

West Heath School

The New School at West Heath, Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1SR

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is an independent co-educational residential special school, situated in Kent, for students with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school provides places for day and boarding pupils between the ages of 10 and 20. The school offers residential placements from Monday to Thursday during term time. The school has five boarding houses, which are located within the grounds of the school. These can accommodate up to 22 residential students. At the time of the inspection, there were 14 residential students.

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

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 January 2024

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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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: 10 May 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Students thrive in the boarding provision. They make exceptional progress and have opportunities to make their 'mark' in the world, giving them a sense of worth and meaning. Students enjoy socialising and making friendships for the first time in their lives. They take driving lessons, learn to budget, shop and prepare and cook meals. These activities prepare them for the future and increase their opportunities to achieve.

Students have strong relationships with staff who nurture them. Staff have a meticulous understanding of each student and how to tailor the support needed to meet their individual needs. In many cases, this relationship lasts throughout a student's time in boarding. Parents' feedback about staff is exceptional. One parent said, 'We were so lucky to find this school. Staff are incredible; there is constant dialogue to work through any problems together.'

Students develop feelings of security and belonging. Preparations when students move in are highly individualised and carefully paced. Students are actively involved in their care planning and their voices are listened to. This is a key strength throughout their boarding experience.

The exceptional progress that students make is supported (and accelerated) by a skilled team of staff. Staff work closely together with teachers and therapists to identify and understand the critical areas for each student's development and to target these in a comprehensive and coordinated manner. This approach includes working in partnership with students' families. One parent said, 'It's a miracle. [Child] did not have a life plan before starting at the school, but they have grown in self-confidence, and now they know their future.'

Students are encouraged to participate in activities that promote their sense of achievement, confidence and self-worth. Within the boarding provision (which is located in beautiful surroundings) is 'The Hub'. This is where students can meet to play on computers, watch films, play pool or air hockey, or just enjoy spending time with their friends. Students also visit their friends in the neighbouring houses.

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

Students live in a safe and supportive environment. A skilled safeguarding team ensures that any concerns are identified swiftly and managed well.

Staff create effective working relationships with professionals outside of the school. This ensures that students are provided with safe care. The school has an open and

transparent approach to all safeguarding concerns and seeks professional guidance whenever this is required.

Staff produce high-quality care and safety plans, which are written alongside students, their families and other professionals. This ensures that all plans are based on well-informed assessments of students' needs.

Staff are aware of safeguarding processes and their importance within a wider safeguarding network. Students and parents have absolute trust in the safeguarding culture at the school. Students spoke about being able to raise any concerns in relation to bullying. They describe the boarding accommodation as a relaxed, calm and safe space to live in.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers demonstrate an exceedingly ambitious vision for the residential provision and for individual students. They draw on (and contribute to) research to create an environment that enables children to flourish.

Leaders and managers ensure that everyone has high expectations for what all students can achieve. This results in a whole-school approach that successfully improves students' quality of life and that of their families.

Trustees are well placed to oversee the work of the residential provision. They have an extensive knowledge of the work being done through their own observations, informative reports from an independent visitor and specialist advice from independently appointed experts.

Leaders and managers have excellent, open relationships with trustees, with all parties having mutual respect for each other's roles. High levels of scrutiny ensure a drive for continual improvement. Leaders are always looking for better ways to meet their objectives. Consequently, children receive exceptional care.

Leaders and managers provide an excellent, supportive environment for staff through well-structured supervision and bespoke training programmes. Staff in the residential provision report very high levels of job satisfaction and, as a result, staff retention is excellent. The continuity of care this affords greatly benefits students. One member of staff said, 'I always feel supported by managers and my colleagues. It's a great place to work.'

Students' views are central to how the residential provision runs. Their participation has produced tangible improvements. These include the language that staff use within their care planning and records. Students know that their opinions matter and that they can make positive changes. The implementation of an online reporting system for students has given an additional opportunity for their voice to be heard, and allows them to report any concerns, which are acted on quickly.

Staff are enthusiastic about their role and the impact that they have supporting children to succeed. One member of staff said, 'I believe that we make a difference to many lives, and that gives me purpose within my role.'

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: SC024063

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Photini Bohacek

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Hannah Cox, Social Care Inspector

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