

The New School at West Heath

Independent Special School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6079
Unique Reference Number	131611
Inspection number	316967
Inspection dates	13-14 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Hartland

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The New School at West Heath is an approved special school. It is located near Sevenoaks in the west of Kent. The original West Heath School opened in 1932 and closed in 1997. The New School at West Heath opened in 1998. There are 103 students on roll, aged between 11 and 18, of whom a quarter are girls. One third of the students are weekly boarders. Most of the students have a statement of special educational need. The school draws its students from a wide range of local authorities mainly in the south of England. It received its approval inspection from Ofsted in June 2003. The school was last inspected by the Commission for Social Care Inspection in September 2006. The school's motto is 'rebuilding lives through education.' It admits students who have experienced considerable difficulties in their lives which have had a damaging impact on their emotions and behaviour, their capacity to maintain good relationships and their ability to learn effectively in school. The school 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.*'

Evaluation of the school

The New School at West Heath provides a good quality of education with several outstanding features. The care and support the students receive is exemplary because the vision of the principal has very successfully permeated into the hearts and minds of all of the school's staff. The students make good progress as a result of good teaching, highly effective support and an excellent curriculum. The students' behaviour, their attitudes to learning and their personal development are good, as is the overall quality of welfare, health and safety. The school meets most of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding as a result of the determination and tenacity of the headteacher's efforts to provide as much as possible for the students in her care. The school's fundamental principle is that academic success is the key to increased life chances and the breadth, range and richness of the curriculum reflect that aspiration. At all levels the planning of the curriculum is detailed and thorough. There are clear subject policies and comprehensive schemes of work along with

personalised lesson planning which ensures that activities are very sharply focused on the individual needs of students. The students have access to an exceptionally wide range of subject options in the years leading up to their first public examinations so that their individual interests and needs are served very well. The recruitment of specialist staff ensures that these courses are taught rigorously and to a high standard. The students also benefit from a wide range of sport and leisure activities which enrich their experience of school life. The personal, social, health and citizenship curriculum is particularly well developed. This covers a wide range of topics, including sex and relationship education, knowledge of public institutions and thorough preparation for accessing the world of work and independence. This provision is further enhanced by a range of highly effective individual services, including speech and language support to develop communication skills and one-to-one coaching, to enable students to manage their relationships and to promote their economic well-being. Very thorough record keeping enables the school to monitor and review individual students' programmes.

The residential provision is very effective in promoting the students' independence and their personal development. The school successfully promotes an awareness of healthier lifestyles. A high proportion of students are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award programme, which helps to build their confidence and nurtures a sense of self-reliance.

At post-16 level, students undertake academic or vocational courses at local colleges, which enable them to gain valuable qualifications and, for some, acts as a stepping-stone to university entrance. These opportunities have been carefully developed and are aligned sensitively to students' interests and aptitudes. This provision is combined with a balance of courses at the school, carefully matched to individual needs as before, but usually focused on the further development of students' basic skills in literacy and numeracy. A number of students also undertake extended work experience placements.

The quality of teaching throughout the school is good, leading to good rates of progress by the students. The staff know their students very well and relationships within the school community are excellent and have a significant impact in meeting the students' academic and personal needs. Staff have high expectations of the students and are appropriately flexible in adapting their approach to meet individual needs. The strongest teaching is well planned and involves the use of a range of teaching strategies to engage students' interest and to entice them into joining in and responding to questions. In the best lessons skilled questioning ensures that students understand what they are learning and when extra support is required. Praise is used well, along with an effective system of rewards. The students are very strongly supported by the high number of committed, well-trained and effective teaching assistants. The high staff-student ratio, very often with one-to one support, usually ensures excellent behaviour is the norm in lessons. Teachers work skilfully with resources, and the students make good use of the computers to be found in the classrooms.

The teachers' record keeping and their assessment of individual students' progress are good and are very effective. Precise and detailed tracking takes place on a regular basis. Information on the students' achievements is used carefully to develop personal learning programmes. The assessment of the non-academic aspects of students' development is firmly established and they make excellent progress in their attitudes to learning, emotional development, interpersonal skills and behaviour.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Staff work very hard to support students, some of whom are re-engaging with formal education after extended periods out of school or are facing significant personal and emotional issues. Effective relationships are central to the students' progress and the school is adept at providing an environment where students can gradually build confidence and regain their self-esteem and respect, both for themselves and others. Most students attend regularly and are responsive to the support and encouragement they receive, so improving their attitudes to learning. Behaviour is generally good. They co-operate readily with staff.

Over time, the students become more confident in expressing their opinions and the student council is an effective forum through which their views are communicated to the school leaders. There is good evidence, for example, that students enjoy and value the opportunities they receive through the residential experience and that they drive many of the key decisions which enable these units to function on a daily basis. They are involved in meeting the challenges of planning duty rotas, meals and shopping within the boarding house budgets. They also extend their confidence in dealing with others through attendance at off-site college courses at post-16 level. Good involvement in their school community is balanced by students' awareness of their wider responsibilities and their developing understanding of public institutions and services, elements promoted strongly through the citizenship curriculum. Throughout their time in school, students are very committed to the needs of others and are involved in regular fund-raising activities.

Students' cultural development is fostered well through the extensive and well-supported creative and performing arts opportunities within the curriculum and this is reflected in the range of sensitively-produced work in art and design. The students have regular opportunities to listen to and to compose music. Regular assemblies promote students' moral development well and provide some opportunities for reflection. The school's successful focus on the students' personal development and well-being gives them the confidence to increasingly engage with the feelings and needs of others which promotes attitudes of tolerance towards those of different faiths and races. They develop respect for themselves and others.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The provision for the students' welfare, health and safety is good. The small numbers in each class and the high regard shown for each individual student, means that they receive excellent levels of attention and supervision from staff. The school routinely provides nutritious meals and regular exercise to enable them to remain fit and healthy. The school's strong system of pastoral support and effective care procedures ensure that the students' emotional needs are met very successfully. The school has very effective working relationships with external agencies and the use of a wide range of specialists ensures that the students' additional needs are well-served.

The school has, in most respects, produced an appropriate range of policies to secure and promote the students' health, safety and welfare on site and whilst on visits to the community. Routine attention to health and safety is good. However, the policy to prevent and tackle instances of bullying is underdeveloped. There is effective supervision of students on trips out of school, supported by detailed risk assessments and a comprehensive written policy. Arrangements for child protection and safeguarding are good. The students indicate that they feel confident to talk to staff if they have problems. The school's policies are implemented effectively regarding the promotion of good behaviour and the administration of first aid. Accidents and incidents are recorded in detail and followed up appropriately. Arrangements for fire safety are secure.

The admission register and registers of attendance are maintained regularly but neither is kept fully in accord with the regulations. The school has yet to draw up an appropriate three-year plan to fully meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has robust procedures for the appointment of staff. All the required checks are carried out prior to appointment to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. The school maintains a thorough central record indicating that all required checks have been carried out.

School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are good and a wide range of facilities are provided, enabling students to learn safely and effectively. The original 18th century school house has been considerably extended and further blocks for teaching and boarding have been added. The school possesses extensive grounds which greatly enhance the quality of the environment in which the students work. There are a sufficient number of classrooms and teaching areas for the numbers on roll. Classroom walls are used especially well for displays of students' achievements and other useful information to support learning. In addition, the school has a number of

specialist facilities for art, design and food technology, dance, science, textiles and music along with a large gymnasium and good-sized indoor heated swimming pool. There are designated suites for literacy, numeracy, speech and language and a number of common rooms for the students, as well a library and dining areas. Outdoor, there are sports pitches and tennis courts. There are further designated rooms for staff, visiting specialists and administration. A well-equipped medical room caters for students who are ill during the school day.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a comprehensive range of information for parents. The aims of the school are set out clearly in the prospectus and there is a wealth of helpful information for new and prospective parents and carers. The school provides extremely comprehensive and very good quality annual progress reports. It makes available information to support the annual reviews of statements of students with special educational needs. Most parents feel that they are well-informed about their children's progress. All policies and statements about the curriculum, discipline and exclusions are available upon request.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a comprehensive policy for complaints which fully meets requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for students' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement a written policy to prevent bullying which has regard to the Department for Children, Schools and Families guidance *Bullying: don't suffer in silence* (paragraph 3(2)(a))
- ensure that the admission register and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure that all policies are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure compliance with the most recent legal requirements and conformity with good practice.

School details

Name of school	The New School at West Heath		
DCSF number	886/6079		
Unique reference number	131611		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1998		
Age range of students	11-18		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 79	Girls: 24	Total: 103
Number of boarders	Boys: 21	Girls: 10	Total: 31
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 75	Girls: 20	Total: 95
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 7	Girls: 5	Total: 12
Annual fees (day students)	£17,576		
Annual fees (boarders)	£46,526		
Address of school	Ashgrove Road Sevenoaks Kent TN13 1SR		
Telephone number	01732 460553		
Fax number	01732 456734		
Email address	principal@westheathschool.com		
Principal	Mrs Valerie May		
Proprietor	West Heath 2000		
Reporting inspector	Ian Hartland		
Dates of inspection	13-14 November 2007		