

# Wymondham College

Sapientia Education Trust

Wymondham College, Administration Offices, Wymondham, Norfolk NR18 9SZ

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this boarding school

Wymondham College is a co-educational academy. The college caters for pupils aged between 11 and 18. There are currently 1,434 pupils on roll, of whom 563 are boarders. Boarding is organised into six houses, with a specific sixth-form accommodation block. Day students are allocated to one of the boarding houses. Facilities include a sports hall, gym, sports pitches, a drama studio and an indoor swimming pool. The college is located between Wymondham and Attleborough, within easy reach of Norwich.

This inspection was aligned with the inspection of the education provision which took place at the same time. The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

The head of boarding has been in post for over five years but has worked at the school since 2005. He is suitably qualified and experienced.

### Inspection dates: 10 to 12 October 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 boarding 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:** 1 May 2019

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

Children speak with total positivity about their experiences of boarding. They have an extremely strong sense of belonging and community. They say that their experiences have significantly helped them to develop their social, emotional and self-determination skills. Children say that boarding adds exceptional value to their education as well as their social life.

Children's academic progress is impressive. Their academic grades exceed the national average. The education provision for children with special educational needs is exceptional. A parent said that staff provide excellent support for children with special educational needs. Another parent said that, without the school, her child would not be in mainstream education and would not have the opportunity to thrive as they do currently.

Children benefit from highly individualised support. The staff forge strong, trusting relationships with the children. Consequently, children feel safe. For some children, the strength of these relationships has led to them confiding in staff. This has resulted in significant improvements being made in children's overall safety. Staff have nurtured a culture in which children are confident to speak out. Children are fully aware that staff will advocate for them and do all they can to support them while they are in their care.

Children who are new to boarding are welcomed sensitively. Welcome packs and open days ease children in gently to their respective boarding provisions. Meticulous consideration is given to the mix of children who share dormitories. Such careful planning reduces children's anxieties. It enables them to settle quickly and begin to experience and enjoy all that the school has to offer.

Children and staff talk about their boarding houses as a 'family' and 'community'. The children look out for each other, providing peer support. Older children act as mentors for younger children. Nurturing relationships between children help to develop their sense of belonging. The school has created a culture of a home away from home. Given the size of the boarding provision, this is an impressive feat.

Children have ample opportunities to express their views and influence day-to-day school life. Requests made by children have led to additional resources being provided, such as dedicated reading areas, adaptations to prep time and additional extra-curricular activities. Student council initiatives do well in representing the views of all children. Children are encouraged to use their skills in enterprise to organise and plan a variety of social events. Children plan formal evening events, such as dinner parties and themed nights.

Children benefit from an increasingly expanding range of opportunities and experiences. Some children visited Kenya spending time working at an orphanage and with disadvantaged communities. Staff work hard to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for children in terms of funding support. All children who want an opportunity to go on a fee-paying trip can do so by seeking funding from the school.

Staff encourage children to take part in charitable events. Children have frequently been on walks to raise funds for animal and military charities. They have been involved in initiatives such as 'Sprinting to Somalia' and 'March to Malawi'. The funds raised led to training for two midwives being paid for by the school. Children routinely take part in national and international charity projects. Locally, children have participated in beach litter collections and put food parcels together for those in need.

The school community is diverse. Children can mix with children from other backgrounds and cultures. This nurtures an increased understanding and appreciation of diversity.

Children have a range of exceptionally positive experiences. Children who can go home at weekends often choose to stay in boarding so that they can have fun, be with friends and take advantage of the exceptionally varied sporting activities on offer. Children participate in rowing, paddle boarding, horse riding, boxing, taekwondo and numerous other activities. The school is a vibrant, exciting place to live and study; a place where children absolutely flourish.

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

Child protection concerns are comprehensively addressed. The right help and right support are provided to children at the right time. Parents have been provided with specialist advice on mental health concerns. Staff ensure that children get swift support that is tailored to their needs.

All children say that they feel safe in boarding. They say that discriminatory behaviours such as bullying, racism and homophobia are challenged promptly. Children are helped by staff to understand how to treat others with respect. Consequently, the school community upholds very high behavioural standards and expectations of children and staff. Embedded mentorship has fostered equality-based values in children that counter misogynistic and unequal values. A culture has been developed that is founded on respect and inclusion.

Staff identify children for whom there are concerns and check in on them to ensure that they are safe and well. This safeguards them and keeps vulnerable children in the hearts and minds of staff.

Risk management strategies are tailored to individual risks. Support strategies range from additional checks, therapeutic support, access to health and welfare apps, room

checks and increased liaison with parents, to purchasing specific resources such as weighted blankets, referral to in-house well-being support, canine therapy and referral to educational psychologists. Referrals have led to assessments and, in some cases, medical diagnoses. Some diagnoses have led to reductions in self-harming and improvements in mental health. Staff are tenacious in the early identification of potential concerns and in seeking support for children.

The school has trained an impressively high number of children to become mental health first-aiders. There has been a considered and innovative commitment to extend the support for children's mental health. The staff are highly skilled in promoting mental health and well-being through positive initiatives such as healthy eating, increased exercise and engagement in social activities.

Designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) regularly source advice from an external organisation that specialises in harmful behaviours. Staff address inappropriate behaviours to keep children safe and with a view to educating children, to inform their future decision-making. This is beneficial to the school community and to wider society.

All DSLs are suitably trained. Each designated lead has enhanced responsibilities. Leaders and managers ensure staff are given additional safeguarding training. Staff have additional opportunities to enhance their knowledge and understanding in responding to domestic and child-on-child abuse.

High-quality one-to-one and group sessions with children explore important topics exceptionally well. These build children's resilience and sense of personal safety. Staff's discussions with children have been responsive in exploring children's understanding of diversity, substance misuse, online safety, county lines, and supporting healthy relationships, celebrating black history, and respecting differences in children's personal identities. These sessions improve children's understanding and foster inclusivity.

Allegations against adults are managed effectively. Records are well maintained and there is effective liaison with the local authority designated officer and other professionals, including the police.

The school has commissioned training that has a clear focus on trauma-informed approaches. This builds on staff's understanding of how adverse childhood experiences may affect children's behaviour.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

The trustees have an exceptional understanding of the boarding provision. It meets regularly with children and staff to gain feedback and understand barriers to progress. The governing body is enthusiastic about championing positive experiences for children. Each member is extremely experienced and highly skilled in their own remit and areas of focus.

Heads of houses and boarding staff are charismatic and enthusiastic about their roles. They have a thorough understanding of children's needs and experiences. Boarding staff who have additional needs say that these needs are understood by leaders and managers.

The head of boarding has spoken at conferences to share good practice. He also ensures that good practice is shared with other boarding schools.

Senior leaders, middle managers and the wider staff team work collaboratively to support boarders and day students alike. Senior leaders are fully aware of the areas of strength and areas for development in boarding.

There is a clear commitment to professional development. The school has funded staff to take management courses and Master's degree courses. This is of exceptional benefit to these individual staff members and the children with whom they work.

Parents have provided glowing feedback about the quality of care in boarding.

The monitoring of the boarding provision and boarders' experience is thorough, detailed and includes the children's views. Findings from monitoring reviews drive improvements in what is already exceptionally good practice.

## **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.

## **Boarding school details**

**Social care unique reference number:** SC055089

**Principal:** Zoe Fisher

**Type of school:** Boarding school

**Telephone number:** 01953 609000

**Email address:** enquiries@wymondhamcollege.org

## **Inspectors**

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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Jamie Cousins, Social Care Inspector

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