

# West Heath School

Ashgrove Road, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 1SR

## Inspection dates

14–16 March 2017

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
Effectiveness of leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	<b>Outstanding</b>
Outcomes for pupils	<b>Outstanding</b>
Sixth form provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	<b>Outstanding</b>

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- Exceptional leadership and management have ensured that West Heath remains outstanding.
- The newly appointed principal has wasted no time in building a highly effective senior leadership team around him.
- Leadership at all levels is strong, including that of the sixth form and the school's therapeutic provision for pupils with high levels of need.
- The school's unique culture and the total dedication of staff ensure that the social and emotional needs of pupils are met very well.
- Despite pupils' very complex needs, their outcomes are excellent due to the care and guidance given by staff and the consistent high quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Safeguarding is effective and given the highest priority by trustees, leaders and all other staff.
- Pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds achieve well here.
- The school's sixth form provides highly effective and finely tuned personalised pathways, resulting in successful outcomes for students.
- Governance of the school is strong. Trustees know the school well and are committed to ensuring that standards remain high.
- The school's curriculum is particularly strong and caters for the needs of individual pupils exceptionally well.
- Senior leaders and trustees have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.
- The school's new system to assess and monitor pupils' progress needs more time to embed before it becomes fully effective.
- Leaders' very strong focus on securing pupils' emotional well-being occasionally means too little focus is given to promoting academic success for individual pupils.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements and national minimum standards for residential special schools

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards'), the national minimum standards for residential special schools and associated requirements.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Further develop and refine the school's new system for assessing pupils' progress, so that leaders and teaching staff fully exploit its potential as a tool to improve outcomes.
- Make certain that the important balance between securing social and emotional stability and ensuring academic success is weighted in a way that supports every pupil to achieve his or her full potential.
- Ensure that residential staff implement a risk assessment for each house which clearly demonstrates that full consideration has been given to the compatibility of pupils residing together.

## Inspection judgements

<b>Effectiveness of leadership and management</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>Impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers in the residential provision</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
<b>How well children and young people are protected in the residential provision</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>

- Excellent leadership and management are at the heart of the school's success. The newly appointed principal has high aspirations and leads with a quiet confidence. Expectations are high. Everyone is required to carry out his or her role to a very high standard.
- A new head of residential provision, who has been in post since September 2016, leads an established, experienced and well-qualified team. Staff are ambitious for residential pupils to succeed and believe they can flourish. Staff members' drive and enthusiasm influence and motivate residential pupils to engage with staff and benefit from the support and opportunities on offer.
- Recent appointments within the wider leadership team have proved successful. Leaders at all levels work as a dedicated team. Despite the many strengths of the school, they are always seeking opportunities to improve things so that outcomes for pupils are as good as they can be.
- A strong culture of ongoing review and monitoring of the residential provision helps drive forward continuous improvements. Surveys, independent visitor reports and governor visits together with commissioned external audit reports contribute to robust scrutiny.
- The school's clearly stated vision of 'rebuilding lives through education' is woven through the day-to-day life at West Heath. Staff work hard to support and empower pupils to become successful learners, as well as developing the skills and confidence required to contribute to wider society. Learning about values such as integrity, respect and trust also helps pupils develop an understanding of the views and beliefs of others, as well as building their own self-belief and aspirations for the future.
- The residential team works cohesively, supporting each other to meet residential pupils' individual needs. They work collaboratively across the school to ensure the highest quality of care.
- School leaders understand that staff need to update their professional skills continuously, especially in light of the very complex needs of the school's pupils. Key staff also provide advice and a range of bespoke training to professionals from other schools and settings. Staff were particularly positive about their professional development in their replies to the Ofsted staff questionnaire.
- Staff training and development for residential staff has an equally high priority, directly linked to improving the quality of care provided for pupils. Through regular formal supervision, annual appraisal and informal ongoing discussion with managers, staff receive appropriate support and review of their practice to maintain high standards.
- The curriculum is impressive and caters for the needs of individual pupils exceptionally well. This is true in each year group and key stage of the school, including in the sixth form. Plans to develop outdoor education are well founded and demonstrate the way

leaders constantly seek to improve the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils.

- 'Self-science' lessons are one way in which the school delivers its programme of personal, social and health education. A wide range of therapeutic care, delivered through the HEART centre by highly qualified staff, is a unique aspect of the school. This is particularly important for pupils with high levels of need who require extra support to help the process of reintegration into the classroom.
- Pupils benefit from a broad range of extra-curricular activities, including residential visits and team-building days. These activities often serve to develop pupils' understanding of the world and better prepare them for life in modern Britain. Much of the extra-curricular offer focuses on building pupils' confidence and self-esteem, while visits to events such as 'Poetry Live!' in London promote pupils' enjoyment of learning.
- Parents and carers report excellent communication with residential staff. One parent reported that the residential staff 'know each child extremely well' and another commented that residential staff have an approach of 'working together' with them to support their child's progress.
- Outcomes for the vast majority of pupils are extremely positive. For many, simply being in a better position to meet the challenges that were previously barriers to learning and becoming active members of society represent life-changing progress. School leaders acknowledge that in some cases academic success should be given more priority to enable pupils to meet their full potential.
- At the last inspection, inspectors identified the school's 'exemplary' arrangements for tracking pupils' progress. Leaders have recently introduced a different system to assess and track pupils' progress and realise that further refinement will be needed before the system becomes fully effective.
- School leaders and the board of trustees are effective in ensuring that all of the independent school standards are met.

## **Governance**

- Governance of the school is strong. Trustees know the school well and have a sound knowledge of day-to-day life at West Heath, while ensuring their strategic overview is not compromised. Trustees ensure that statutory requirements are met well, particularly those that focus on the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff.
- There is a healthy mix of new and longer serving members on the board of trustees, with a good range of experience from both within and outside the field of education. The recent addition of a new trustee from an educational background will strengthen further the board's ability to support and challenge the school's leaders in order to maintain the school's high standards in the future.
- The appointment of the new principal by the board of trustees has been a particular success. There is no doubt that this decision has played a major part in the extremely positive outcomes of this inspection.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school complies with all elements of the independent school standards regarding the safety of pupils, including publishing a

suitable safeguarding policy on its website. Staff are vigilant and ensure the safeguarding of pupils is their very top priority. Other policies and procedures to keep pupils safe are implemented well, including in the school's residential provision.

- Highly effective safeguarding measures protect residential pupils. All staff are acutely aware of the vulnerability of residential pupils and protecting them is at the heart of practice.
- Senior leaders and managers make up the team of designated safeguarding leads. They are appropriately trained, experienced and diligent in responding to all safeguarding concerns. Strong links with external safeguarding agencies ensure that the correct action is taken to protect residential pupils.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate a commitment to improving safeguarding practice. The team of designated safeguarding leads meets daily to review any concerns. Weekly meetings review the action taken in response to concerns and further develop safeguarding practice. Any weaknesses in aspects of safeguarding are rectified promptly to protect pupils.
- Residential staff are well-trained, alert and confident in their safeguarding role, with the necessary understanding of current issues that can present a risk to residential pupils. These include child sexual exploitation, e-safety and radicalisation.
- Residential pupils reported that they felt safe residing at the school.
- Extremely positive relationships between residential pupils and staff underpin successful behaviour management strategies. Staff understand pupils' complex and particular needs well. Their consistent approach develops pupils' sense of security very effectively, thereby enabling them to respond positively to the support the staff offer. Consequently, residential staff use physical intervention rarely and only as a last resort to protect pupils from harm.
- Leaders have recently introduced a new system for monitoring and analysing incidents. Monitoring information enables leaders and managers to adapt and change practice throughout the school to reduce incidents and support pupils' behaviour effectively.
- There have been no incidents of pupils being reported missing since the last inspection of the school's residential provision.
- Comprehensive health and safety measures protect residential pupils. Appropriate fire safety checks are routinely applied, including regular fire drills. Robust recruitment processes are in place to safeguard residential pupils and ensure the suitability of the adults employed.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

## **Outstanding**

- Teaching staff know their pupils well. Consequently, staff plan and deliver high-quality personalised learning in a way that suits each individual in their care. This is the case in all phases of the school and across a broad range of subjects.
- Teaching staff have strong subject knowledge. The range of expertise among staff enables pupils to access excellent support and guidance, and enables teachers to identify misconceptions and fill gaps in pupils' knowledge very effectively.

- Support staff are extremely effective and are particularly instrumental in ensuring that pupils fully participate in lessons. This is especially the case in English and mathematics, where many pupils require extra encouragement and support in order to make the accelerated progress required for them to catch up.
- Teaching and support staff are tenacious in their attitudes to engage pupils in learning, even when pupils lack confidence in their own ability. During the inspection, there were many instances when inspectors witnessed staff successfully encouraging pupils to complete or improve their work. Levels of challenge and support are finely tuned, leading to very positive outcomes for most pupils.
- Patience and tolerant understanding of the complex needs of pupils ensure that relationships in classrooms are positive. One pupil told inspectors, 'They explain things in different ways to help you understand.' Another said, 'They are like friends who listen and care, as well as teaching you.'
- Teaching staff have just started to use the school's new system for assessing pupils' progress. Early indications are that this is already a useful tool to help teachers identify gaps and plan next steps in learning, although leaders know that more time is required to fully exploit the benefits that this system offers.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Outstanding**

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Most pupils who attend the school have had unsuccessful experiences in previous schools or educational settings. For many, West Heath is the first taste of stability and success they have experienced for some considerable time.
- Most pupils show very good attitudes to learning because staff understand their vulnerabilities and are sensitive to their needs. One pupil told inspectors, 'My one-to-one has made me less shy, and more confident, so I don't feel like I have to run off and hide.'
- Teaching and support staff attach great importance to removing barriers to learning. Creating opportunities for success ensures that pupils' emotional well-being is protected and their capacity to engage in learning is enhanced. Developing pupils' self-confidence and promoting a sense of self-worth are key components to all aspects of day-to-day life at the school.
- The individualised nature of the curriculum supports each pupil to stay safe and understand the potential dangers of the world around them. Visiting speakers and special events strengthen the school's wider curriculum to ensure that pupils understand how to identify and deal with bullying and about the potential risks posed by the internet and social media.

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Despite the very complex needs of many pupils, inspectors were impressed with their conduct and attitudes to learning throughout the inspection.
- High levels of staffing ensure that pupils are adequately supervised throughout the day.

Staff know pupils very well and employ successful strategies to ensure that problems do not escalate. The impact this has on improving relationships and the benefits it brings to pupils' subsequent engagement in learning in classrooms is key to the success of the school.

- Classroom visits showed positive relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils and their peers. Tellingly, a few instances of low-level off-task behaviour did not have a negative impact or disrupt learning.
- Most pupils attend school when they should. This includes students in the sixth form who attend off-site provision in local colleges, often accompanied by members of staff from West Heath. School leaders understand the importance of ensuring that pupils attend school and work hard to support families when problems arise, or when individual circumstances mean that attendance is not as good as it could be.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **Outstanding**

- Outcomes for pupils are outstanding. Most pupils join the school with low levels of attainment and major gaps in their knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects, but especially in English and mathematics. This is compounded by the severe and complex needs of most pupils, often meaning that their social and emotional needs have to be addressed before meaningful academic learning can take place.
- As a consequence of the outstanding quality of provision, most pupils make exceptional progress at West Heath. This is true of their academic progress, including in subjects other than English and mathematics, as well as their progress to overcome their personal barriers to becoming successful members of society.
- Expectations are high. Staff know that most pupils will need to make accelerated progress to catch up with or exceed age-appropriate expectations. Evidence gathered from classroom visits and talking to pupils and parents during the inspection clearly showed this to be the case for the majority of pupils. The school's own pupil progress information indicates that, after a period of transition, most pupils start to make the progress required to begin to address the deficits of the past.
- The breadth of the school's curriculum is a key factor in preparing pupils for further education, training or employment. Pupils enjoy the various options open to them, including in the arts and technology. Motivation to do well in these subjects is strong. Consequently, progress is also strong, and impacts well on improving pupils' functional mathematics and English skills.
- It is not possible to compare pupils' outcomes overall or by group with other schools nationally in a meaningful way. This is due to the very small numbers of pupils in each year group and the school's unique context.

### **Sixth form provision**

### **Outstanding**

- The sixth form provision is a strength of the school. Students benefit from flexible and bespoke pathways which deal well with the needs, interests and aspirations of each individual. Because of this, most students engage with their studies well, have positive attitudes to learning, and make excellent progress from their different starting points.

Nearly all students leaving the sixth form go on to further education, training or employment.

- Leadership of the sixth form is effective and has many of the outstanding features and characteristics of leadership and management of the school overall, including the constant drive to improve provision so that it better meets the needs of each new cohort of students.
- Partnerships with other providers including local schools and colleges are strong and allow greater flexibility to students to study different subjects, including at GCSE and A level, often with the close support of staff from West Heath.
- All pupils continue to develop their mathematics and English skills throughout the sixth form, at whatever level is appropriate to them.
- Work-related learning is also a strength. Staff constantly seek appropriate partnerships with local businesses to provide meaningful opportunities which help students achieve the qualifications and experience they will require for future employment or further education and training.
- Careers guidance and advice are strong, forming part of the wider curriculum for all pupils as soon as they join the school. Students were particularly positive about this aspect of sixth-form provision, as well as the 'excellent support' they receive out of school when they attend college.

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people in the residential provision**

**Outstanding**

- Residential pupils thoroughly enjoy their experience. One residential pupil commented, 'I love it, it's like home.' Another residential pupil scored it 'a thousand out of ten' and could not think of anything to improve it.
- Through highly individualised care and support, residential pupils flourish and make excellent progress.
- Residential pupils with complex health needs respond rapidly and build positive relationships with residential staff who are patient, tolerant and caring. Over time, pupils' anxiety levels reduce and they benefit from support in managing their day-to-day lives. They make friends and with sensitive assistance from staff, learn how to deal with conflict and maintain positive peer relationships.
- Developing life skills and independence is fundamental to the ethos of the residential provision. Residential staff provide support at a pace and level appropriate to the abilities and vulnerabilities of each residential pupil, preparing them for their life as young adults.
- Residential pupils who historically found school extremely difficult are now are learning, maximising their future life chances, and are happy at school. Their residential experience has a positive impact on their academic progress, building their resilience and developing their capacity to learn and achieve successfully.
- Parents acknowledge the very positive difference the residential provision makes. They note the significant improvements in their child's attendance rates, self-confidence and lower levels of anxiety. A parent commented that their child 'would not have made such progress if they had not been boarding'.

## Quality of care and support in the residential provision **Outstanding**

- Residential staff know each residential pupil extremely well and consistently implement supportive, nurturing strategies to promote positive outcomes. Individualised care plans identify pupils' needs with specific targets to promote their development.
- Residential pupils receive appropriate support to maintain their physical health and maintain healthy lifestyles. The school nurse works proactively with residential staff to monitor residential pupils' health needs. Detailed plans are compiled when necessary to meet specific medical needs. Pupils' emotional and psychological needs have a high priority. Led by a psychologist, the therapeutic team provides a range of integrated provision to support residential pupils' personal and educational development.
- A rich and varied programme of evening activities provides opportunities for residential pupils to relax and enjoy their leisure time, while at the same time promoting their social skills and independence. Local community experiences are an important aspect of helping them develop appropriate social skills and become more confident in managing social situations. Residential pupils thoroughly enjoy their activities.
- Residential pupils thrive, knowing their views and opinions are important and that staff listen. In an environment of mutual respect, staff value them as individuals. They develop self-esteem and confidence, realising that staff appreciate their views. In addition to individual, informal interaction with staff, and weekly house meetings to plan activities and menus, regular boarding council meetings enable residential pupils to put forward ideas and raise matters affecting their living experience at the school.
- Refurbished houses provide an excellent standard of bright, modern and spacious accommodation for residential pupils. Residential pupils are grouped in houses according to their gender, age and ability, but there is no recorded risk assessment to demonstrate that the compatibility of the group has been considered.
- The school's catering arrangements provide residential pupils with a wide range of healthy, nutritious meals at lunchtime. Evening meals are prepared by staff in the houses with involvement from residential pupils in choosing the menu, shopping and helping prepare the meal. Residential pupils reported clearly that they enjoy their meals.

## School details

Unique reference number	131611
Social care unique reference number	SC024063
DfE registration number	886/6079
Inspection number	10026009

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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 residential provision was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

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	129
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	43
Number of boarders on roll	26
Proprietor	West Heath 2000 Ltd
Chair	Mr Stuart Crookshank, OBE
Headteacher	Mr James Nunns
Annual fees (day pupils)	£52,500–£82,500
Annual fees (residential)	£88,000–£102,500
Telephone number	01732 460553
Website	<a href="http://www.westheathschool.com">www.westheathschool.com</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:principal@westheathschool.com">principal@westheathschool.com</a>
Date of previous inspection	11–13 December 2013

## Information about this school

- West Heath School is located on a 35-acre site near Sevenoaks in Kent. Trustees agreed to change the school's name from The New School at West Heath to its present name from September 2015.
- The school appointed a new principal in September 2016. At this time, there were also a number of internal promotions within the senior and wider leadership team.
- The school currently provides residential or day school education for 129 pupils in the age range 10 to 20 years. There are currently 43 students in the sixth form and 26 boarders in the school's residential accommodation.
- All students have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. The majority of students experience behavioural, emotional and social difficulties associated with their individual needs. Many have been excluded from mainstream education prior to coming to West Heath.
- The school has charitable status and aims 'to rebuild lives through education', providing a strong therapeutic approach to learning.
- A number of external providers are used to extend the range of vocational and pre-employment opportunities available to key stage 4 pupils and post-16 students.
- The school was last inspected in December 2013, and the last full inspection report for the residential provision was published in January 2016.

## Information about this inspection

- Inspectors carried out a wide range of classroom visits, accompanied by senior leaders. During visits, inspectors talked to pupils about the quality of their work and assessed the progress they were making. Classroom visits enabled inspectors to talk to teaching and support staff about the way they plan, deliver and assess learning in order to meet the complex needs of pupils. Visits to the school's residential provision allowed the social care inspector to speak to staff and pupils to gain their views about the quality of provision.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of pupils' work and observed behaviour in classrooms and as pupils moved around the school.
- Meetings were held with the principal and deputy principal, the head of the school's residential provision, other staff in leadership roles, the chair of trustees, accompanied by another trustee, and a representative group of pupils.
- The lead inspector met or held telephone conversations with three parents and received an email from another. Inspectors also took into account the 16 replies to Ofsted's online parent questionnaire and accompanying free-text responses.
- Inspectors considered the views of 95 staff who completed the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documents and policies, including those regarding safeguarding and other aspects of the independent school standards and national minimum standards for residential special schools. They looked at minutes of meetings of the board of trustees, information about pupils' outcomes provided by the school, pupils' personal and individual education plans, the school's self-evaluation of its own performance and school improvement information.

## Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jan Hunnam

Social Care Regulatory Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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