

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 and young people who have autism spectrum conditions. The residential accommodation is provided in four houses and one bungalow located on the school site.

There are 125 pupils on roll. The total number of residential pupils is currently seven. Residential pupils board between Monday and Friday for 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.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2020. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

We last visited this setting on 4 November 2020 to carry out an assurance visit. The report is published on the Ofsted website.

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 March 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 January 2020

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

The staff recognise the significant impact that being in residence has on children. Staff can readily identify children's progress. Children develop their independence skills, learn to cook and budget, travel independently and grow their social networks. One child attends a gym independently. This is substantial progress, as the child was unable to socialise with others when he first joined the residence. Pairings for staff and children are well considered in residence. This enables transitions to residence to be a positive experience for children.

Diversity and inclusion are welcomed and encouraged by the staff, and difference is celebrated. One member of staff said, 'Children need to see difference, to know that it is acceptable to be different.' The diverse staff team has been specifically appointed to encourage children to view the differences that they feel about themselves as something to be proud of.

Children's attendance at school is consistently high. Children's academic outcomes are impressive, with some children predicted 5s and 6s in their GCSEs. One child was unable to end his time in residence in a planned way due to ill health. However, staff continued to support him via outreach. This additional support helped the child to gain a distinction in music, a grade 5 GCSE in mathematics and grade 7 GCSE in English. This is exceptional progress for the child, who was experiencing a particularly distressing time. Staff did not give up on the child. They systematically go above and beyond expectations to get the very best out of the children.

Children at this school feel immensely well cared for. One child wrote about the residential manager, 'From the start, you welcomed me with open arms and made me feel like I belong in a world that is confusing and overwhelming most of the time. You have changed my life and the way I view the world. I feel listened to and seen at Gretton. I have never experienced that feeling before.' By the child's own admission, the school has changed his life beyond what he thought possible.

The school benefits from the weekly input of an educational psychologist. Support is also provided from occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and a clinical psychologist. Therapists work with residential and school staff providing training in research-informed practice. The educational psychologist said, 'Staff have superb relationships with children and an understanding of children's behaviour. Nothing throws them, they fully understand the children's needs and consider how to move them forward.'

One parent said, 'Gretton school has been an absolutely positive experience for my child, who spent two years out of mainstream education. I feel that there are tremendous improvements being made socially as well as educationally.'

Children build trusting relationships with staff. Children benefit from the consistent staff team because they are supported by staff who know them well. Staff's understanding of the children's needs ensures that situations that may make the children feel uncomfortable or anxious are minimised.

Staff encourage children to take up hobbies. Children go to the gym, go bouldering and spend time with each other playing board games and Dungeons and Dragons. Music jamming sessions and playing instruments are encouraged. Children's experiences are broadened because of being in residence.

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

The designated safeguarding lead has exceptional oversight of the systems to record and manage safeguarding concerns. Child protection referrals are made promptly and there is good liaison with partnership agencies. This ensures that children are safeguarded appropriately. Staff understand the importance of recording low-level issues as these can contribute to a broader picture of concern.

There has been a reduction in restraint over the last three years. When restraint is used, it is done so in a reasonable manner and only when necessary. There have been no restraints in residence for over a year. Staff use their relationships with and understanding of children effectively to help calm children when they are in crisis. Consequently, incidents in residence are infrequent.

Staff helped one child to access support from the child and adolescent mental health team during restrictions related to COVID-19. Staff attended sessions with the child and an assistant psychologist for a six-month period. Without the support from a staff member attending these sessions, it is likely that the child would not have accessed the psychological support that she required. Consequently, she would not have made the remarkable improvements to her mental health that she has achieved. This support is above and beyond usual care practices that a school provides.

Online safety is exceptionally well considered by staff. Staff have appropriate training in online safety. The topic is interwoven into residential meetings and the school curriculum. Appropriate e-safety agreements are in place, but the staff are not risk averse. Staff support children when they have been vulnerable to online abuse or exploitation. The staff provide online safety guidance to parents. This additional support increases the safety of children both in and outside of the school.

Children's physical, emotional and social development needs are supported well. Children are involved in writing their own support plans, which are reviewed and updated regularly. Clear strategies enable staff to support children to manage their behaviour and anxieties. Support plans outline the child's abilities, preferred communication methods, behaviours and health. Children benefit from the consistent approach from staff.

Medication procedures are good. Medication errors are infrequent. However, when errors do occur, they are recorded thoroughly. Staff take appropriate action to ensure that the children are safe after medication errors and ensure that medical advice is sought. Children are supported to voice their feelings and wishes regarding their medication. Staff support children to tell their parents how they feel about their medication. As a result, appointments have been booked with consultants and changes have been made to the children's medication in response to their wishes.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The residential manager has exceptional leadership and management qualities. Her understanding of the children and her passion to do the very best for children shines through in all her practices and interactions with children and staff alike. The residential manager is a role model to children to show that obstacles are to be overcome. She views challenges as opportunities for positive change. She is an asset to the school, and she is respected by the staff and children alike. Staff value her constant availability, unwavering support and determination to advocate for children as a tenacious parent would.

Both the residential manager and the deputy residential manager are fully immersed in the children's care. They have the children's interests at the centre of all their practices.

The headteacher and residential manager work as a strong alliance. This has allowed the school and residence to operate in a more integrated manner. This has led to improvements in the provision of tailored care and delivery of differentiated education.

The school not only adopts research-based practice, but it also creates its own research. Outcomes from the research are adopted by other schools and feature in educational research journals. The school works alongside charities and has made an alliance with organisations whose values and principles align with its own. The school is involved in autism-specific research that not only supports the children at the school, but has the capacity to have a positive impact on children far beyond the school.

Outreach work is provided to other schools and the school shares its expertise to support other professionals and children. The positive impact of the school has a far-reaching influence.

The staff tenaciously challenge other agencies when it is felt that their services fall below standard. The executive principal raised a concern about a placing authority's effectiveness of planning and safeguarding practice in relation to a child. In the absence of a home for this child, the school stepped up and allowed the child to stay in residence for some weekends and holiday periods. This is vastly beyond the school's scope. Emergency staff were put in place to support this child. Senior

managers advocated on behalf of the child like tenacious parents. The persistent challenge to the placing local authority led to the child being found a suitable and safe place to live and meant that the child was not homeless for the Christmas period.

During nationally enforced lockdowns, a time when schools were closing their doors to children, this school opened its doors wider. Children were able to stay for occasional weekends, which supported families that had COVID-19. This arrangement kept children safe and reduced transmission levels. The school also supported the children of key workers. This led to key workers being able to continue their invaluable work. Without the support from the school, permitting children to stay on in residence and for occasional weekends, the availability of key workers to continue working would have been restricted.

Leaders and managers welcome external scrutiny and auditing visits. Leaders and managers engage effectively with external monitoring processes and this drives improvement. The newly appointed independent person conducts visits with great rigour and challenge. This provision of external scrutiny ensures that residence continues to operate to very high standards.

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

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Inspectors

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