

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 School is an independent residential and day school for boys aged between seven and 18 years with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. At the time of the inspection, it was providing boarding for 31 children.

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. Only four areas were occupied by children at the time of the inspection.

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 September 2025

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 1 October 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children spend their week in a nurturing and comfortable environment where they can be with other children or have access to calmer and quieter areas. There have been further improvements to children's bedrooms and living spaces and this has made these areas more personal to the children and enhanced the presentation of the homes.

The children and staff have warm and respectful relationships. These have grown because the staff always put the children first and take time to listen, understand and support them. Staff continue to offer outreach to children, particularly over holidays because they understand how important it is for children to maintain their connections with staff.

Children are making strong and sustained progress in many areas of their development. Staff spend time with them, finding the best ways to develop or expand their abilities. For one child, this means they now enjoy spending more time with friends. Previously, they had been more isolated and, at times, struggled with their behaviour. In addition, the child wants to be helpful in the house, so they complete some chores. This demonstrates increased independence and confidence.

The relationships between staff and children are captured in records. Staff are exceptionally positive and thoughtful about what they write about the children. They keep the child in mind and use language that truly cares.

Transitions within the residential settings, or moving to independence due to age, are well coordinated. The child remains central to the process and the move is done at the child's pace and in accordance with their presenting needs and risks. When children leave the residential provision, there is a lot of thought from staff and external professionals about what it means for the child. This helps in preparation for this final and significant move.

The care and education staff have a seamless approach to supporting the children to achieve outstanding outcomes. There is daily sharing of key information regarding the children. This ensures that all staff are aware of what is going on in the children lives and what could impact on their learning or well-being.

There is a proactive approach to children participating in various activities. These are chosen by the children and staff do all they can to ensure that children have fun and enjoy spending time with their friends.

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

Safeguarding remains a priority within the school and residential provision. Staff have an excellent understanding of safeguarding processes and their safeguarding responsibilities.

When children are subject to a physical intervention, this is proportionate and necessary and always at the lowest level and undertaken safely. Staff use de-escalation in their relationships to help children who are struggling with their emotions. Children are debriefed after incidents, and there is oversight by management. Further oversight by a senior leader would support the staff to reflect on incidents and learn valuable lessons to inform further practice responses.

There has been a reduction in physical interventions within the setting. Children have been supported to develop their own strategies to manage their anxieties or worries. For some children, this has improved aspects of their life. For example, one child was extremely anxious about going to school but, over time, has learned to regulate their feelings and emotions. They now attend school each day, and there is a positive impact on their attainment.

When concerns have been raised, leaders and managers ensure that all relevant safeguarding agencies are notified, when it is appropriate to do so. Notifications to other agencies reflect effective safeguarding practice. There is a detailed chronology of action that staff have taken.

Children are rarely reported missing from care. There are clear policies in place for reporting children that are relative to age or where there are more specific concerns or needs to be considered. There are good systems in place for staff to consult safeguarding leads while managing children who cannot be located.

There are multiple forums for children to express any concerns or worries. These voices are heard, and children receive an outcome to what they have raised. This reinforces that their viewpoint is valued and valid.

There has been one serious safeguarding incident since the last inspection. On this occasion, the systems in place did not ensure that essential information was passed to managers. This breakdown in communication resulted in the incident taking place. Managers and leaders have taken action to rectify this issue and now have a clear process that staff need to follow.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

There has been some restructuring within the leadership team since the last inspection. Staff are confident in their roles and abilities to provide effective care. They are being encouraged to develop in their roles and extend their own knowledge and skills. The staff team in each of the homes has exceptional knowledge of the children they are caring for.

Leaders and managers know their responsibilities of ensuring the welfare of their staff team, and in turn, this is reflected in how the staff care for the children. There is a strong ethos of staff supporting each other and a culture of group reflection and actively exploring lessons learned.

There is a shared vision that comes down from the leaders that has a definite focus on the children being the best version of themselves. This creates a shared understanding of everyone working together with the same focus that enables children to reach their full potential. This has fostered an excellent team morale and shared ownership.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the support from managers. They are of the view that all managers are very approachable and recognise how life events can impact on their staff. One member of the team was able to work flexibly over a period of time, so they could remain in work and manage a personal issue.

Staff speak passionately about all the children. They enjoy sharing the progress that children have made and can easily identify what the impact has been for them. Staff reported that all children have a key relationship within the staff team and have a safe adult they could approach if they have any worries.

Internal quality assurance secures a continued analysis of the operation of the residential setting. This means that leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Firm plans are in place to drive improvement.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard for residential special schools:

- The school should ensure that there are appropriate safeguarding systems in place to ensure that children remain protected at all times. (Residential special schools: national minimum standards 13.2)

Point for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that the Head of Care has oversight of physical interventions and the potential impact of these on the children.

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 Toby Oakley

Type of school: Residential special school

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