

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 years. Located on the outskirts of Cambridge, the school specialises in teaching children and young people who have autistic spectrum disorder conditions. The school had 97 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection, eight of whom reside at the school for four nights a week. The residential accommodation is provided in three houses and one bungalow located on the school site. The residential provision was last inspected as part of an integrated inspection in February 2017.

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 January 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected **requires improvement to be good**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 22 February 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is good because:

- The children have good, effective relationships with the staff who support them. The staff know the children well.
- The children enjoy the experience of staying in residence. They make progress as a result.
- Parents report that communication is strong and effective. The staff work well with outside agencies.
- The staff receive regular supervision. They speak positively about the support and guidance that they receive from the residential manager and the team leaders.
- The children access a wide range of activities. These provide the children with new experiences while reinforcing the development of social skills.
- The children have appropriate freedom. They make progress towards independence as a result.
- There are few behavioural incidents in the residential provision. The staff support the children to manage their behaviour well.
- Internal monitoring by the residential manager has improved considerably since the last inspection.
- The points for improvement made at the last inspection have been addressed.

The residential special school's areas for development are:

- The response to emerging risks related to a recent safeguarding concern was not sufficient. The risk assessment lacked depth and clarity, and was not known to staff. The staff understanding of internet safety is not reflected in individual children's risk assessments. Some key records are not consistently clear enough, with some lacking summary and evaluation.
- There is no independent person whom the children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school.
- Staff are not enrolled quickly enough on courses to work towards required professional qualifications.
- Recruitment processes are not consistently strong enough. It is not always clear if full employment histories have been gathered. When an applicant has worked overseas, the rationale for not seeking an overseas criminal check is not recorded.
- Monitoring by governors is not consistently strong enough, with limited evidence of reports being shared, and some whole school reports lacking consideration of residence.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school does not meet the following national minimum standard(s) for residential special schools:

- 2.2 The school identifies at least one person other than a parent, outside the staff, and those responsible for the leadership and governance of the school who children may contact directly about personal problems or concerns at the school. This person may be known as the 'independent person'. Children are informed who this person is, and how to contact them and they are easily accessible. Children are also provided with one or more appropriate helpline(s) or outside contact numbers, including the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, to ring in case of problems or distress.
- 6.3 The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
- 19.2 All existing care staff have attained a relevant minimum level 3 qualification or have qualifications which demonstrate the same competencies. All new staff engaged from the commencement of these standards hold these qualifications or begin working towards them within 3 months of confirmation of employment.

Recommendations

- Ensure that all records relating to safeguarding concerns, complaints and staff conduct are clear, complete and recorded in a timely manner.
- Ensure that all recruitment files clearly show employment histories and explanations for employment gaps, and that the school's policies and procedures are clear about what recruiting managers should do regarding overseas applicants. This should include ensuring that the rationale for not seeking an overseas check is included on relevant personnel files.
- Ensure that records support and fully record the monitoring activity undertaken by the governors.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The residential provision is good. The response to safeguarding concerns in the majority of cases is good. However, there is a need to improve the quality and oversight of risk assessments. On one occasion, during which the residential manager was absent, the response to emerging risks was not sufficient. Despite this, there are a number of strengths. The children benefit from good outcomes and experiences, and they make good progress because they stay at the residential provision.

The children have good, effective relationships with the staff who support them. The staff know the children well. The children speak positively about them. Families report that the children receive well-coordinated and consistent care. They say that this care makes a significant difference. One parent said, '[The school is the] best thing that has ever happened to him. He feels secure and happy; he has not felt like that before.' Positive, good-humoured and supportive interactions were seen throughout the inspection. Children feel settled as a result. One child said, 'I feel safe and secure here. I am not anxious like I was before.'

Parents report that communication is strong and effective. The children and their families say that introductions to the residential provision are handled well. The children are able to contact their families during their time at school. Some of the children have developed friendships with other residential pupils. They are able to spend time with them and enjoy leisure activities together.

The children are able to access a wide range of activities. This is a strength. The children spoke with excitement and enthusiasm about some of the activities that they had participated in, such as trips to the cinema, going to see bands and a trip to a local water park. Families report that the children's participation in these activities has a significant impact. The children, many of whom find socialisation a difficult skill to master, are able to develop their social skills. A parent said, 'They [the staff] really look after social needs. He [my child] walks to the shop. They worked really hard on this. They go out socially as a group, and that is really important for these children; getting them out and enjoying social situations.'

The staff support the children to develop their independence skills in a safe way. The staff ensure that there is careful planning and review. They ensure that the children are confident in each task. This approach equips the children with the skills to keep themselves safe and manage in the community in a safe way. As a result, the children make progress. They go into town on the bus independently, cook meals and go to the local shops. This progress changes children's futures. One parent said, 'The level of care is exceptional. It is not just care. He [child] is being helped to be independent. It is now possible that he may be able to live independently.'

The children attend school. For some children this is a significant improvement because they did not attend or struggled with attendance in the past. The children themselves report that they feel progress has been made in this area. There is a joined-up approach to encouraging the children to engage with education, with the residential staff working at the school. This means that the children's education goals and targets are monitored, and reinforced during residential time.

The children's health needs are managed effectively. A system is in place to manage medication, and staff have their competency to administer medication assessed. The staff support the children to access additional health services as necessary, although the primary responsibility for this remains with parents. Managers work with parents and children when new health needs emerge. A parent said, 'It was [the school's] support that resulted in a diagnosis. This was because they [the staff] listened to him.' The staff benefit from support from a music therapist. The staff have protected time once a fortnight to come together as a multi-disciplinary team to discuss and reflect on the needs and experiences of a residential pupil. These discussions focus on a different child each time so that the staff are fully aware of the needs and progress of every child.

The children said that the staff listen to them. House meetings take place on a regular basis and the staff seek the children's views. The children say that they are able to raise concerns with staff. They say that they would be able to complain if they wanted to. However, there is no independent person whom children can contact directly about personal problems or concerns at school or in residence. Although work is ongoing to identify someone, this has yet to come to fruition.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

In the absence of the residential manager, the response by designated staff to new risks arising from a recent safeguarding concern was not sufficient. Individual risk assessments that were completed after the incident were not on the children's files, and could not be located until the end of the second day of the inspection. The actions identified in the risk assessments did not sufficiently address the risks. There was no evaluation of the degree of risk, the seriousness of the potential harm and the likelihood of such harm. The recommended additional safeguards were not clear. Consequently, important information in the risk assessments was not known by staff, and there is no record of the actions taking place. In addition, records relating to this incident and other safeguarding concerns were not consistently clear enough, with some lacking summary and evaluation.

Approaches to recruitment are not consistently strong enough. Records do not always clearly identify whether gaps in employment history have been explored. In addition, the school's approach to seeking information from overseas agencies when an applicant has worked overseas lacks clarity. The current policies and procedures offer no guidance for recruiting managers on what to do in these circumstances. This creates a risk of inconsistent practice in recruitment.

Managers work with children, staff and parents to increase the children's understanding of the risks that the internet may pose. The staff provide training for parents, and the school website gives information about new and emerging areas of internet-related concern. However, this information does not translate into individual risk assessments. As a result, the staff lack guidance on how to manage the risks associated with children bringing internet-enabled devices into residence.

The staff work well with outside agencies. They take on board safeguarding advice and follow procedures. The designated officer reports that communication is effective and advice is sought as needed. A police officer provided positive feedback. They said that the school has engaged with them and other agencies regarding a recent safeguarding issue. The police officer had no concerns about the actions of the school or information sharing.

Children do not go missing from the residential provision. The children have appropriate freedom. They make progress towards independence as a result. The children have a sense of security because of the care that they receive. This sense of security empowers them to take reasonable risks. A parent said, 'It provides consistency. They can stretch him in a way that I cannot. It is peer-led learning. They get him out in the community. He feels safe to be stretched in that environment.'

The staff manage the children's behaviour well. There are very few behavioural incidents. The use of physical intervention in the residential provision is low. The staff have a clear protocol and strategy in place. The manager oversees the records of each incident and ensures that debriefings take place with the children and the staff. Families report that the children are making progress with their behaviour. One parent said, 'He [my child] did not use to manage his behaviour, but now he does.' Another parent said, 'Whatever they do works! They [the staff] provide treats and motivation. They are clear about what is expected from them [the children].' The staff consistently work in the same houses with the same children to build familiar relationships. The children have individual behaviour plans that identify strategies to help de-escalate and manage behaviours. Consequently, the houses are very settled.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager of the residential provision is well respected by his team. He has been the manager for just over a year, and has high aspirations for the children. During his time in post, he has overseen significant improvements in the monitoring of the quality of the residential provision. He continues to attend training and ensures that he is up to date with new guidance and relevant documents.

The residential manager ensures that the needs of the children are prioritised. The managers monitor the progress that the children make. The residential manager has a good understanding of the plans for the children. These plans are generally comprehensive.

Families said that diversity is promoted and discriminatory behaviour is challenged and addressed. Observations during the inspection saw the staff being respectful towards the children and treating them with dignity.

The staff receive regular supervision. They speak positively about the support and guidance that they receive from the residential manager and the team leaders. This support helps the staff to work collaboratively and to take pride in their work. This, in turn, contributes to the consistency of the care that the staff provide.

The staff have access to training. However, less than a third of existing residential staff have a relevant level 3 qualification. There are staff who have been working at the school for more than three months who have yet to begin working toward a qualification. This means that children are receiving support from staff who have not yet had the training or learning and development opportunities expected.

The residential manager and his team leaders regularly monitor the quality of care. This monitoring has improved considerably since the last inspection. The monitoring is well organised, identifies shortcomings, includes a plan to address them and is then followed up to ensure that the actions have been completed.

Monitoring by governors is less effective. There is little evidence that independent monitoring reports have been shared with all of the governors. One report that was shared was not shared in a timely way. In addition, the safeguarding report that was presented to governors did not sufficiently distinguish between practice that takes place in the school and practice that takes place in the residence. This does not provide the governors with a clear picture of the quality of the service, to enable them to provide challenge and scrutiny to drive improvement.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the school knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

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: Ms. Zoe Kirby

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Inspectors

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