

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. The residential accommodation is provided in four houses and one bungalow located on the school site. The bungalow is not currently in use.

There are 160 pupils on roll. The total number of residential pupils is currently 10. 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: 28 to 30 January 2025

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: 13 November 2023

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

There were 10 children boarding at the time of inspection and four children were spoken to.

There is significant evidence of change and improvement for children because of the actions of the leaders and staff working at the school. There is a strong culture of ambition for the staff and the children, fuelled by a lack of complacency across the provision at all levels. This has resulted in a consistently excellent inspection history.

Children have grown in confidence. Children who previously struggled to leave their rooms are now doing so and trying new things. Children have benefited from mentoring support that has helped equip them to move on to college placements after leaving the school.

Staff work sensitively with children who are struggling. The staff show patience, care, resilience and commitment to help the children make positive changes. An open and transparent approach enables the children to contribute to designing their support plans. Children have their support plans emailed to them to review, amend and send back to the author. As a result, children feel heard and understood.

Children and young people have enjoyed many highly impressive positive experiences with staff, including an ambitious trip to Rome. The leaders of the school took essential steps to ensure the trip was meticulously planned, involving parents to settle their fears, including a presentation. Parents report this to have been a life-changing moment. It has contributed to children growing in confidence. Children are developing new goals and ambitions, which reflects significant progress.

Staff embrace inclusivity. Children are shown acceptance and supported to follow their chosen path. Children are helped to become members of trusts and groups that celebrate their differences. Children take part in charity walks and coffee mornings, raising money for important causes. These contributions are helping children to feel valued at the school and part of the wider community. They have visited events associated with their interests.

The collaborative approach of staff and managers is having a significant impact on children's lives. Feedback is consistently excellent. One member of staff said: 'We know we are doing a good job when every child is safe and happy with who they are.' A parent said: 'The school has been a breath of fresh air, they take the blame and shame away.'

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

Safeguarding decisions are made with great care and consideration, with all parties receiving support and understanding. Leaders, managers and staff act in the best interests and safety of the children.

Proactive and creative safeguarding practice means children do not go missing or leave the site without permission. The relational approach of staff enables them to get to know the children and create safe spaces for them to go when they are struggling in school, such as return to a house, or retreat to a quiet area. This means children do not feel the need to leave the site.

Children are safer because of staying at the school. Sharing of information and the strong, trusted relationships built with staff and leaders have meant that children are likely to make safer choices when they move on from boarding. All children spoken to could name a member of staff they would turn to if they had any worries or concerns.

Children who communicate by self-harming and self-injurious behaviour are showing vast signs of improvement. Staff have worked extremely hard to build safe relationships with children. As a result, children have felt able to share difficult feelings with staff and work with mental health professionals.

Staff use their relationships to help children to remain calm. These relationships help children to open up about their feelings and emotions. On occasion, incidents have occurred when it has been necessary for staff to carry out restraints to keep people safe. However, these have decreased, and they are not commonplace within the houses.

Creative, highly effective approaches to house meetings further enhance children's capacity to become safer. The approaches have included quizzes, booklets and worksheets on a topic of the week. Staff use this platform to help children to understand the meaning of consent, how to stay safe online, how to be more independent, have good hygiene routines and how to achieve goals.

The designated safeguarding leads confidently challenge other teams to think about the interests of the children. They advocate for children and escalate concerns. This approach is helping to remove labels and prompting others to consider how best to support children who need more support to be able to manage their emotions and their behaviour safely.

The skilled staff use recording and reporting systems effectively to ensure information is shared. This has helped to ensure that required actions are carried out to support children to reduce the risk of reoccurrence of incidents.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Leaders and managers are inspirational, confident and ambitious for children. They make a highly significant contribution to the lives of those in their care. The headteacher and heads of care work closely alongside one another to provide the best possible support to the children who are boarding.

Proactive, positive and creative leadership enables a can-do, forward-thinking approach to flourish. Leaders and managers work with local authorities and other settings to share their expertise in how to support neurodiverse children to maintain school placements and to be heard.

A lack of complacency and a determination to always improve and progress underpin the quality of the service. Leaders and managers recognise the role of quality assurance and ensure that this is effective.

Leaders and managers are committed, along with the staff team, to achieve the best possible outcomes for the children. Research-informed practice is strongly embedded throughout the setting. Staff speak confidently about how it is role modelled to them and has shaped their understanding of how to connect with neurodiverse children.

The approach of leaders and managers is embodied by the staff team. The exceptional support and guidance staff receive leads to their being able to confidently meet the needs of the children and manage significant challenges.

Careful, considered recruitment and selection has provided children with aspirational role models. Staff feel supported and feel they have grown from the belief and opportunity provided to them.

The residential leadership team works extremely closely with the school leaders, professionals and families. Feedback is excellent. A parent, referring to the progress their child had made, said: 'The head of care has been incredible. I had lost faith in education. My child had been out of school for four years and now attends every day.'

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

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Dan Williams, Social Care Inspector

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