

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 34 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, and one area was temporarily closed.

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 October 2024

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 last inspection: 7 February 2024

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children make highly significant progress in many areas of their lives. One child said, 'Because I am here, I have made progress. I swear and fight less, and [more likely] to walk away. I use these things at home too.'

Children's progress is a strength and constant focus, which starts with transition planning. A robust and effective referral system, leading to a transition plan, means that the likelihood of children settling well is high.

The provider has a dedicated team that manages initial referrals through transition into the residential home and school. This means that children and their families are provided with a bespoke and well-organised process that is both child- and family-focused. Robust but adaptable transition plans are produced to help children to settle. Risks are shared appropriately with the safeguarding team. One parent said, 'All the care staff at Wilds have shown care, compassion and knowledge of my son's needs since day one and I will forever be grateful to the school for saving not only my child, but us as a whole family unit.'

Children learn to be responsible for their behaviours. For some children, this has been highly significant. This support for self-regulation, together with outstanding care, means that children now access their community for the first time. This level of care can have a life-changing impact.

Leaders and managers ensure that children live in an extremely well-kept and homely environment. Where appropriate, children share rooms. This is assessed around friendship groups, and also risk factors. In most cases, children are encouraged to personalise their bedrooms.

All success is celebrated. Several new initiatives have been introduced, including children being given a certificate of achievement. Children said this was important to them and also that they were proud to tell their families about their achievements. The impact on children's self-worth and self-esteem is considerable.

Children's voices are heard. They have several ways of sharing their views and concerns. Advocates ensure that children have further opportunities to share any concerns about the care they receive. The student council also provides opportunities for children to have influence decisions affecting their time in residential. . Processes for making a complaint are clear and accessible.

All the children are polite and respectful and their interactions with all staff were all positive. Staff are approachable and children seek reassurance from them when needed. This means that there is a culture of inclusiveness that crosses all residential and school. Because of these children feel safer.

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

There is a clear and proactive multi-agency approach to keeping children safe. Children are provided with consistent and reliable daily routines and structure. Staff provide emotional warmth and understanding. This supports children to feel protected and secure. Children say they feel safe and happy living at the home. One child, who previously had multiple placement breakdowns said, 'This is the best home that I have ever lived in.'

Children's individual risk assessments capture their risks and vulnerabilities. The level of detail recorded shows how well staff know each child. Managers and staff regularly review risk assessments and update them if circumstances warrant it. As a result, staff have up-to-date information about each child and the best way to respond to their needs and to risks when they arise, enabling them to keep children as safe as possible.

Managers respond to any allegations against staff, in accordance with guidance. Records of investigations show a thorough approach to managing concerns. When allegations have been made, managers work with safeguarding partners to ensure that all allegations are shared and investigations take place. Staff are also supported throughout this process. This process ensures that children are protected.

The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) goes above and beyond in ensuring the safety and well-being of children. Systems are in place to keep children safe when using their electronic devices online. On one occasion, the DSL was alerted out of hours by the internet safety system that a child was attempting to access content of risk while they were in the care of their family. The DSL alerted the child's family, preventing the child from coming to harm. Her dedication to her role is commendable.

There is a strong focus on ensuring a restorative approach and children being helped to understand natural consequences for their actions. For example, three children had walked off site and engaged in anti-social behaviour. Leaders and managers were quick to respond to the incident, explored the children's actions with them and the children gave genuine apologies to those impacted.

Staff are very proactive and use their skills and experience to creatively respond to risks and de-escalate incidents quickly. Staff have a good understanding of children's emotional needs and have the required skills to effectively manage behaviours that challenge. In most instances, this approach works. As a result, the use of physical restraint has significantly reduced.

There has been a creative approach to supporting children and their families, by establishing a community hub for families who have become isolated as a result of their child's needs.

The number of concerning incidents involving children has decreased. When incidents do occur, staff are quick to respond and follow relevant protocols. Staff are meticulous in recording incidents, and they capture all the vital details. Staff undertake individual debriefs with children following any incidents, and further individual work is carried out with children if necessary. The focus on learning from incidents by managers and staff is excellent. They remain committed to learning lessons and preventing incidents in the future.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential team is well established and highly effective. The head of care provides steadfast leadership to her team. The team is aspirational for all children. There is excellent team morale and a sense of shared ownership. This ensures continued and dynamic improvement across residential. One staff member said, 'I genuinely love it here, it's the happiest I have ever been in work.'

Leaders and managers have well-established working relationships with a wide range of professionals and partner agencies. They continue to develop new networks to share and improve practice. For example, connections have been made with the local authority, with the expectation of working closely together to share and learn from practice. This ensures that the residential team provides the best possible care and outcomes for children.

The leadership team is clear about their vision for the home. This is clearly and consistently conveyed to staff. Team meetings are held on a regular basis and staff find these highly beneficial. Staff can share their views openly and feel their views are supported and respected. Staff feel valued by the senior leadership team and there are various incentives in place to support them in their roles. Some staff who had left their jobs in the home have later returned. This is due to them recognising the strength of the leadership, values and working practices in the home.

Regular, focused supervision ensures that staff are supported in their professional growth and are better equipped to meet the needs of the children in their care. Staff complete mandatory and child-specific training that enhances their skills. The managers' focus on reflective and thoughtful practice allows the team to evaluate and improve their methods of care. Ultimately, this results in more responsive and thoughtful care for the children, improving their overall well-being.

The management team uses both internal and external quality assurance measures that enable them to gain a clear, objective view of the home's strengths and areas for development. This insight allows them to devise and implement firm strategic plans aimed at driving improvements, ensuring the school continually enhances its services, with the focus on improving the outcomes for children.

All national minimum standards are met and no points for improvement were identified at this inspection.

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: Toby Oakley

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

Zoey Lee, Social Care Inspector

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