

Wilds Lodge School

Stamford Road, Empingham, 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 up to 70 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.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 November 2021

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: 3 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children thrive in the residential provision. They speak very positively about the school and residential provision, with comments including, 'It's a brilliant school' and 'I really like it here.' Children's experiences support and promote them to make progress. Children who have histories of school exclusions, and who have complex needs, make outstanding educational progress. This progress is sustained over time. For some children, the positive impact of school is life changing. Children look forward to a brighter future because of this provision.

Parents' views are overwhelmingly positive. One parent said, 'The school has changed our son's life forever, in the most positive and fantastic way.' Another parent said, 'I owe the staff at this school everything. If it was not for them, I and my son would not be here today.' The impact on children's lives of having a positive experience in residence extends beyond progress at school.

The whole-school therapeutic approach makes a considerable difference to children. Therapists are at the forefront of planning and are visible and helpful to all.

Children lead very stimulating academic and social lives. The range of activities on offer encourages the children to develop social skills and to grow in confidence.

Support to children and their families during the pandemic has been exceptional. Some families have received food parcels and financial help. Support for families who need it continues.

Children who may otherwise have struggled to cope with the pandemic have received specialist and innovative support. The school has been working on a time capsule which will be buried at the school. Children have written about their feelings regarding the pandemic. They have also decorated face masks and used other items to mark the pandemic and express their worries and concerns.

Children's transitions in and out of the school are managed very effectively. There is a clear focus of developing long-term independence skills to enable children to lead full lives when they leave.

The care provided to children is highly personalised and respects their circumstances, background and identity. One isolated example was found where a care plan did not include information on how to help a child to choose healthy food. There was a very proactive response from managers about this, showing that they are always open to ideas about care planning.

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

Leaders are proactive in considering current research and guidance and incorporating this into safeguarding practice across the whole school. The staff training programme is constantly updated to reflect the most up-to-date guidance. Staff consistently work to improve safeguarding practice year on year. This year, the school has considered the research carried out regarding harmful sexualised behaviour in schools. The school has also applied for the renewal of an accreditation in relation to 'Leaders in Safeguarding' and it has been successful in gaining the award. Leaders are highly creative. Their inspirational work, and the progress made since the last inspection, is worthy of sharing with others.

Children are safer because they are encouraged to be responsible and reflect on their actions and behaviour. This approach enables children to develop skills in self-regulation and in how to manage their emotions. A parent described how differently their child manages his feelings of upset and frustration because of the school. She stated, 'I don't know where we would be without the school. The staff are amazing with the children.' The whole-school approach to behaviour management ensures that strategies implemented are shared with families so these can be replicated at home as well as in residence.

The use of physical intervention is very closely monitored, reviewed and tracked to identify any patterns and trends. There is a drive within the new organisation to minimise and reduce the use of physical intervention. This has already started to work. The number of incidents is low, and they are managed extremely well.

Allegations and safeguarding matters are always escalated and investigated appropriately. The highly detailed approach ensures that children live in a safe environment. During the pandemic, leaders never stopped thinking about children's safety. They kept in touch with children and their families, positively influencing safety, even when children were at home.

Concerns and views from children are always a top priority. The staff team has devised creative ways to seek feedback from children about any concerns they may have. For example, there is a new approach involving scanning from an electronic device, using Quality Review codes. This works well and children regularly use this method to pass on their views.

When families raise concerns, they are listened to. There is always a highly respectful, helpful approach from the school. Families know that they can rely on staff for help and support, and they often do.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The ownership of the school has changed since the last inspection. The change of management has been seamless and has had a minimal impact. This school

continues to go from strength to strength. It is a credit to leaders and staff at every level that, despite such a challenging year, the school continues to offer exceptionally high-quality care to the children.

Leaders and managers extensively analyse the quality of the day-to-day care provided. The independent visitor also has very good oversight. Her highly independent approach drives further improvement. Governors further support the strong leadership. Very soon after the new organisation took over the school, they asked children for their ideas. Children's ideas have already been threaded through the strategic development plan. Children are truly listened to. They are highly valued for their ideas and this builds their confidence.

Children are disappointed that some staff left during the pandemic, but they have been extremely well supported. The therapy team has been pivotal in this support. The therapy team's recent extensive training has helped it to develop new ideas regarding how to support children with autism spectrum conditions cope with loss and change.

Leaders have invested very heavily in the remaining staff team. They have made the best use of current resources and have only seen potential problems as challenges rather than shortfalls.

Leaders have used the pandemic to create opportunities. For example, activities with children have been more relationship based with staff and, as a result, relationships have become more enriched. Teaching and residential staff have worked together to plug any gaps in the rota, often working over and above their normal working hours. Staff at every level report that the staff team is stronger than it has ever been. Children have seen everyone helping out and have experienced the sense of community growing and developing.

Leadership continues to be research based. There are a range of developments, including visual resources, that have helped children to make sense of their feelings and emotions. Research has been carried out in relation to remote working, which has included an assessment of each child's home situation in relation to internet connections and access to devices. Other research on what happens to children when they leave the education and care system is underway. Leaders are also involved in a national study on child abuse in schools. They constantly look for improvement and better ways of working to positively impact children's lives as much as they can.

What does the residential special school need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure that health plans are flexible and incorporate children's specialist dietary needs.

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: Emma Mills and Kirsty Lamb

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