

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

Wolverdene is a local authority school in Hampshire catering 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, effective learning and child development, and the PACE (playfulness, acceptance, curiosity and empathy) model 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 in the school grounds.

The inspector only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 December 2022

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 last inspection: 11 January 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Staff provide deeply caring and compassionate support to children who have experienced profound challenges in their lives. Staff use reflective and trauma-informed practice to support children to make excellent progress in their personal development and educational attainment.

One child said, 'This isn't just a school. It is a place that has helped me with my emotions and behaviour.' Children are encouraged to reflect on challenges and progress in group discussions and their levels of personal insight are, at times, remarkable.

Staff provide a warm and homely environment, full of opportunities for children to enjoy play and social experiences with peers. Staff constantly seek out ways to improve the environment, against a backdrop of funding challenges. Staff have frequently given up their own time to engage in charity fundraising activities to enhance the outdoor spaces and improve the lives of children in their care.

Staff and children both cite the quality of their relationships as a core strength of The Lodge. Several children said they love being there and had only praise for the work that the staff do to support them and to provide them with a positive experience of education.

A skilled psychotherapist provides holistic support to children and staff. Staff and children reflected on how much they value this resource. Staff say it has helped them to improve their professional practice and to receive vital support with the emotional challenges of their work. Children can identify the progress they are making in learning about the impact of their behaviour and how they are developing empathy for those around them.

Parents and carers praise staff highly. They talk passionately about the whole-family approach and value the support that they receive from staff. A parent whose child had struggled in mainstream settings said, 'My child has made immense progress and he is always excited when he knows he is going in. Staff have been brilliant. They are so approachable and responsive.'

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

In the main, staff deliver high-quality safeguarding support for children. They have a well-developed understanding of the specific risks and challenges that children face. Staff are also acutely aware of the need to keep children's safety in mind, in school and when children are not in their care. Regular check-ins with family and carers ensure that children are supported effectively. When concerns have been raised about a child, staff produce clear and detailed referrals to external agencies to ensure that all professionals work closely together to safeguard children.

On a recent trip out of school that involved children from The Lodge, there were some shortfalls in the planning around specific risks presented by children on the trip. There was also some uncertainty from staff in following agreed procedures relating to allegations against staff, which led to delays in reporting. However, once the appropriate information had been received by the designated safeguarding lead at the school, effective steps were taken to ensure matters were dealt with according to the school policy and all relevant partners were notified.

Staff work with children who have some very complex behavioural challenges. They work skilfully and patiently to promote positive behavioural change in children. Children have opportunities to talk about incidents after they have happened, and this is done sensitively and caringly. This promotes learning and delivers some very positive outcomes for children. Parents spoke of the significant improvements that they see at home as a result of the support that their children receive in the residential setting.

The residential provision benefits from the support of a skilled safeguarding governor who provides strong oversight of safeguarding practice. Regular safeguarding meetings ensure that all live cases are regularly reviewed, and any new concerns are escalated effectively when necessary.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders at the school have an exciting vision for the continued development of the trauma-informed model that has already had a significant and positive impact on staff practice. Leaders have also enhanced the use of analytics and data to demonstrate improvements for children in all areas of their school lives.

Leaders place a strong emphasis on creating a school that promotes inclusivity and celebrates diversity. Bullying and intolerance are challenged promptly and effectively, and children are supported through learning to accept difference and respect each other at all times.

Leaders have increased the support offer to staff, providing access to both group and clinical supervision alongside their professional supervision. This has been well received by staff, who find the opportunity for reflective analysis of their work invaluable. Staff receive high-quality training, with bespoke training events organised to meet specific individual needs of children.

Severe strains on both resources and recruitment have affected staff morale and several staff members spoke of feeling a disconnect between their experience at work and the headteacher's recognition of the pressures they faced. Residential staff also said that communication from leaders at the school has not always been to a standard they would expect. Some felt that decisions made about children in their care were not always clearly explained. Staff felt that, when they asked questions or raised concerns, there did not appear to be clear processes in place to ensure that

they got good feedback. Senior leaders demonstrate care and compassion for staff but not a full understanding of the depth of feeling currently existing in the residential team.

Leaders are working very hard to recruit and retain staff. They are also determined to maintain the service to a high standard, regardless of the economic stresses the school faces.

Leaders and governors maintain excellent oversight. Regular reviews and audits of practice ensure that issues or concerns are addressed promptly. Governors play a very active role in school life and are regularly on site, engaging in activities with children and also supporting children to access exciting opportunities outside school, including going horse riding and to a forest school.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should review risk assessment and risk management of children when out of school on organised activities to ensure this clearly addresses the individual needs of those children attending.
- School leaders should ensure that all staff are confident in their understanding of, and follow, approved school procedures in the event of any concerns or allegations relating to staff or children.
- School leaders should ensure that residential staff feel more closely integrated into the whole-school approach. The headteacher should find means to ensure that communication is effective. There should also be clear procedures in place for staff to raise concerns, feel involved and receive feedback around decisions that affect the lives of children in their care.

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: Nathalie Akhmatova

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Inspector

Peter Jackson, Social Care Inspector

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