

Inspection of West Heath School

Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1SR

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 May 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are extremely positive about their school. Some take time to settle and develop trusting relationships with their peers and staff. Often, this is due to pupils having had unsettling experiences in previous schools. Staff know this. They expect the best from all pupils but are sensitive when pupils struggle. This includes in the school's health, education, assessment and revitalising therapy (HEART) department, where pupils enjoy additional expert support for their complex needs.

Pupils behave exceptionally well, even when struggling to regulate their emotions and anxieties. Staff are adept at managing this and refocusing pupils when there are potential problems. Older pupils set a good example for their younger peers. Discussions with pupils showed them to be positive about what the school offers. They like the staff, including therapists, who they say have great patience and help to keep them safe.

All staff work hard to build pupils' resilience and self-esteem. This was typified by one teacher describing the need to be 'emotionally astute' and the absolute imperative for staff to be 'clever at reading the learners and understand their needs, including their many barriers to achieving'. Inspectors found this to be the case.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Staff are dedicated and always put pupils first. They strive to provide a nurturing environment where pupils thrive and gradually rebuild their confidence to learn and achieve. The relatively new senior leadership team has ensured that the quality of education the school provides continues to be excellent. Trustees are supportive and active. Their work with leaders and managers at the school has ensured that all aspects of the independent school standards continue to be met.

Teaching and support staff are dedicated. Many have served the school for a long time. Most are experts in their field and have developed their expertise further in supporting their already vulnerable pupils through COVID-19. The large majority of staff who responded to Ofsted's survey were positive about their work at the school.

The school's curriculum is broadly aligned with the national curriculum at key stages 2 and 3. However, pupils follow bespoke programmes of study which staff design with each individual pupil in mind. Although they use schemes of work as a starting point, staff are mindful of the stage pupils are at. They design learning which is aimed at the individual and based on careful assessment of what pupils know and can do.

This approach continues in key stage 4 and beyond into the sixth form. Older pupils benefit from an impressive breadth of options. These include traditional GCSE courses and a range of vocational options, or a mix of both if appropriate. For some pupils, sixth form takes place at a satellite site located at a local further education college. Students enjoy the opportunity this gives them to develop their social skills

and prepare them for life after they leave the school. The school also uses a range of other off-site facilities to enrich the curriculum offer.

The school's HEART department provides an additional level of care, especially for pupils' mental health and anxieties. However, this is not a 'soft option' academically. Expectations are high. Pupils can study for a range of GCSEs, including mathematics and English. Classroom visits found pupils very engaged in their studies. During one session, pupils discussed a new character they had just been introduced to in a set text they were studying. Women's rights, poverty and the importance of education were also part of the mix as pupils reflected on their thoughts about the book.

Reading has a high priority at the school. Specialist interventions to help pupils develop their reading skills include support from the school's speech and language therapy team. Class reading books are chosen carefully. Staff know they need to interest pupils, as well as strengthen their understanding of the world around them. Younger pupils enjoy role play, acting out key aspects linked to their work in English. Staff understand that by making learning fun, most pupils will engage more confidently.

The arts also play a big part in the school. Pupil study for a range of qualifications, or none at all, simply enjoying the enrichment the arts bring to their lives. Much of the artwork on display is of high quality. Pupils enjoy their time in the art department. This includes open sessions at breaktime. Most are happy to discuss their work, much of it with personal links to their lives and emotions.

The personal development of pupils has a high priority. This goes well beyond the school's formal curriculum, or the wide range of extra-curricular activities available. Pupils were gleeful before they left for a trip to the London Science Museum during the inspection. They were just as excited as they got off the coach on their return. Pupils were keen for inspectors to join a lunchtime meeting of their LGBT+ group. Age-appropriate information is available about sexual health. Additional support and advice are made available when staff become aware of issues that impact on pupils' lives out of school.

Discussions with pupils revealed very forthright views about certain aspects of the school. This was also reflected in the pupil survey. Not all pupils who responded to the survey were 100% positive. However, pupils who talked to inspectors formally and informally were positive about how staff deal with their problems. Some pupils disagreed with each other. Impressively, the dialogue that followed was respectful, leading to some pupils changing their original responses, or at least softening their stances.

Most parent responses to Ofsted's survey were supportive of the school. Comments included views on good communication, high degrees of care and growing academic success. Some parents also provided personal reflections about the very positive impact the school is having on their families.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand the additional vulnerabilities of pupils who attend the school. They know what to do if concerned. Leaders responsible for safeguarding are experienced and knowledgeable. They act when they need to. Their record-keeping and systems to identify problems, then help and support pupils and their families, are fit for purpose.

Pupils learn how to stay safe through the formal curriculum and by additional planned initiatives. Staff deliver focused pieces of work to individuals or groups when required. Their knowledge of potential dangers faced by pupils is constantly updated because safeguarding leaders are proactive in their approach to safeguarding.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	131611
DfE registration number	886/6079
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10220945
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent residential special school
Age range of pupils	10 to 20
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	141
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	25
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	West Heath 2000
Chair	Pauline Knutton
Headteacher	Photini Bohacek
Annual fees (day pupils)	£52,500 to £82,500
Telephone number	01732 460553
Website	www.westheathschool.com
Email address	photini.bohacek@westheathschool.com
Date of previous inspection	19 to 21 November 2019

Information about this school

- West Heath School provides residential or day provision for up to 150 pupils in the age range 10 to 20 years. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school provides for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties and other associated needs. Some pupils have autism spectrum disorder, and some have been excluded from mainstream education prior to joining West Heath School.
- The school provides additional support for a small number of pupils with additional complex needs in its HEART department.
- The school uses a number of external providers to extend the school's curriculum. This includes some of the school's sixth-form provision which takes place at North Kent College.
- The school's previous standard inspection took place in November 2019.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- This was an aligned inspection of the school's education and residential provisions. Although these were two different aligned events, inspectors worked closely together on some aspects of the separate inspections.
- The inspection team considered additional information brought to their attention on the Department for Education's inspection commissioning form.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the principal, senior leaders, curriculum leaders and teaching and support staff. The lead inspector held a meeting with the chair of the board of trustees and two other trustees.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics and art. Deep dives included visiting lessons, including in the sixth form, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time.
- One inspector visited the school's additional sixth-form site situated at North Kent College, Tonbridge.

- Inspectors toured the premises and accommodation of the school. They checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. They also reviewed the school's website and other records regarding the welfare, and health and safety of pupils and staff, linked to the independent school standards.
- Inspectors gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload.
- Pupils were talked to throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. This included two formal meetings with mixed groups of pupils.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted's online parent survey. Ofsted's staff and pupil surveys were also taken into account.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

James Broadbridge

Her Majesty's Inspector

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