

Wells Park

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 primary school which is part of The Beckmead Trust. Essex County Council previously operated the school. Due to the change of operation to The Beckmead Trust, this is the first inspection reported on as part of the trust. The school caters for children aged between five and 11 who experience social, emotional and mental health difficulties.

There are 56 pupils on roll. There were 39 residential pupils at the time of this 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 since September 2021 and is working towards a relevant qualification.

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

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 December 2023

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: not previously inspected

Overall judgement at last inspection: not applicable

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The whole staff team has high aspirations for children. Consequently, the outcomes for children are extremely impressive. Many children arrive at the school having not been in education for some time. Baseline and current assessments demonstrate that children make rapid progress in their learning after joining the school. Overall, all children make clear academic, social and emotional gains.

Last year, out of 13 children who left the school in Year 6, three children went on to mainstream education. Moves from the school to new education provisions are meticulously planned. Staff support the children and their families to move on from the school to new beginnings exceptionally well.

Staff have an acute understanding of the importance of relationships. This understanding underpins staff's commitment to continuing to support children even after they leave the school. Staff support education colleagues, sharing their skills and knowledge to help maintain an ex-student at another provision. An ex-student who left over 10 years ago returned to the school to request support from staff. This support was swiftly given without question. The staff have extensive positive influence on children that endures during and after their time at the school.

The staff go above and beyond expectations to support children. In the absence of mental health and specialist support, the school has self-funded play therapy and speech and language therapy for those children who require it. The staff do not see challenges, moreover an opportunity to create positive change.

Staff are exceptionally well attuned to the children's needs. They give children individual time and differentiate their approach dependent on need. The children have exceptionally strong and trusting relationships with staff and clearly love being in their company. Children's behaviour is exceptionally good. This is a direct result of the staff's support and care.

Activities are enjoyable, exciting and broad in their scope. Activities all have clear objectives that develop children socially, emotionally and educationally. Staff encourage children to be creative and brave. Staff give children choice but are on hand to support as and when children require it. This enables children to try new things and broaden their experiences. The opportunities to engage socially are impressive. Trips to wildlife parks, theme parks, theatres and activity centres are frequently on offer.

Placement planning is carried out thoroughly and underpinned therapeutically. Staff tailor support to children's diverse needs exceptionally well. Staff provide support to children through praise, clear reward systems, relationship-based practice and breaking down information in line with the child's cognitive ability and learning style.

Staff understand the part that they play in ensuring that children retain positive memories from their time at the school. Staff are acutely aware that for some children, their life journey may mean that they lose their connection to their past. Staff have created specific memory books for these children that document their journey at the school. Staff understand the importance of children's experiences and how they link into the formation of identity. Children can take these books with them when they leave the school. This gives children tangible memories that represent part of their life story.

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

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) is exceptionally effective in her role. She has a reach outside of the school that tenaciously supports not just children but their families too. The DSL is accessible to families at weekends and school holidays, an offer which is above and beyond the expectation of her role.

The DSL and the wider staff team undertake activities that far exceed their roles. Staff have taken children for haircuts and the school has paid for outfits for special occasions, collected furniture for families in need and even paid utility bills when families have not been able to meet these costs. Staff routinely send families in need food parcels. These are exceptionally kind and thoughtful practices which make the lives of families in crisis that little bit easier.

Risk assessments are concise and succinct, only assessing what needs to be considered. This makes them easy to understand and follow. Risk assessments are underpinned by a theoretical understanding that behaviour is a communication method. Consequently, staff are adept at addressing the root causes of presenting risks instead of just addressing the behaviour itself. This leads to swift behavioural changes in children from their starting points.

Safeguarding records are clear and accessible and demonstrate what action was taken by whom and when. The DSL is tenacious in her work and makes direct challenge to external professionals when she feels that they are not acting in the best interests of children.

Restraint is used proportionately and only when necessary. Staff understand that children require different de-escalation approaches dependent on their needs and emotional state. Soothing techniques that are referred to in children's plans are readily used in practice to maintain positive behaviour and calm children when they become unsettled.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are exceptional. Their dedication, commitment and highly attuned expertise directly affect the well-being of children and their families.

Leaders and managers are aspirational for the children, the staff and themselves.

Leaders and managers maintain strong relationships with other professionals and the wider community. Consequently, the community benefits from the school as well as the children who attend. Community links are extensive and impressive. The continued work with a residential home and the on-site food bank touches numerous lives in the community.

Leaders continue to consider how they can improve the lives of children and become an even more important pillar of the community. Recently, the headteacher forged links with a construction firm and successfully secured funding for a community classroom that will be built in the school grounds. This will expand the school's already impressive offer of outdoor learning. This new addition will be accessible to some members in the community and other education providers.

The staff are trained in a range of theoretical approaches. Some staff provide training in theoretical practice to other education providers. Consequently, leaders and managers influence a greater number of children than those who attend the school.

Internal and external monitoring processes drive the already high standards in residence. The head of care engages exceptionally well in external monitoring processes. This demonstrates her eagerness to continue to progress the provision.

Staff speak highly of the head of care. They value the support, training and guidance from the head of care. Staff say that this support improves their capacity to care for children with adverse childhood experiences.

The love and care that are nurtured and modelled by leaders are profound. Staff are committed to upholding the ethos of the school. Consequently, children have a sense of belonging, joy and hope. For many, this is a first in an education setting for a very long time.

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: 2747505

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Matthew Surman

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector

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