

Greenbank Residential School

Greenbank Lane, Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1LD

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Greenbank Residential School is a local authority-maintained school for the education of children aged 11 to 18 with moderate or severe learning difficulties and/or language and/or communication difficulties.

The residential provision provides care, support and educational opportunities for 48 children. Each child has an individual residential package for one night each week during term time. Some children stay only for the evening to extend their opportunities to socialise and learn independence skills.

A suitably qualified and experienced acting head of care is overseeing the residential provision during the absence of the head of care.

An inspection of the school's education provision was carried out at the same time as this inspection.

Inspection dates: 28 February to 2 March 2023

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **requires improvement to be good**

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **requires improvement to be good**

The residential special school is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.

Date of previous inspection: 14 March 2022

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: requires improvement to be good

Children say that they are happy in the residential provision. They make progress in their communication skills, social skills and understanding of the world. This is because they are well supported by residential staff who care about them and who are responsive to their changing needs.

Parents said that their children have improved their independence skills and sociability. They say that staff keep in touch regularly and that this open approach gives them confidence and trust in the staff to keep their children safe and happy.

Children stay in residential accommodation that has been updated and improved. The inspector saw that children were confident to use the residential accommodation to relax, meet and play with their friends, and take part in learning and enjoyable activities. Children enjoy friendships in the residence because staff think carefully about the mix of children who stay each night. Children use on-site and community-based activity to improve their understanding and experience of the world. They have fun and develop new skills that enhance their quality of life.

Staff use a positive approach to support children's behaviour that results in a calm and happy environment. Children's views are routinely sought. Many children spoke to the inspector about how their wishes and feelings had been responded to, and how happy this made them feel. Staff actions included helping them to move accommodation to somewhere quieter, providing alternative activity, having the food that they like available to them, and choosing how they were going to celebrate their birthday.

Children enjoy their education. They are supported to aspire and make plans for their future. Staff help them to overcome barriers to success through goals and targets based on their individual education, health and care plans. On occasion, staff do not deliver children's activity plans consistently. Staff do not always make sure that there is the right balance of support and challenge for children so that they are prepared for adulthood, and can continuously improve their independence skills.

Children are in good health. Staff receive relevant training to support children to manage any health conditions.

Senior residential staff monitor the quality of staff recording, completion of termly and annual reviews of progress, and try out new ways of working to see if children's experiences can be improved.

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

Children and their parents say that children feel safe during their overnight stay in the residential provision.

Residential staff use their warm relationships with children to promote children's welfare and feelings of security. The use of positive behaviour is fully supported in all aspects of children's care. Children trust staff to help them to deal with exploring sexuality and relationships, consent, unwanted sexual behaviour and maintaining appropriate friendships. Staff guide and support children to begin to understand and manage their feelings. They help them to recognise the impact that their behaviour, language, and attitude can have on others. Staff help children to learn about how to keep themselves safe.

Children's needs and vulnerabilities are identified and understood by residential staff. Children's plans include management strategies to enable staff to support children in times of difficulty. Staff provide individualised opportunities for children to learn about and practise skills that help them to lead happier, healthier lives.

Leaders ensure that staff undertake regular training so that they know how to identify when children are at risk of potential harm. Residential staff are very clear on their responsibilities in relation to procedures for reporting and recording any concerns about safeguarding children.

Leaders and managers have effective working relationships with other safeguarding agencies. This enables them to share concerns and seek advice about action they should take to keep children safe. The principles of early help are embedded in the school's culture. Staff are actively engaged in helping families to access professional support to identify and address children's needs.

Some safeguarding records are unclear. Leaders do not ensure that information about children's needs and vulnerabilities is consistently recorded between education and care staff. Verbal accounts of children's behaviour sometimes differ from written accounts. At times, there is inconsistency in how the respective teams identify and address potential risk. This inhibits the development of consistent preventative measures to protect vulnerable children.

Governors have recently begun to review the comprehensive reports provided by the independent visitor to the residential provision. This will help to improve their knowledge and understanding of children's experiences during their overnight stays.

Recruitment practice has improved. All the necessary checks required to reduce the risk of unsuitable adults working with children are carried out prior to employment.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: requires improvement to be good

A suitably qualified senior residential leader is overseeing the residential provision during the absence of the head of care. She works collaboratively with the residential team and headteacher to deliver a vision of providing children with high-quality experiences and opportunities for personal development.

The acting head of care has recognised that a revised residential development plan and more consistent monitoring will build on well-established effective care practice. This new plan will further improve the quality of record-keeping and delivery of children's activities. Children's views and expressed preferences are always considered and responded to as part of any review of residential provision. The residential leader's ability to drive improvement is limited by lack of dedicated time to manage and oversee the provision.

Staff are provided with regular practice-related supervisions. Supervisions are purposeful in supporting staff in their roles and responsibilities. Staff also have their practice annually appraised. They have opportunity for reflective child-focused group discussion during routine team meetings and daily handovers. However, the head of care has not been supervised regularly enough to ensure that all identified actions to improve the residential service have been implemented. The acting head of care has reviewed all actions and has begun to address them; for example a children's guide to residential has been drafted.

Systems for assessing how well children are making progress are in place. Improvements to care planning and target-setting are ongoing, and a residential curriculum that focuses more on the individual development needs of each child is being created. This aspiration is now included in the short-term goals of the residential development plan and is a work in progress.

Governors visit the residential setting on a regular basis, to enable them to have better oversight of the residential provision and how it operates. However, governors are unclear about who manages the residential provision. The residential provision is not always a standing item at the governing body meetings. There is no evidence of robust scrutiny by the governing body to ensure that children's experiences and the quality of provision are systematically kept under review. This limits their ability to support development of the residential provision.

The leadership team and staff work well with internal and external professionals to promote children's welfare and progress, and there are positive relationships between education and care teams. This helps residential staff to plan effective transition for students into their residential stays. The family liaison officer works well with all external professionals, such as mental health services, social services and also with families, to secure appropriate provision for children who need additional support.

Leaders and managers have successfully met the national minimum standard and addressed one of the points for improvement made at the last inspection. However, shortfalls identified during this inspection related to governance and oversight of the residential provision mean that some national minimum standards have not been met.

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 standards for residential special schools:

- 3.3 Written reports of all monitoring visits are provided to the headteacher (or school equivalent) and where applicable the governing body, trust, or proprietor. Reports are also provided to each member of that body (or the appropriate committee of that body) within two weeks and as written by the visitor without amendment or summary. The governing body, trustees, or proprietor of the school should record a formal response to each written report. Monitoring reports and formal responses should be retained by the school and made available during an inspection and, on request, shared with any placing authorities and with the local authority where the school is located.
- 2.5 There is clear leadership and management of the practice and development of residential and care provision in the school. Leaders ensure that there is a mutually supportive and reinforcing approach, between (i) the educational provision and (ii) the residential provision, which is centred around the child. Individuals working in each aspect of provision should be able to challenge each other where necessary. The school should have processes in place to ensure that this is the case.
- 2.2 The residential provision is a standing or regular item at the governing body meetings to ensure that children's experiences and the quality of provision are systematically kept under review. At least one governor should have responsibility for the oversight of residential provision but responsibility for the quality of provision lies with the governing body as a whole. At least one governor should also be expected to visit the residential provision on a regular basis.

Recommendations

- Leaders and managers should ensure that records of safeguarding incidents are appropriately classified, and the consistency and quality of recording across care and education are improved to provide clear and succinct accounts of the nature of incidents, what children say about them, and what actions are taken to prevent further harm.
- Leaders and managers should ensure that residential staff understand how the residential provision contributes to children's preparation for adulthood, and tailor individual activities so that children develop independence skills appropriate to their age and understanding.

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: SC006624

Headteacher: Mr Michael McCann

Type of school: Residential special school

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Inspector

Denise Jolly, Social Care Inspector

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