

Gretton School

Manor Farm Road, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0RX

Assurance visit

Information about this residential special school

Gretton school is a privately owned independent residential special school for pupils aged between five and 19 years. Located on the outskirts of Cambridge, the school specialises in teaching children and young people with autism spectrum disorder conditions.

The residential accommodation is provided in four houses and one bungalow located on the school site. The residential provision was last inspected in January 2020.

The residential manager has been in post since November 2018 and holds a relevant level 5 qualification.

Visit dates: 3 to 4 November 2020

Previous inspection date: 14 January 2020

Previous inspection judgement: Good

Information about this visit

Due to COVID-19 (coronavirus), Ofsted suspended all routine inspections in March 2020. As part of a phased return to routine inspection, we are undertaking assurance visits to children's social care services that are inspected under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF).

At these visits, inspectors evaluate the extent to which:

- children are well cared for
- children are safe
- leaders and managers are exercising strong leadership.

This visit was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000, following the published guidance for assurance visits.

Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills is leading Ofsted's work into how England's social care system has delivered child-centred practice and care within the context of the restrictions placed on society during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Findings from the visit

We did not identify any serious or widespread concerns in relation to the care or protection of children at this assurance visit.

The care of children

The residential provision stayed open during the initial COVID-19 national lockdown period to support families who were struggling or having to isolate. This included opening at weekends and during the school holidays when the residential provision would normally be closed. The extended provision was made possible by the flexibility of the staff and managers. As a result, no agency staff were needed and the children benefited from being looked after by familiar established staff.

The day school remained open during the lockdown period. Access to the school day provided education for children who were assessed as needing the safety or support of the school. This extended to supporting a child whose own school closed and whose mother is a key worker.

Families and professionals spoke with great enthusiasm about the quality of the residential provision. Families consistently spoke about constructive relationships and of children's improvements in social and independence skills. One parent described this as 'transformative' for their child. Another said of their child, 'Without the staff's support and care, I don't know where we would have been as a family.'

Children have good, warm and trusting relationships with the staff. They talk to staff about issues that concern them.

The staff and managers listen to the children and act on what they hear. For example, two children created a presentation to demonstrate the reasons why they should be able to share a house together. Their arguments were considered, and they are now sharing a house.

Managers and staff work hard to support children with their mental health needs. Mental health professionals were very positive about the shared approach to supporting children. One professional said, 'Without the fantastic communication and support we have had, [the child] would not have made the progress she has, and you can see that progress in her presentation.'

The safety of children

The staff understand how to raise concerns. They know who the designated safeguarding leads and the designated officer are. The staff spoke with confidence

about the procedures to follow if they have concerns about the conduct of colleagues or the safety of children.

The children are increasingly able to manage their behaviour because of the support that the staff provide. Children said that they feel safe. They said that the staff look after them and that they can talk to them if they are worried, angry or upset. Children were seen to share distress with staff, who acted to support them. The managers share necessary information with safeguarding professionals. Professionals said that this information is timely and of sufficient quality.

The staff rarely use physical interventions. When they are used, they are proportionate to the level of risk and for the shortest time. The management team encourages a culture of reflection and debriefs take place. This encourages professional development and improvement.

On occasions, risk assessments have not been fully updated following significant incidents or changes for children. This does not ensure that staff have clarity about what actions to take to manage the associated risks.

Leaders and managers

Managers and staff have worked hard to provide a flexible, caring, safe and consistent provision for children throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

The staff and children benefit from strong, positive management. Managers are open, reflective and self-critical.

The residential manager has an excellent knowledge of the children. She has strong relationships with them and they are comfortable in communicating with her. She is valued by staff, managers and external professionals. Families spoke of strong management and good communication in the management team.

The staff feel well supported by the management team. The staff have received supervision and guidance throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Managers have enabled team meetings to continue during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has helped to keep staff up to date with developments across the school.

External monitoring has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic. Visits were conducted remotely initially, but have since become face to face again. The visits provide scrutiny and challenge and enable discussion. They have the potential to contribute to further improvement.

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 standard for residential special schools:

- 6.3 The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Residential special school details

Unique reference number: SC425708

Principal: Mr Ian Thorsteinsson

Inspector

Ashley Hinson, Social Care Inspector

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