

The New School at West Heath

Independent special school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Lucy Martin HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of boarding provision was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000³ having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools, in order to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided.

Information about the school

The New School at West Heath is a day and residential special school for boys and girls of secondary school age. It is located on the outskirts of Sevenoaks in Kent. The original West Heath School opened in 1932 and closed in 1997. The present school opened on the same site in 1998. Currently there are 116 students on roll who have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities. The majority have communication difficulties and several have additional behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. All except seven of the students have a statement of special educational needs. About a quarter of students are girls. The school draws its students from a wide range of local authorities, mainly in the south of England. The school's motto is 'rebuilding lives through education'. It aims to nurture and to educate young people in a safe and highly supportive environment and affirms that: 'We believe in our students until they believe in themselves.' The school was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2007 and the boarding provision was inspected by Ofsted in January 2010.

Evaluation of the school

The New School at West Heath meets its aims and provides a good quality of education and care. The curriculum is outstanding and the quality of the boarding provision is good. Students make good progress and the school has taken satisfactory action since the last inspection when it did not meet a few regulations regarding students' welfare, health and safety. It now meets all the regulations for independent schools and its safeguarding arrangements are good. The leadership is aware of areas for further improvement and has suitable plans to take the school forward.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/ukpga_20000014_en_1

Quality of education

The outstanding curriculum provides a very wide range of experiences and is matched closely to the specific learning needs of students. It includes the National Curriculum and is supported by schemes of work and planning for all subjects. Students in Years 10 and 11 are able to choose from a good range of options which includes several GCSE courses. The post-16 curriculum includes a very appropriate independence programme and the study of A-level and vocational courses. The expressive arts are given a very high priority, with all students having weekly drama lessons where they develop their communication, speaking and listening skills. During the inspection, students were engrossed in rehearsing a 'Mad Hatter' performance to present to parents and guests. An excellent personal, social and health education programme includes 'self-science' emotional education lessons which help students develop strategies to understand and manage their emotions. The physical education curriculum is supported by excellent on-site facilities and there is good preparation for adult life in boarding.

The school has established a Health, Education, Assessments and Revitalising Therapy (HEART) unit where all new students follow an induction programme, usually for two weeks. Students' specific individual needs are assessed and any additional support needed to enable students to access the curriculum is identified. This support includes individual timetables and access to a range of therapies, for example speech and language therapy and massage. Older students are given extensive careers advice through the Connexions service and have the opportunity for work experience.

The students' statements of special educational needs are reviewed thoroughly as required. The staff analyse each statement and prioritise the most pressing needs of the students to enable them to fully access the curriculum.

A very wide range of educational visits enriches the curriculum. These include not only local and national trips but also travel abroad with recent visits to Disneyland Paris, for a performing arts study programme, and to Beijing. The school is currently raising funds for a school in Kenya, which a group of staff and students intend to visit in the summer. There is a wide range of extended curricular opportunities both during and after school.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Teachers are confident, have good subject knowledge and know the students very well. They are well informed about their prior attainment and specific learning needs, which are clearly identified in each student's individual education plan. In the best lessons, detailed planning sets out clearly what students are expected to learn and students are made aware of their specific objectives. Students confirmed that they like this thorough, step-by-step approach and feel that it helps them in their learning. A high ratio of staff to students supports the learning well. All the teaching assistants are trained and some have attended specialist training. Each class has two teaching assistants who accompany

their class through the day. These assistants form an invaluable link between different subject teachers and help to maintain continuity for each individual student. The school uses a good range of strategies to support the development of students' communication skills, including targeted withdrawal groups and visual prompts, although the various strategies are not yet drawn together into an overarching policy on communication. Students mostly show good attitudes to their work and confirmed that the staff were approachable and that they felt comfortable asking for additional help should they need it. In most lessons the pace of learning is good and students stay on task. Some students have a history of non-attendance at their previous school and their re-engagement with learning is a credit to the staff who work hard to ensure that their lessons are sufficiently interesting to motivate the students to attend. A significant number of students have in the past exhibited anxious and challenging behaviour. The specialist training of staff, combined with the very positive relationships between staff and students, enables staff to use a variety of techniques to defuse situations and to teach students self-reliance and independence. Students' work is marked regularly but the quality of marking is variable, with limited written comments suggesting improvements. The school's self-evaluation identifies the need to improve marking and provide students with more detailed feedback.

Students' progress is assessed termly and carefully monitored to ensure that each student is on target. Students make good progress, particularly when compared with the underachievement of many in their previous schools. They achieve several GCSE examination passes and some gain additional vocational qualifications.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Attendance is good, although in the past year there have been a number of fixed-term exclusions which were made in line with the school's policy. There is a friendly, welcoming atmosphere; students are proud of their school and are happy to speak to visitors. An older student commented that, 'This school is making my dreams come true.' Students' personal and social development is outstanding. The extensive expressive arts subjects are instrumental in raising students' self-esteem and self-confidence. Opportunities to participate in productions and performances unleash, in some of the students, hidden talents which they have not previously felt safe to express. The students decided to call their theatre company the Acting Up Theatre Company and all have the opportunity to take part. Twice-weekly assemblies contribute to the students' understanding of life both within and outside school. Students raise funds for charity and are currently raising funds for a school in Kenya. The students are adamant that there is very little bullying and that the staff deal with it well. A positive reward system enables students to gain merits for attainment and achievement in class. The school council, composed of students from all year groups, has been effective in giving the students a voice and actively contributes to the decision-making process in the school. The students' behaviour is good. The code of behaviour and expectation is known by all students and reinforced during lessons.

Staff provide excellent role models. They treat the students with kindness and respect and the students respond by putting their trust in them. The school is a sociable community and all students mix well. Older students undertake posts of responsibility as head boy, head girl and ambassadors within the school. The school is well known in the local community and the annual Lawnfest is attended by local residents, including the Mayor. A range of visits outside school introduce students to public institutions and services, for example when they visit an art exhibition in Bristol or take part in the Kent Youth Parliament election. The school has some good international links to promote students' knowledge of different world cultures. However, students have fewer opportunities to learn about the diverse religions and cultures in the United Kingdom, an area the school has identified for enhancement. Students' economic well-being is promoted successfully through the development of information and communication technology and basic numeracy and literacy skills. The social care provision significantly aids the students' development in this area.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of students is good. Education and care staff are committed to providing a supportive and caring environment and demonstrate a good understanding of each student's individual needs. There are robust health and safety policies and procedures which cover effectively all aspects of the school's work, including child protection and boarding. Fire drills are held regularly, including in boarding time, and there is routine servicing and testing of fire, gas and electric appliances. Risk assessments are carried out consistently and are particularly comprehensive regarding school trips.

Students feel safe and well supported. An updated bullying policy now meets regulations and staff respond quickly and effectively to any incidents. Training in behaviour management is provided and staff respond to challenging behaviour well in a calm and non-confrontational manner. Robust safeguarding arrangements are in place and staff have received appropriate training in this area.

A healthy lifestyle is promoted, with regular opportunities for physical exercise. There are a variety of healthy foods available, including a well-stocked salad bar at lunch, fresh fruit and water coolers around the school for easy access.

The admission and attendance registers now comply with regulations. The school has a three-year action plan indicating how it will fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has checked the suitability of all staff, the proprietor and other adults to work with children through rigorous appointment procedures, and maintains a single central register of such checks.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are maintained well and enable students to learn safely and effectively. There are sufficient classrooms and teaching areas for the numbers on roll. There are distinct areas of learning for Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and for post-16. Some classrooms are purpose-built while others are in the refurbished original 18th century house. In addition, there are specialist facilities such as a music recording studio, a food and nutrition suite and a dance studio. There are also a number of small rooms for individual literacy and language and communication support. The school has a large school hall, a sports centre which has an indoor heated swimming pool, and, outside, 32 acres where there are sports pitches and hard tennis courts.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a good range of information for parents, carers and others through its prospectus, newsletters and informative website. Parents and carers feel well informed about their child's progress and there is regular contact with tutors and keyworkers in respect of boarders. The school has a texting service which is used regularly to communicate specific information to parents and carers. Termly reports provide good detail on how well students are making progress, including in boarding. Parents and carers are actively involved in meetings such as the statement of special education needs reviews. The boarding houses have handbooks for new boarders which are colourful and informative.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear complaints policy which fully meets both education and boarding requirements.

Effectiveness of the boarding provision

The overall quality of the boarding provision at the school is good and there are aspects which are outstanding. Boarders enjoy their experience of boarding and feel safe and well supported. One boarder commented, 'It is fantastic, I love it.' The boarding management structure includes members of the school's leadership team and directly oversees and monitors boarding. This contributes effectively to the promotion of boarders' welfare. All except two of the key national minimum standards were found to be met. At present, there is weekly boarding only.

Five recommendations were made at the last inspection and all have been met. The complaints procedure has been updated as has the procedure regarding boarders who are absent without permission. A risk assessment has been carried out of the areas where bullying is most likely. There is improved lighting outside the boarding houses, which are removed from the main school, with further work planned. The

school now maintains a central sanctions record for major sanctions but this does not include the minor sanctions imposed on boarders in the boarding houses.

Boarders' health needs at the school are met well; for example, there are varied opportunities for physical activity in boarding time. Parents and carers retain responsibility for ensuring that routine medical and dental matters are attended to, although there are effective links with local surgeries if urgent medical or dental treatment is required. There are sound procedures for the administration of medication, with regular monitoring.

The boarders are provided with a good variety of healthy, nutritional food. All mealtimes are sociable, informal occasions with staff and students eating together. Boarders are involved in choosing the weekly food menus in the boarding houses and a number of older boarders shop for, prepare and cook some of their own meals. Breakfast and evening meals are in the boarding houses while lunch is in the main school dining room. There is a variety of food provided, including a vegetarian choice and an extensive salad bar. The main school kitchen has been awarded the top five star award in food hygiene by the local council.

Boarders feel safe at the school. They are confident about reporting concerns or issues of bullying to staff and say that they are quickly and effectively dealt with. The behaviour of the boarders is generally good, with staff responding positively to acceptable behaviour. Unacceptable behaviour is consistently challenged. All incidents are recorded and comprehensive records are completed when a physical intervention takes place. Since the last inspection, major sanctions, such as exclusions, have been recorded, but there are no records maintained of more minor sanctions imposed in the boarding houses, and consequently the school is not fully compliant with the national minimum standards.

Child protection procedures are robust and there are effective links with outside agencies. Good levels of training are provided for all staff in child protection and they are aware of the reporting procedures. There are sound staff recruitment procedures and all the required checks are completed.

Boarders receive high levels of support from the care staff. In addition to the informal time spent together, each boarder has regular sessions with their keyworker which are well recorded and link to the individual targets set for each boarder. Communication and relationships between the school and the care staff are good. Meetings take place to ensure that key information is shared and the care staff contribute to reviews and write end-of-term reports. Boarders enjoy a variety of activities both on and off the school site. There has been a recent go-karting trip and an end-of-term outing has been arranged to a theme park.

The support provided to boarders is documented fully in their boarding files. Boarders are fully involved in the running of the boarding houses. Weekly meetings take place and boarders are involved in decisions regarding décor, food and

activities. Students were also involved in the appointment of the new vice principal of care for next term.

The boarders' accommodation consists of five bungalows in the grounds with individual bedrooms, a living room and a kitchen/dining room. Older students live in a specially converted semi-detached house in the grounds. All the accommodation is in a good state of repair and decoration. The bedrooms are well personalised and furnishings are homely and of good quality.

There is a small but consistent number of care staff, in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the boarders at all times. There are sound, professional relationships and the staff know the individual boarders well. There is a commitment to provide training to staff in boarding practice. Staff feel well supported and regular formal supervision sessions take place for day staff, but not for the waking night staff who work at the school. There is effective leadership of boarding and monitoring of practice.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

In order to meet the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated regulations, the school must:

- ensure that a record of all sanctions applied to boarders is maintained (breach of national minimum standard 10.9)
- ensure that the night staff receive formal supervision in accordance with the national minimum standards (breach of national minimum standard 30.2).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the quality of marking so that students receive more detailed feedback on how they might improve their work
- produce a communication policy which draws together the various strategies used by the school to aid students' communication skills
- extend students' knowledge and understanding of the different cultural and religious traditions in the United Kingdom.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils		✓		

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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The quality of boarding provision

Evaluation of boarding provision		✓		
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School details

Name of school	The New School at West Heath		
DCSF number	886/6079		
Unique reference number (URN)	131611		
Type of school	Special residential school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1998		
Age range of students	11–18		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 86	Girls: 30	Total: 116
Number of boarders	Boys: 16	Girls: 10	Total: 26
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 79	Girls: 28	Total: 107
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 6	Girls: 4	Total: 10
Annual fees (day students)	£18,569–£53,56		
Annual fees (boarders)	£49,146 – £84,177		
Address of school	Ashgrove Road Sevenoaks Kent TN13 1SR		
Telephone number	01732 460553		
Fax number	01732 456734		
Email address	principal@westheathschool.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Christina Wells		
Proprietor	West Heath 2000		
Reporting inspector	Lucy Martin HMI		
Dates of inspection	6–7 July 2010		