

Wyre Forest School

Wyre Forest School, Habberley Road, Kidderminster, Worcestershire DY11 6FA

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

The school is a local authority service and is directly responsible to a governing body. Wyre Forest School is a special school which caters for children and young people with a broad range of needs, including physical, social, emotional and learning difficulties. There are 328 children on roll at the school. The school moved to a new purpose-built site in April 2015. This site includes a residential aspect of the school called Russell House. It operates from Monday to Friday and can accommodate up to 16 children and young people. There were 15 children and young people receiving a service at the time of the inspection.

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 February 2023

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

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: 11 October 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Currently, 15 children have residential stays. Some children stay for four nights per week and others may only stay for one or two nights. This flexible approach to boarding means that children's and their families' needs are catered for. It also enables children to feel comfortable to gradually build up to four nights per week as they become older or should their needs change where they need more support.

The purpose-built environment is designed well to meet children's needs. It is spacious and provides room so that all children can happily live together. Each child has their own bedroom which is cosy and personalised to them. Staff take pride in the upkeep of the home. In the mornings, all bedrooms are thoroughly cleaned, aired and prepared nicely for children to come home to later on. Children enjoy the wraparound garden, which has a bicycle track, trampoline, lots of room to run and play and a developing sensory garden.

Children love having residential stays at their school. Some day pupils self-refer to stay overnight as they know how much their friends enjoy staying over. One parent told the inspector, 'They are like a family to him.' The residential provision is a seamless extension to what the school offers for all day pupils.

Children have fun and experience a variety of different activities they might not normally do at home. Staff are constantly thinking of new ideas to enhance children's lives as well as listening to what children would like. One child told the inspector, 'I have asked to go rock climbing and staff are sorting this out for me.' Other examples include going to cricket club, the local youth club and swimming.

Care and education are harmoniously entwined with one another. This cohesive approach supports children to excel beyond their expectations. Leaders have done extensive work to develop and embed the 'Wyre Forest Pathways', and children benefit from this 24-hour curriculum. This curriculum-based model captures children's development needs, which informs staff of achievable targets to set. All children have individual targets that link to their education, health and care plan.

Children make exceptional progress. One child has learned how to open doors, which is widening his world and independence. Another child is finding it easier to settle to sleep. All children become much more independent. Staff know the goals children are working on. All staff have work mobile phones, which enables them to capture photos and videos of children's daily achievements the same as in any other family environment. This progress is instantly celebrated and shared with the child, their family and teaching staff.

Positive communication is a priority and is always in the child's preferred method. The dedication from staff to get this right is immense. Staff use communication aids

constantly to ensure that information is communicated to children in a way they can understand. The child's mechanism to have a voice is always with them. For example, communication aids and devices travel with children at all times. In addition, communication signs and symbols adorn the home, and staff can confidently sign to children who use this method.

Values such as respect, kindness and inclusion are shared by children and staff alike. Staff and children are positive role models to one another. Children are happy. The support they provide each other is special and unique. For example, one child was keen to inform inspectors how a child with more complex needs likes to communicate. In another example, children were seen to praise each other when one of them had done something well.

Staff understand children's health needs, and children's well-being is central to their practice. Medication is safely stored and administered. Currently, information about children's sexual development is captured in risk assessments, despite this not being a risk. This is a point for improvement for leaders to consider where this best sits in children's plans.

Transition planning is a strength. A well-coordinated approach with both education and care staff supports children to understand the options available to them and to make informed choices. Because children make such good progress from their starting points, this widens their opportunities when it is time to move on. The 24-hour curriculum supports these transitions and enables children to move on with the maximum independence individual to them. For example, children spend time working in a local cafe and can now cook more independently and make hot drinks. One young adult who moved on has recently visited the children to talk about her experiences. She told the inspector, 'It's amazing here, I really miss it and wish I didn't have to leave.'

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

A positive safeguarding culture is embedded across the whole school. Leaders have good oversight of safeguarding. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities to keep children safe. The knowledge and understanding that staff have about children, their vulnerabilities and potential risks helps them to keep them incredibly safe. Any risk is well managed and mitigated.

Staff know the children exceptionally well. They pick up on social cues if children are struggling and need some support. Staff have a high level of intuition, are responsive to children and understand them. This means that children quickly get the support they need before their behaviour escalates. Restraint has not been necessary to keep children safe.

Children behave well and respect one another and each other's differences. Bullying is not an issue. Children know the rules and are part of developing and implementing

them. Consequences are not part of the ethos and children receive praise as a means of promoting positive behaviour.

The day is structured and staff provide children with a good routine. This creates an atmosphere where children tend to know what to expect and what is expected of them, which promotes a calm and positive environment. Children know which staff are caring for them and which staff are on duty throughout the night. One child told the inspector, 'If I need help at night, I get that. I always know the staff here.'

Staff think of ways to support children to become increasingly safe. Through the 24-hour curriculum, they incorporate experiences to help children to understand safety and make links with other professionals who keep children safe. For example, local emergency services visit the children as an enjoyable activity. Additionally, children receive online safety training and understand ways of keeping safe online.

Children make such good progress that it enables them to become more independent and take appropriate risks as part of their development. For example, while one child still needs a harness while in the community, they have started to walk to school without it. This is part of a plan to gradually reduce such restrictive equipment. Other children develop skills to enable them to walk to school alone. As children move on, this positive culture enables them further. For example, young adults, who have now moved on from the school, use public transport, attend a local college and enjoy accessing their local community independently.

Leaders have taken action since the previous inspection to improve their recruitment practice. However, during this inspection, a different shortfall was identified regarding the verification of references. Leaders put this right immediately at the time of the inspection. Recruitment processes now follow statutory guidance.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The school is led by experienced and inspirational leaders who have children at the heart of everything they do. Residential leaders are part of the school senior leadership team. This unity demonstrates a strong message to all staff that they are one team. Consequently, residential and school staff frequently come together to share information and work out any challenges. This creates a consistent experience for children.

Leaders create a culture of enablement and inclusion where there are no barriers to children's progress. They have high aspirations for children and incredible oversight of their progress and experiences. This means that they can quickly identify when changes to children's plans or targets are needed. The 'Wyre Forest Pathways' is embedded in practice, children benefit from this research-based model which supports their progress.

The visibility of leaders is demonstrated by the very positive relationships children have with them. The residential provision offers children a more relaxed environment

in which to experience the leaders of the school. One child was chatting to the headteacher and calling her 'Mrs G'. Another child was quick to tell leaders about a problem in his bedroom which the maintenance team quickly rectified.

The head of care and deputy head of care are positive role models for staff. They clearly demonstrate their expectations and the high-quality care they expect staff to provide for children. The members of the care team work fluidly with one another. They know their roles and responsibilities well. Staff work with each other respectfully, support one another and ensure that children have a happy and consistent experience in the residential provision.

Staff feel supported and are led by a team of highly skilled and experienced leaders. Good-quality and frequent training, supervision and appraisals support staff's development to ensure that they can meet the needs of children to a high standard. The integration of care and education means that staff have access to specialist professionals in the school should they need additional training. For example, one teacher provides autism spectrum disorder training, the school nurse provides medication training, and links with the leads on the curriculum and transition after school are solid.

Governance is strong, and governors take their role very seriously. The governor responsible for the residential provision said, 'We don't take what leaders tell us for face value, we check ourselves, speak to the children and staff and observe practice.' Governors carry out unannounced visits at important times of the day to enable them to see morning and evening routines. Children know the governors and are confident to talk to them and share their views.

Families provide positive feedback about the leaders and how they ensure that their children are well cared for. Families say that they trust leaders to meet their children's very complex needs and feel comfortable with them doing so.

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

Points for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that they consider how they record children's needs in respect of their sexual development and avoid labelling sexual developmental milestones as risks.

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: SC490122

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Rebecca Garratt

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspectors

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