

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 a privately owned, independent residential special school for pupils aged between five and 19. Located on the outskirts of Cambridge, the school specialises in teaching children with autism spectrum conditions. The residential accommodation is provided in four houses and one bungalow located on the school site.

There are 127 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 inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 October 2022

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 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

This is an outstanding residential provision that not only transforms the lives of children, but their families too. Children take on challenges that they and their families never thought possible and, as a result, achieve outstanding outcomes. Children enjoy and gain substantial benefits from boarding. They are exposed to opportunities that help them develop socially, emotionally and intellectually. They build strong relationships with staff who are committed to helping them achieve their potential. Consequently, children make significant progress in many areas of their lives.

Many children have been out of school for long periods before starting boarding. Despite previous challenges in education, children have flourished as part of the boarding community. Children's educational attendance and achievement are exceptionally high. Children who board have significantly better educational outcomes than children who attend the school as day pupils. This evidences the commitment that boarding staff have to supporting children to achieve to the highest possible level.

Children are exposed to a range of opportunities that help them develop socially, emotionally and intellectually. Some children have attained a Bronze Duke of Edinburgh Award and participated in work experience and voluntary work. These achievements are remarkable given the children's needs and previous experiences. Parents said that there have been substantial improvements in children's social engagement with others in the time that their children have been boarding.

Children's independence grows because of being in boarding. Children who have had very limited experience in developing life skills have been helped to use public transport, schedule appointments, improve personal hygiene and manage money. Children learn how to cook. They have broadened the range of food that they cook and eat, which for some children was quite limited. Staff have helped children to find employment and undertake work experience. Staff are supporting one child to learn to drive. Help for children to learn a variety of new skills has led to them making significant progress with their levels of independence.

Staff help children to plan for and move into further education. Children are given support to visit further education facilities. Staff go above and beyond expectations to ensure that children's onward education placements are a success. Staff discuss education travel arrangements with children. These things help to reduce children's worries and anxieties and make future success more likely. This is evidenced by exceptionally high rates of children going on to further education, including college and university.

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

Therapeutic support is readily available to children from the on-site therapists. The school employs occupational therapists, a sensory integration-trained therapist, two speech and language therapists, an art therapist and a clinical psychologist. Therapists work with residential and school staff providing training in behavioural support and trauma-informed practice. Therapists also assist in staff supervision, debriefs and meetings. All children have had access to at least one of the therapists to help meet their individual needs. The therapy team supports the residential staff by sharing guidance and strategies to help children. There are two therapy dogs at the school. They are used to support children to go from their houses to school and to help them at times of distress and anxiety. Different forms of therapeutic support have helped to significantly improve outcomes for children.

There have been no incidents of children being reported missing from the school, none of restraint and no complaints. This demonstrates how settled children feel staying in boarding and the relationships that they have with staff. When behavioural incidents occur, staff manage them skilfully. Staff use their in-depth knowledge of what children respond best to. Follow-up work is undertaken with children and staff to ensure that any learning from incidents is taken and used to help prevent them recurring.

Risks relating to the group dynamic between children living in the same house are well managed. One child had lived on their own for a significant period, but another child has recently moved into the same house. Careful consideration was given to ensure that children were suitable to live together. Both children have been well supported by staff to manage minor issues that have arisen, and have now formed a good relationship. When another child was struggling to settle into their house, staff quickly identified the issues and took action to resolve them. The child was helped to move to another house. Exceptionally careful planning went into this, minimising the child's anxieties.

Children are encouraged and helped to take appropriate risks. Two children were able to go on a trip to Barcelona. When there, they were allowed free time and encouraged to independently use the underground system. This demonstrates a real willingness of staff to help children take risks in supported ways that lead to them developing new skills. The trip took place as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. It helped increase the children's self-esteem and confidence in achieving new things, supporting them to be more confident with their upcoming exams.

Staff have set up a working group to work with parents and children to increase their awareness of online safety. Information is shared with parents regularly about online and other risks through newsletters and regular email updates. These have included information about risks relating to current trends of what children are known to be accessing online. Sharing information outside school about potential risks for children helps to keep them safer at home as well as at school.

There are clear recruitment procedures for new staff. Checks are thorough and any discrepancies or gaps are suitably explored. Children have been included in the recruitment process. They have written interview questions. Prospective staff are assessed as safe to work with children and as suitable and having the skills and knowledge that children themselves identify as necessary for the role. Early in the recruitment process, leaders and managers think about which children the staff would be most suitable to work with. This demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that the group dynamic in each house, not just between children but also between children and staff, works as well as possible.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The head of care is highly experienced and knowledgeable. Her understanding of the children and determination to do the very best for children shines through in all her practices and interactions, with children and staff alike. The head of care is a remarkable role model to the children, as she demonstrates that when faced with barriers, you work to find solutions to overcome them.

Leaders and managers not only adopt research-based practice but continue to undertake their own research. The school's executive principal continues to work closely with external organisations to undertake and share research, seeking to find new and innovative ways of working with children with autism spectrum disorder. Research has been shared with other schools and outreach work has taken place with them in relation to behaviour management. Children beyond those at this school benefit from the work undertaken by leaders.

External and internal monitoring are exceptionally strong and are used to drive improvement. Monitoring visits are carried out with vigour and reports identify when practice can be improved. Managers are open to and inviting of this scrutiny and respond to it effectively. Systems for internal monitoring ensure that managers have excellent oversight of any developing issues for children and take action to address these. Managers have clear plans to further develop the care that they provide to children. These are regularly revisited to ensure continuous improvements are being made.

Leaders and managers advocate with tenacity on behalf of the children. They work closely with other professionals to ensure that all support options for children are considered. Leaders and managers encourage staff to inspire children. Children hold aspirations that they would not without this support. One parent said that their child now has dreams that they had previously not thought possible for them. By constantly encouraging children's abilities and ambition, staff help them to have achievements that will have a positive and enduring effect on their life.

Children's views are actively sought and responded to. The independent person provides children with regular opportunities to discuss their views, wishes and feelings. As a result of these visits and time spent with children, positive changes are

made. These include bullying issues in school being resolved, an increased choice of snacks being made available in residence and issues with friendships being resolved. The independent person is an excellent advocate for children who improves outcomes for children who board. In addition, the independent person provides an extra layer of scrutiny that ensures safeguards are maintained and that children are safe.

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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Inspectors

Joe Cox, Social Care Inspector (lead)
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