

Wilds Lodge School

Stamford Road, Oakham, Rutland LE15 8QQ

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Wilds Lodge is an independent residential and day school. Pupils are aged between five and 19 years. Pupils have social and emotional and/or mental health difficulties. The residential provision provides boarding for 64 pupils. The accommodation is situated across three sites. Two sites are situated a few miles from the main school site. The boarding accommodation is divided into five areas according to the pupils' age and vulnerability. Pupils stay in residence for four or five nights per week.

Inspection dates: 3 to 5 December 2019

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: 30 October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Parents' and carers' comments are extremely positive and reflect the life-changing impact that the school has on children and their families. Comments include: 'My child now has a future', 'My child is unrecognisable from when they started' and 'The school has saved my family, it's as simple as that.'

Young people often arrive with a history of poor school attendance. This dramatically improves as soon as the child arrives. School staff focus heavily on ensuring that children feel settled and safe. This promotes their learning from an early stage. Children quickly start to develop socially, emotionally and educationally.

The whole-school therapeutic approach enables young people to thrive in the residence and the classroom. Children learn to regulate their emotions. This enables them to socialise well and to stay in lessons. Because children become better able to manage their emotional responses, they are able to focus on learning and achieve greatly improved educational outcomes.

The school's ethos and practice are underpinned by a range of therapeutic approaches. The therapy team is innovative and creative in how it engages with children and gives them the help they need. For example, one child who was not able to express their emotions verbally has been helped to do this through dance and drama therapy.

The school has earned many awards for its work in helping to support children who have experienced trauma and mental health issues. The expert knowledge of staff is being shared with local schools and at national events. As a result, they are improving outcomes for a large number of children in other schools.

Children's views are incorporated in the running of the school. The school council consists of children from different year groups and residences. Managers ensure that the school council is given an important role in decision-making and planning for the future of the school. A new complaint form, with a simplified format, is being implemented to ensure that children can easily raise concerns.

Children are supported to transition to and from the school at a pace that suits their individual needs. Parents and carers commend staff on the support that they and their children receive. Leaders work extensively to iron out problems and reduce children's anxiety about change. They sometimes provide support to families several times a day to make sure that children can make progress.

Team leaders and deputy team leaders work closely with their staff teams and with school staff to provide a very high level of consistency and stability. Because routines are so stable, the environment is calm and children feel secure.

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

Children are fully safeguarded. Clear risk assessments ensure that staff fully understand the potential risks faced by children and how to minimise these risks. Staff and managers are extremely diligent and very proactive in their approach. They respond very well to any safeguarding concerns. Excellent multi-agency working ensures that strategies to reduce risks are carefully reviewed and evaluated.

Effective risk management does not prevent children from taking age-appropriate risks as they become more independent. Because staff are so good at helping children to safely learn new skills, children look forward confidently to independence.

Children who were previously unable to attend education because of concerns about risk-taking behaviour are now having driving lessons, taking their GCSE exams early and being fully supported to move into higher education. This greatly increases children's life chances.

Very good quality training ensures that staff are kept informed of emerging safeguarding issues. In addition, the senior leadership team staff have undertaken a considerable amount of training since the last inspection. They have greatly improved their safeguarding practice by drawing on knowledge on up-to-date research.

Behaviour management is excellent. Strategies are built around strong and trusting relationships between staff and children. Staff are extremely child-focused. Irrespective of the challenges and risks that children present, staff are tenacious and do not give up. Children feel a sense of belonging and soon learn that they are respected, whatever their behaviour or background. Children who have struggled to regulate their behaviour in the past start to learn about other, more positive ways to cope. As a result, they develop much greater confidence and self-esteem.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders are inspirational, creative and focused on continual improvement. They are always available to support children, parents and carers. For example, families have been supported to address problems related to disability, benefits and housing. By making a difference to children's lives outside the school, leaders enable children to focus on learning. The actions of leaders mean that children's life chances are greatly improved.

Staff are very well supported and enjoy their roles. They say that it is a 'privilege' to work in a school that makes such a difference to the lives of children. Staff are motivated by children's success stories.

Staff and managers challenge other professionals when they believe that children are not receiving the best service. They advocate for children as if they were their own. This passion is a key strength of the school.

Monitoring and scrutiny by the senior leadership team, independent visitors and nominated parents are very effective. Leaders are clear about the school's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, leaders are keen to open themselves up to additional outside scrutiny in order to promote improvement. They have recently commissioned several external professionals to quality-assure safeguarding practices.

Development plans are extensive and ambitious. Leaders continually build on what they know works well. This year, there are plans to develop the post-16 provision to increase the range of vocational subjects. Land adjacent to the school has been purchased to give greater opportunities for outside play. Leaders are also building links with local universities to develop the school's own learning framework.

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: SC069231

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Robin Lee (MBE)

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspector(s)

Caroline Brailsford, social care inspector (lead)

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