

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 catering for children and young people who have a broad range of needs, including physical, social, emotional and learning difficulties. There are 305 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. This opened in September 2014 prior to the whole-school move. It operates from Monday to Friday. It can accommodate up to 16 children and young people between the ages of eight and 19. There were 14 young people receiving a service at the time of the inspection. The residential provision was last inspected in December 2019.

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers on 17 March 2020.

Inspection dates: 11 to 13 October 2021

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: 9 December 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Students thoroughly enjoy and benefit from their stays at the 'house'. This is due to the warm, consistent and intuitive care they receive from staff. Students told inspectors that they love their time in the house. They enjoy spending time with their friends, staff and having their own bedrooms.

Staff are dedicated to improving the experiences and progress of students. They are child focused. This attitude enables students to make progress. For example, students learn to cook, make a cup of tea and learn self-care skills such as how to wash their own hair. These skills help to prepare students for adult life.

Parents praise staff highly and also comment on the positive progress that their children make. All parents spoken too highlighted that they would recommend the house to other parents. One parent told inspectors, 'I have seen my son come on in leaps and bounds since he started boarding. His social interaction has greatly improved, and I believe it's down to the ethos that the school and boarding staff have there. I thank them all.'

The purpose-designed environment is warm and welcoming. Staff make the very most of the clever design of the building, which benefits from an art room, games room, sensory room and two lounges. It also benefits from a well-set-out garden that includes a mud kitchen, trampoline and an area to ride bicycles on. The design and use of the building allows for students to spend time together or separately as they choose.

During the inspection, students were keen to sing and dance to show inspectors new dance moves they had learned in school. The environment was calm, but all students were busy taking part in their chosen activities. This also allowed students to work towards their tailor-made targets. These individualised targets are reviewed with education staff and updated as necessary.

Connectivity between the school and residence is seamless. They work as one and complement each other. Excellent information-sharing means that targets can be reviewed and shared. This allows for every little achievement to be celebrated within residence and education.

Information is clearly displayed around the building using mediums of communication that is individualised for students. This includes information about what is for dinner, which staff are working and a reminder of each student's targets. This has been set up with the clear support from the communication team. As a result, students have access to information they need to know. This helps to reduce any anxieties they may have.

Students benefit from a fantastic range of activities, both on and off site. These include swimming, riding bikes, game consoles, youth club, trips to the park and shops, and dog walking.

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

Students and parents state they feel that they, and their child, are safe in the house. Some refer to it as the 'safe place'.

Leaders and staff keep children central to the working and development of the house. There is child-centred planning so that staff are clear who they are working with and what they are doing. This means that children have a predictable routine for the day, which helps them to enjoy their stay.

Staff encourage all children to have a voice and to be heard. There are visual reminders around the setting of how children can raise a complaint and who they can talk to. There are also a number of visual prompts for children to use if they wish to communicate to staff how they are feeling. This has really enabled children to share any concerns that staff quickly address.

Fire safety is now given priority. Bright and colourful displays around the setting help to remind children what to do if there is a fire. Students were keen to point out to inspectors where the fire exits were and where to meet should the need arise.

Students show excellent behaviours during their stays. Staff understand each student's individual cues and send clear but gentle reminders about expected behaviours. As a result, students have not needed to be held to keep them safe, no students have gone missing and there have been no concerns surrounding bullying.

There are clear systems in place to quickly identify safeguarding concerns and to address them. Concerns are shared quickly and appropriately with the designated officer. He told inspectors that the team members had a good understanding of their role and, as a result, they seek advice appropriately.

Not all recruitment records show that safer recruitment practices have been followed. For example, one member of staff did not have a complete work history, which meant that any gaps in employment could not be identified and explored. Furthermore, not all staff are formally interviewed for the roles they are in. A recommendation has also been made in regard to family members working together. Although this has been considered and any potential risk managed, there is no written protocol for this.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders in the house and the school have a 'can-do' attitude. This is infectious and staff feel inspired to work in this way also.

Staff love working in the house. Not only do staff feel supported by leaders and managers of the house and school, but also by the senior staff on duty. One member of staff told inspectors, 'I've felt really supported since (they) have been in charge. We are really lucky to have them both, they meet with the head and this helps to keep everyone in the loop. Students have come on and are happy and thriving.'

The head of care monitors the house consistently. She is clear about areas of strength and areas to work on, which means the house has been able to go from strength to strength since the last inspection. Monitoring has not, however, picked up concerns in recruitment and the equivalency of qualification. Staff's exceptional practice has meant that this has not had an impact on the students' care.

Governors have a clear oversight of the residential provision, which has developed significantly over time. Governors visit regularly and are reassured by the detailed reports from the independent visitor. The visitor fulfils the role of critical friend exceptionally well and the head of care acts on his findings at pace.

Staff benefit from regular supervision. This gives staff time to reflect on their work and supports staff to develop in areas of practice.

Not all essential training is up to date. In most cases, this is due to COVID-19 (coronavirus) restrictions, and leaders are working hard to address this as soon as they can. Training records are not kept up to date, which reduces the ability of managers in the house to have a thorough oversight. In addition, not all staff have the required qualifications for their role. Leaders and managers have not fully considered the equivalency of qualifications that staff do have and so cannot be assured of the cross-over learning of these qualifications. Leaders and managers work hard to fully consider staff competency in their work so that the impact of this not being considered has been minimised. However, this remains an area to address.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- The school's leadership and management consistently fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the standards are met. (NMS 13.4)
- Schools operate safe recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. (NMS 14.1)
- All existing care staff have attained a relevant minimum level 3 qualification or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies. All new staff engaged from the commencement of these standards hold these qualifications or begin working towards them within 3 months of confirmation of employment. (NMS 19.2)

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that training records are kept up to date.
- The registered person should ensure that training takes place so that all essential training needs are met.
- The registered person should ensure that there is a clear written risk assessment in place for when family members work together.

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

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Inspectors

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