halfway through the year to discuss children's progress. This is an excellent source of support.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the school went above and beyond expectations to support the children and their families. Feedback from families demonstrates their gratitude for food parcels, visits from friendly faces and advice and guidance that the staff provided about housing and benefits. This exceptional practice was very much needed at an exceptionally difficult time.

External monitoring is undertaken to an excellent standard. Monitoring visits provide comprehensive and objective oversight of the care in residence. Senior leaders engage fully with the monitoring process. The external monitoring reports provide rigorous challenge. Actions in response to monitoring further improve the already outstanding care.

Leaders and managers have exceptional relationships with parents, social workers, the local authority and the local community. Training and support are provided to local schools to share best practice and promote inclusion in mainstream settings. These links strengthen relationships.

Leaders and managers actively encourage tolerance, equality and diversity. The children have a rich exposure to a broad variety of experiences to help widen their understanding of diversity and difference. These include celebrating events such as Christmas, Pride, Diwali and participating in African drumming and sampling food from a variety of cultures.

Leaders and managers have created an impressive ethos of hope, joy, belonging and love. Examples of the school's ethos can be seen in every interaction and discussion that staff have. Leaders, managers and the staff hold great aspirations for themselves personally, as a school and for the children they care for. As a result, children have a 'can-do attitude' and make remarkable progress from their starting points at the school.

## **Information about this inspection**

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people 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

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Margaret Burke, HMI Social Care Inspector



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