

Gretton School

Manor Farm Road, Girton, Cambridge CB3 0RX

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Gretton School is privately owned and is located on the outskirts of Cambridge. It is an independent residential special school for pupils aged between five and 19 with autism spectrum conditions. The residential accommodation is provided in four houses and one bungalow located on the school site.

There are 138 pupils on roll. The total number of residential pupils is currently nine. Residential pupils board between Monday and Friday for up to four nights.

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

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

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 November 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: 4 October 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The residential provision remains outstanding and has a transformative effect on many children. Staff consistently and persistently work with the best interests of children at the front and centre. As a result, children flourish.

Children establish and maintain friendships in residence that they would not otherwise have developed. Children are helped to gain a sense of belonging and the confidence from which to develop their self-belief and worth. Consequently, children feel included in the wider community.

Many children have been out of education for some time before coming to the school. Many make impressive academic progress. Children's onward destinations include college and university, including children who this was previously considered unthinkable for. One parent said that their child's stay in residence has been unreservedly 'life changing'. The parent attributed this to the exceptional leadership and oversight of the head of care.

Children's views, wishes and feelings are at the heart of staff's interactions and practice. Staff find various ways to elicit children's views and to act on them. Staff work exceptionally well to support children when they are anxious or unsettled. The support they provide leads to children making substantial progress. For example, due to the focused support of staff, one child who required the use of a therapy dog to enable them to cope with the change from school to residence no longer needs this support as their anxieties have significantly diminished.

Staff respect children and treat them with the utmost dignity. Children accomplish impressive achievements, which are wholeheartedly celebrated by staff. For example, staff work creatively to help children develop the skills and knowledge to gain employment.

Children have choice and autonomy over their time in residence. A variety of social activities, such as planning meals for the week, shopping, budgeting, trips out and attending clubs, broaden their social skills extensively. One parent said, 'I could never achieve with my child what the residential staff have.' Staff support children to develop lifelong interests that they pursue after they move on from the school.

Staff work hard to prepare children for adulthood. Children's independence is gradually and continually built on with impressive and stretching ambition. Children engage in work experience in local schools and cafes. These experiences have directly increased children's confidence. This helps to empower children and increases their self-esteem. These are exceptionally impressive developments from some children's starting points.

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

There have been no restraints in residence. There has only been one episode when a child has gone missing. The highly skilled and attuned members of staff use a relational approach to understand and support children. Therefore, incidents are infrequent and are well managed when they occur.

Children get the right support at the right time to help them develop educationally, socially and emotionally. Staff recognise that although some children do not meet the threshold for social care input, they are nonetheless in need of help and protection. As a result, staff provide additional support, and this is having an extremely positive impact on children and their families.

The newly implemented 'team around the child' and 'team around the family' meetings have led to intensified support for children and their families. The on-site therapeutic and clinical teams collaborate with residential, safeguarding, behavioural support and educational staff to meet the needs of the children. Strategies are routinely solution focused. This leads to targeted support and appropriate signposting to external specialist provision when required.

The newly appointed designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has carried out an exceptionally thorough review and evaluation of the school's safeguarding processes and procedures. This has led to several improvements and changes. Recording systems have improved, information-sharing has been strengthened and social care colleagues are more readily consulted with. These changes have improved the already excellent safeguarding practice at the school.

The DSL actively challenges other professionals in the best and safe interests of children. This has led to increased engagement from social care and an improved understanding of potential risks across the school. Consequently, strategies to support children are more targeted and therefore more effective.

The electronic systems for recording safeguarding concerns show that staff are highly effective in their recognition and reporting of low-level issues and those that are more concerning. Swift action is taken in response to concerns raised. Outcomes and actions are clearly recorded and show that appropriate safeguarding processes and procedures are routinely followed.

Residential staff work excellently with the child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). Staff frequently liaise with CAMHS when support is needed for children. This exceptionally strong collaborative approach has led to children receiving faster support than they would have otherwise and the implementation of safety plans that have reduced risks. This is another excellent example of staff's commitment to improve the lives of children and not accept 'no' for an answer.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are creative, exceptionally child centred and proactive yet practical in their approach. Consequently, the children have extremely strong and effective ambassadors working on their behalf. The positive impact of leaders on children is long lasting and for some is life changing. Children and their families are given hope, and this hope blossoms into tangible achievements which see children succeed not just in school but in their lives beyond school.

Managers take time to support staff, celebrate their achievements and guide them professionally to ensure that they receive consistently excellent standards of care. This increases staff's well-being, which indirectly affects the well-being of children. Staff said that the support they receive from the head of care and the deputy manager is exceptional.

Leaders and managers make the most of opportunities to share their practice and increase understanding and acceptance of children with autism. The staff support and develop the skills of other professionals external to the school. The headteacher has delivered training at one of Cambridge's largest teacher training programmes. She has also spoken at the women's institute and the local church to increase the local community's awareness of how to interact with children with autism. The work carried out at the school is worthy of wider dissemination.

Leaders and managers understand that children who are neurodiverse can face challenges that prevent them from gaining suitable employment. Leaders and managers have been creative and proactive in their endeavour to rewrite this narrative. Leaders and managers have carried out research that shows that children with autism are significantly less likely to go into paid employment than non-neurodiverse peers. Consequently, an application has been made to apply to an established programme that creates supported employment internships for young people in their last year of education.

The staff are dynamic, never content to rest on their already high standards and continually look for ways to support children more effectively. For example, leaders and managers have recently signed up to an anti-bullying initiative to reduce the frequency of bullying.

Leaders understand the challenges and potential prejudice children with autism can face. Leaders are creative in their dedication to breaking down stereotypes and improving tolerance and understanding of difference. Leaders' commitment to champion and celebrate inclusivity and diversity has a direct impact on how children view themselves and their place in the world.

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: SC425708

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Beth Elkins

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Inspector

Lianne Bradford, Social Care Inspector

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