

Wolverdene Special School

Wolverdene School, 22 Love Lane, Andover, Hampshire SP10 2AF

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

This is a local authority school for primary-age children who are experiencing social, emotional and mental health difficulties. The school uses the Thrive Approach, which draws on research in neuroscience, attachment theory, effective learning, child development and the PACE (Playfulness, Acceptance, Curiosity and Empathy) model of care to underpin its work. There are currently 57 children on the school roll.

The school provides mainly day placements. Ten residential placements are available for boys in The Lodge, where they stay for up to four nights a week. It is situated on the school grounds.

Inspection dates: 25 to 27 April 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 13 December 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children really enjoy staying at The Lodge. They show this through their excitement to see staff, running in and hugging them. The staff have a shared bond with the boys that they share the residential area with. Children enjoy warm, loving and nurturing care from a small and committed team of staff who know the children well. Children's families say that they feel engaged and well informed about their child's progress and are highly complimentary of the care and support that children receive.

Children's views are heard and respected. They share their ideas through house meetings and the school council, but also at other times during their stay, such as mealtimes. Children were happily sharing their views on how activities could be changed with senior leaders over breakfast. The free-flowing discussion showed how children are relaxed with staff in the school and confident in sharing their views.

Some children have had their natural year six ending in the residential provision brought forward by a term due to financial cuts. Children have been supported thoughtfully to understand why some of their friends are no longer attending the residential provision. Those who have stopped attending sooner than expected are also being well supported.

Joint working across the residential and education staff teams means that children benefit from seamless transitions between the school and residential provision. Children have time to relax and talk about their day on their return from school, and they are helped to work through any challenges that may have happened. Children receive beads as tokens to acknowledge how they have managed aspects of their day, such as being helpful or kind and overcoming something challenging. Each child's jar of coloured beads represents their progress, and children enjoy seeing how many beads they have.

Children enjoy a wide range of activities within the school grounds and in the community. Children helped each other to overcome fears using the obstacle course and climbing frames, as well as congratulating each other on their cycling and go-karting skills. When emotions become overwhelming, children readily apologise to their friends for any issues this may have caused.

Children's emotional well-being is well supported across the school and residential provision. Various therapists provide children with individual sessions in addition to helping staff to support children's needs. Close working with other professionals means children benefit from a consistent approach and specialist help when needed. Children are encouraged to widen their diet and try different foods, alongside becoming more physically active. This helps them begin to enjoy a healthier lifestyle.

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

Children's actions show how safe they feel in the residential service. They are confident approaching staff with any worries or concerns, and staff are particularly vigilant of children's interactions with each other. Staff have an excellent understanding of children's needs and the complicating factors that impact on their safety. Children are respected as individuals, and staff are acutely aware of their vulnerabilities, doing all that they can to keep them safe.

Staff have strong working links with partner agencies and families. This means that staff can approach them with any concerns that they have about children. Staff know who to report any concerns to. They understand wider safeguarding systems and whistle-blowing procedures. The school has strong links with the designated officer in the local authority and is constantly seeking to improve its processes to protect children. The safeguarding governor offers sufficient challenge and has a strong understanding of all aspects of safeguarding across the school.

The culture in the school demonstrates a recognition that all behaviour is a form of communication. Staff recognise and celebrate progress as it is happening, giving meaningful feedback at the end of the day and throughout the children's stay. The bead rewards approach is well used, and children are continuously rewarded throughout their stays. Staff use their relationships with children to manage any issues in the group and plan the evening knowing when tensions may occur, such as at the end of activities.

Joint working with the school's therapists and between school and residential key workers allows for greater consistency in the approach to meeting children's needs. Plans are clear on how to support children when they are unhappy or in crisis, leading to very few physical interventions in the residential provision. One-to-one work with children highlights areas that they are working on and supports children to use other ways of managing their more uncomfortable emotions.

Key senior staff have regular meetings to discuss children who they consider to be at risk, deciding any further actions and who is taking responsibility. Family support is deemed as key to helping children be safe at home, and staff provide parents and carers with strategies to support children when needed. Staff continue to feel a sense of responsibility for children who have moved on from the school and ensure their safety.

Children are protected from avoidable risks through strong planning and risk assessment. Staff carry out regular checks of the residential environment and fire protection systems. Safer recruitment practice is strong, and this helps protect children from being cared for by unsuitable people.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The head of care has particularly high expectations for children and what they can achieve. This is echoed throughout the team of staff, who are enthusiastic and energetic in their approach to developing children. The senior leaders have a joint vision for how children will succeed. However, there is still some feeling among staff that the residential provision is not as valued as the educational setting.

Staff feel incredibly well supported by the head of care, knowing that they can contact her at any time. They are complimentary of the support that they receive, which is evidenced through effective supervision records. Staff particularly like the clinical supervision sessions where they can reflect on children's presentations, their own feelings and the impact that they have on children.

Monitoring of children's progress is detailed and well thought out, showing the progress that children are making in all aspects of their social and independence skills. There is continued thought about how to represent the nuanced progress children are making, particularly when it may be small or slow, and the staff are considering using new recording systems to better reflect this.

Monitoring of the residential service by the independent visitor is thorough and highlights areas for development. The residential managers are constantly seeking to improve the service provided, and the development plans are clear and realistic.

The review of written policies is ongoing to ensure that they hold key information regarding updates and developments locally and nationally. It is noted that some of the information is ambiguous, particularly with regards to behaviour management and physical intervention.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that residential staff feel more closely integrated with the whole-school approach. The headteacher must find means to ensure that communication is effective.
- School leaders should ensure that all policies are clear and unambiguous. This specifically relates to, but is not exclusive to, policy points in relation to seclusion and permissible forms of physical intervention.

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: SC012029

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Ms Nathalie Akhmatova

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Jennie Christopher, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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