

Cloughwood Academy

Cloughwood Academy, Stones Manor Lane, Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1NU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Cloughwood Academy is a purpose-built day and residential special academy. It is located within extensive grounds on the Mid Cheshire Campus in Hartford. The academy caters for children aged between eight and 18 years.

There are currently 121 children on roll. The academy provides extended days and residential places during term time. There are eight residential places, with 20 children accessing the provision from Monday to Thursday.

A head of care oversees the residential provision. She is appropriately experienced and qualified.

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

Inspection dates: 13 to 15 February 2024

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: 14 February 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children have excellent, secure and trusting relationships with the residential staff. Staff provide nurturing support to the children and demonstrate that they genuinely care about them. They speak proudly about the fantastic progress that the children make. The staff team is sensitive to children's individual needs, and the children respond positively to this approach.

Children enjoy their residential experience. Children told inspectors that they are made to feel very welcome in the residential provision, and this helps them to settle in quickly. Children are happy and have fun during their stays. The children make friends with children who are also residing in this school and with children from other residential schools. This provides them with opportunities to develop their social skills and establish relationships with others, both of which are areas that many of the children struggle with.

The residential experience has a profound impact on the lives of children. Children make exceptional progress because of the support they receive from staff working in the residential provision. Some parents told inspectors that their children have significantly improved their ability to manage their own emotions and behaviour. This has helped to improve their family life at home. One parent said, 'The school has helped transform my son into the happy little boy that he used to be. He has thrived since being there. The emotional and well-being support is of a high standard. The residential team is brilliant. The staff go above and beyond.' This practice is worthy of wider dissemination.

Children's life opportunities are enhanced because of their residential experiences. The provision of activities on and off the school site is excellent. Children are supported to experience lots of different activities to develop their independence and their interests. They also take part in volunteering in the community and fundraising for local charities. Parents are kept up to date about their children's experiences through an online communication system. This enhances the strong communication network that the residential team has with children's parents and carers.

Children's views are prioritised. They attend weekly house meetings, are part of the school council and are encouraged to speak to trustees and the independent visitor regularly about their residential experiences. An independent person also provides an additional opportunity for children to speak to someone about their home and residential life. This number of forums for children to share their views empowers them to take ownership of their care and make decisions about their residential experience.

Children's health needs are thoroughly monitored by the staff team. The staff team is appropriately trained to understand and meet the physical and mental health needs

of the children. The school nurse and associated health professionals work collaboratively with the residential staff to ensure that children are provided with the support they individually require. There is the additional support of a counsellor who has been commissioned by the school to support children's emotional well-being.

A newly formatted care plan has been introduced to promote a holistic approach to assessing and tracking children's progress between the residential and school staff. The residential team works collaboratively with the school to incorporate children's learning targets into their evening routines.

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

Safeguarding is of paramount importance in this school. Children feel safe and have a strong sense of security. The safety and well-being of the children is a central ethos of the residential provision. Leaders and managers have an excellent understanding of multi-agency safeguarding practice. They take their responsibility for managing safeguarding concerns seriously, have up-to-date training and provide continuous 24-hour safeguarding support to the residential provision. A board of governors and trustees ensures that safeguarding practice is regularly monitored, reviewed and maintained to a high standard.

The residential team offers high-quality support to children and their families who are experiencing challenges at home. Residential provision has been used as a short-term alternative to emergency foster care to prevent disruption to children when they need a safe place to stay. The designated safeguarding lead and the staff team are positive advocates for children. When other professionals have not acted in children's best interests to ensure that they are safeguarded effectively, this has been appropriately challenged.

Residential staff have excellent knowledge of children's complex needs and potential risks. This enables them to identify and respond to children's changing developmental needs. Staff benefit from regular comprehensive safeguarding training. Leaders and managers ensure that safeguarding knowledge is clearly articulated to staff to ensure that they have up-to-date information in relation to managing a wide range of safeguarding issues.

Risk management plans identify triggers and different stages of children's escalating behaviour. They provide staff with useful strategies for each child to minimise potential risks and to help them de-escalate situations effectively. This ensures that there are high safeguarding standards and that consistent support is offered to children. Incident records demonstrate a consistently high level of information-sharing with all relevant professionals.

Behaviour management is exceptional. Rewards systems are understood by children, and they are appropriate in supporting them to make positive choices. Children do not go missing from the residential provision. This reflects a settled group of children.

Incidents of physically holding children have decreased in frequency over time. Leaders and managers have also taken steps to improve records relating to holding children to allow for greater detail and clarity about how the intervention has been carried out.

Children enjoy a largely harmonious residential experience. Staff teach children to develop strategies to manage any conflicts or escalating emotions. This prevents any low-level issues from escalating further, and it means that children have developed extremely positive and respectful relationships with each other.

There has been one isolated incident when leaders and managers have not carried out safer recruitment checks for a staff member who has worked overseas. This has been an oversight by leaders and managers. It is not the school's usual approach to safer recruitment. Leaders and managers took swift action during the inspection to address the shortfalls and implement appropriate safeguards.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers collectively work together and have a shared ambitious vision for the residential provision and for changing children's lives. They are always looking for ways to improve the service. They have high aspirations for the children and are focused on progression to support children into adulthood. They are innovative, organised and exceptional role models for the children.

Leaders and managers have an excellent understanding of the plans for the children. They encourage children to achieve their goals and permanence for their futures. They are honest and transparent, recognising the strengths and areas of development of the provision. The head of care has effective monitoring systems to enable her to monitor children's progress, and she can demonstrate children's progression while using the residential provisions over a sustained period of time.

Staff regularly receive highly effective support to develop their practice and skills. Staff appraisal targets are focused on developing the service and linked to individual staff practice self-assessments. The head of care has introduced a continuous professional development record. This has enabled her to proactively assess staff's areas of confidence, training needs and support required in relation to their roles and responsibilities.

The staff team is highly supported, valued and empowered by the senior leadership team. Staff recognise the high expectations for them to change the lives of children. The residential and educational staff work very well together to ensure that communication is fluid and children are consistently supported. This has been a key area that has contributed to children's excellent achievements and progression.

Arrangements to ensure that there is a highly skilled and qualified workforce are strong. New staff are provided with a very effective induction. Staff are trained in a variety of areas that are bespoke to children's needs. Because of this, children are

helped by adults who have the knowledge and skills to support them. The head of care brings regular research-based practice linked to children's needs and current issues to the team meetings to develop staff's knowledge and skills.

The residential development plan is focused and drives improvements in children's experiences of residential provision, promoting children's involvement and excellent communication with parents. The senior leadership team works with other residential schools to share exceptional practice and to support improvements to children's residential experiences.

The independent visitor's reports are of excellent quality, and they support ongoing improvements in the residential provision. They are shared with the appropriate people in the senior leadership team and governing body, and there is evidence to demonstrate that recommendations are acted on quickly by the head of care.

The governor and trustee arrangements hold the school to account to ensure that the highest standards of care are provided to children. They are passionate about the residential provision and the impact it has on supporting families and changing children's lives. The residential provision is a standing agenda at the governor's meetings, which allows sole focus on its progression. Termly residential inspections by trustees also provide an extra layer of scrutiny and accountability in relation to the board's oversight of the operation of the residential provision.

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

Point for improvement

- School leaders should ensure that they operate safer recruitment and adopt recruitment procedures in line with the regulatory requirements and having regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State.

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: SC006625

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Robert Newton

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Inspectors

Cheryl Field, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Aislinn Cooper, Social Care Inspector

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