

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 autistic pupils aged between 5 and 19. The residential accommodation is provided in four houses.

There are 175 pupils on roll. The total number of residential pupils is currently 6, but can accommodate up to 12 pupils. 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: 10 to 12 February 2026

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: 28 January 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

There were 6 children boarding at the time of inspection and all 6 children were spoken to.

Staff patiently persevere with children. Furthermore, staff are knowledgeable, empathetic and committed to their roles. This helps to forge substantive relationships with children. Relational practice runs through the core of the school. As a result, children learn to trust staff, enabling them to thrive and make positive strides in their lives.

The deputy head of care reflected on the gravity of their role when considering the children's parents by saying, 'We are looking after their most treasured possessions'. One parent captured their child's care by saying, 'School have made all the difference,' making reference to their child flourishing as they are 'understood.'

The children's written records are recognised as important by staff and managers. Records succinctly and personably reflect the children's progress. They give a sense of how staff are effectively challenging children to become as independent as they can be. Furthermore, they show, through conversations led by skilled staff, that children are developing a clearer understanding of self and the world around them.

Extensive efforts are made to ensure that children are involved and consulted about their care. Again, relational practice is at the heart of this endeavour. Children are taught to navigate relationships and develop the skills needed to repair these when they become strained. This has had a profound influence on children's relationships, both in and out of school. One child captured their experience of care by saying, 'The only complaint I have is that I don't have a complaint!'

In essence, residence reflects and is seen by children and their families as a home from home. It is a place where children share enjoyable moments and laughter with staff. Importantly, staff capture memorable moments in photos and collate them into a personalised photo album, which children leave with. The children are able to look back on and cherish positive memories experienced in residence.

Staff maintain links with children and their families once children move on from residence. In doing so, staff continue to demonstrate their interest and care in the children's lives. Again, reinforcing the value and positive influence that supportive and caring relationships can have.

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

The designated safeguarding lead has made credible efforts to demystify the broad concept of safeguarding. An example of this is through the implementation of bitesize lesson scripts to boost staff knowledge in this area of their practice. Such efforts have embedded a confident, robust and proportionate response to safeguarding.

Importantly, the head of care attends weekly safeguarding meetings alongside various practitioners across school. Again, the quality of information sharing across school, including residence, enables effective and timely supportive interventions for children. Moreover, these meetings are seen as a crucial forum to reflect, learn and plan how to best mitigate emerging and known risks.

The designated safeguarding lead is a standalone role, which is supported by two deputies. This empowers and enables these practitioners to fully focus on evaluating and driving forward practice in this area. An example of this is the skilled application of the school's electronic recording system to recognise worrying behavioural trends. In such instances, bespoke training and support is given to staff to better support children.

When staff are worried about a child's behaviour, a child's mental health, or any other aspect of the child's care, the concern is approached sensitively and collaboratively. Staff are skilled at communicating the context around incidents that involve children, or any worries that they may have around the child's welfare. This means that children's parents and other professionals can work together to deliver a proportionate and supportive response.

Staff are perceptive and effective at supporting children to process a plethora of information that the modern world exposes them to, particularly online. In doing so, children receive a balanced view and learn how to appropriately debate topical issues in the world. This practice reduces the risk of children forming entrenched extreme views.

The behaviour and welfare team inject objectivity, accountability and oversight concerning children who require more help to manage their behaviour. Again, incidents that involve children are reflected on with an analytical eye. This creates the opportunity for staff to learn how to better support children when children experience acute episodes of crisis. Tellingly, significant incidents involving children in residence are rare.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Practitioners across school exude an energy and sense of purpose in enacting their respective roles. Undoubtedly, this is influenced by leaders and managers who have created an open, inclusive and forward-thinking culture. Moreover, leaders are adept

at delegating roles and fostering a dedicated work ethic that is rooted in championing the children to succeed.

There is a forensic approach around researching and planning staff training. This is done with the needs of autistic children in mind. In doing so, training is tailored to meet the high expectations of care that the school have for children in residence. Resourcefully, the school seek expert input to achieve this aim. Moreover, excellent efforts are made to engineer shared learning opportunities for staff to prevent learning becoming an isolated experience.

Leaders are consistently striving to improve through seeking and funding expert bodies to critically evaluate practice in school, including residence. This means that leaders keep abreast of latest research findings in order to continually evolve and improve. One external practitioner said, 'All practitioners want to do better, they are engaged and want autistic children to have their rights met.'

Staff supervision sessions are steeped in reflective practice. Again, children are at the centre of these discussions, even playing an active role as they are encouraged to give feedback on their relationship with staff. This practice also extends to seeking feedback from teaching staff. This approach has developed staff's ability to heed and learn from constructive feedback. A further example of an embedded learning culture.

Systems to evaluate the children's care in residence are meaningful and effective. These systems are not applied as typical auditing tools. The head of care and deputy head of care apply them evaluatively in order to improve standards of care in residence.

The governor who oversees residence uses their experience to evaluate the children's care. The governor's objectivity in their written reports enables constructive oversight that is delivered in governor's meetings. Notably, residence is a standing agenda item in governor's meetings, showing the value that school hold for their residential setting.

The school newsletter is written termly and sent to children's families and staff across the school setting. This provides an all-inclusive overview of life in school, featuring life in residence. Photos bring children's experiences to life. Of particular note, there is excellent sharing of knowledge. Examples include learning about the risks that children are exposed to when online, or providing useful links to resources such as social stories.

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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Inspectors

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