

# 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 and young people aged 11 to 18 years of age who have moderate or severe learning difficulties and/or language and/or communication difficulties, including autistic spectrum disorder.

The residential provision provides care, support and educational opportunities for 52 young people. A maximum of 12 students can stay each night. There is also the capacity for students to have an extended day and to return home to sleep. Each young person has an individual education and residential package for one or two nights during term time. This does not include weekends or holidays.

**Inspection dates:** 18 to 20 September 2018

**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:** 3 October 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- All leaders and managers act as role models who promote an ambitious vision and have high expectations about what young people can achieve.
- Direct feedback from young people, parents and external professionals about the quality of care and the difference it makes to young people is overwhelmingly positive.
- Residential staff know the things that matter most to young people; they create the best opportunities for young people to achieve ambitious but realistic targets.
- An excellent, holistic approach to learning, that focuses on the whole child, underpins the tremendous progress young people are making in their education, social and emotional development and their practical independence.
- Staff are highly skilled in offering just the right amount of support to allow young people to overcome their difficulties, while also giving them time to learn from their experiences.
- Young people experience success and this improves their self-esteem and emotional well-being and prepares them for positive and independent futures.
- Young people's views sit at the heart of practice. Staff know that often the best learning comes from personal experience and reflection and are highly skilled in creating safe spaces for this to happen.
- The local safeguarding professional is exceptionally complimentary about the school. She remarked on the dedication staff demonstrate and the excellent safeguarding practice they achieve.
- Staff understand the increased vulnerability of disabled young people and act swiftly and sensitively to address any concerns.
- Highly effective systems for identifying and reporting concerns are well known and used by all staff.
- A strong approach to monitoring and continual improvement is embedded within the school.

The residential special school's areas for development:

- Residential staff rely on education staff to complete formal personal, social and health education support for young people. This reduces young people's opportunities for generalisation and reflection.
- Not all records about young people's needs are easily accessible because they are stored in different places. This is the result of progress towards the transfer of information from old to new recording formats.

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

### **Recommendations**

- Further enrich young people's learning through more focused relationship and sexual health related activities.
- Ensure that staff have easy access to all necessary information about young people throughout the transition period for placement and risk assessment plans.

## Inspection judgements

### **Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding**

All residential pupils thoroughly enjoy the residential experience. Most only stay for one night each week and they achieve much in that short time. Staff help them to build on the excellent progress they make in education. Young people make outstanding progress in learning social and practical independence skills. They explore how to be independent of their families in a safe and nurturing environment. This prepares them well for their future adult lives.

Direct feedback from young people, parents and external professionals about the quality of care and the difference it makes to young people is overwhelmingly positive.

One residential pupil said: 'I am really happy staying here. I really like the activities. I like meeting my friends'. Another residential pupil said: 'I am a lot more confident now than before I stayed.' She went on to describe how she has been helped to overcome shyness and anxiety caused by poor experiences in a previous school. Another residential pupil said: 'When I stay, I get to spend time with my friends instead of staying in my bedroom at home.' These are the things that matter most to young people – to have friends and to have a range of experiences and opportunities for leisure and interaction. Residential staff know this; they dedicate their energies and use their considerable knowledge to create the best opportunities for growth and enjoyment.

Parents universally reported that their children make great progress in developing confidence and skills in looking after themselves. A parent summed this up by saying: 'This is giving him the building blocks to be a teenager and for independence'. Another parent recognised that her son was transferring the skills he had developed at school. She said: 'He is making friends [at home] now. This is new, and it's because he has learned how to do this in residential.'

Parents have every confidence in the staff. A parent said: 'They have more patience than me. When they explain things, she gets it!' Another said: 'His key-worker was really supportive when we were going through a few problems. He really helped him to have a positive experience.' Parents recognise that their children have blossomed under the positive nurturing they receive from the residential team.

A holistic approach to learning focuses on the whole child and underpins the excellent progress young people are making in their education, social and emotional development and their practical independence. Each young person contributes to an assessment of their individual needs, and their wishes play an important part in the targets that are developed. Teachers and residential staff work closely together to set suitable targets that young people can achieve in both settings. The speech and language team supports residential staff to enable young people's communication

and interpersonal skills to develop. However, a stronger focus on helping young people to understand how to manage emerging adolescent crushes and sexual development will help young people to manage these feelings and prepare them for safe and happy relationships. Activities, such as a walk in the woods or cycling proficiency, are planned and differentiated to the young people's level of ability to provide challenge and stretch for young people as well as enjoyment.

Young people learn coping strategies and build emotional resilience. Staff are highly skilled in offering just the right amount of support to allow young people to overcome their individual difficulties and have time to learn from their experience. For example, staff watched as one young person filled her glass too full and then asked her to think about how to prevent spillage in future. Another young person was helped to deal with his fears about not being listened to when it was his turn to lead the group around a section of the orienteering course that they were following. Practical advice and emotional support to think about how to get the group's attention enabled him to experience success in the activity. This gives young people who have autism valuable experience in how to think ahead to avoid and solve problems and think flexibly to see more than one point of view.

Residential staff work with young people and their families to complete baseline assessments for self-help skills. They agree targeted interventions to help young people to develop their skills and to overcome barriers to learning. One young person said: 'I am banned from the kitchen at home, but here I like to help make supper.' Staff understand the areas of strength and challenge for each young person and they recognise and nurture their individual potential. Some young people stay in an 'independence flat', where they learn what it might be like to live alone, plan and prepare a meal, and to keep their home clean. Staff are always on hand to guide young people through this experience so that it remains positive for them. Some young people also undertake work experience in catering environments and work towards gaining accredited food hygiene certificates. This has a lasting and positive impact on all areas of their life.

Young people have a big say in how their residential experience is planned and carried out. They contribute ideas for activities and feel they are listened to very well. This open communication has resulted in a 'HUB' space being created because young people wanted a common and relaxed area to socialise. Young people use this room as a place to develop their friendships, to chat and to organise themselves to play card or board games. They also eat snacks and prepare supper or seek reassurance from each other about how well their school work is going. Staff are on hand to enable young people to test out their social skills in a positive way. This approach keeps young people's lives at the heart of practice and recognises that often the best learning comes from personal experience and reflection.

Senior residential staff ensure that young people have a positive introduction to their residential stays. They use meticulous co-produced planning so that young people feel they are making the final decision about when they are ready to stay over. One parent talked about the great lengths taken by the residential team to instil

confidence in their child through a lengthy introductory programme. Young people can stay from Year 9 onwards. The two most common 'complaints' about the residential service are from younger children who feel they are losing out by having to wait to access the service, and by those who already use the service who want to stay for more nights.

Staff have high expectations for what young people can achieve. Throughout their limited time in residential, young people earn external accreditation for several skill areas including: understanding the local community; key independence skills such as personal care, shopping and cooking; independent travel; trampolining; bicycle safety; and photography. These considerable achievements help them to demonstrate their potential and improve their positive reputation and chances of success when applying for college or employment. Key-workers provide accurate summaries of young people's progress and achievements as well as their vulnerabilities and challenges. The summaries inform decision-making about young people's futures from an early stage.

Once young people have moved on, key-workers continue to support their new endeavours by meeting with the professionals who continue to work with them. This ensures that vital information about each young person's personal history and experiences is captured. It also means that young people do not have to keep repeating their story to help new professionals understand the strategies and approaches that work best for them. Residential staff advocate effectively for young people to ensure that each young person receives the individual support that they need to succeed. They are proud of young people's achievements, and this helps young people to be proud of themselves.

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

Families, young people, external professionals and staff reported that young people are safe in the school. Young people said that they readily communicate with staff if they are worried or upset and that staff always do their best to help them. They gave examples of how staff have responded and resolved their concerns. Young people also said that the activities in the community help them to understand some of the problems they might encounter and that this helps them to learn about being safe while being out and about.

Staff know young people well and provide close support and supervision to reduce risks and promote well-being without being intrusive or unnecessarily protective. Each young person has a comprehensive individual risk assessment and care plan. Staff understand the importance of letting young people experience challenges to achieve their potential for solving problems. They want young people to experience exciting and new situations safely. The staff are not complacent and use skilfully judged interventions to maintain young people's safety and well-being.

Following the last inspection, senior residential staff have researched and piloted improved risk assessment documents. While not yet fully implemented, those that are in place add detail to the existing individualised documentation that helps staff to identify and manage risk quickly. The new format captures more effectively the wealth of knowledge that staff have about young people's needs and vulnerabilities. Due to planned reductions in the number of young people who stay, all now have their own bedroom. There is a suitable risk assessment format available should young people wish to share rooms.

The local safeguarding professional is extremely complimentary about the school. She remarked on the dedication staff demonstrate in achieving excellence in safeguarding practice. She highlighted their transparency in learning from, and acting on, the audits she carries out on their policies and procedures. The membership and purpose of the school safeguarding group are under review. The review will focus on reviewing all safeguarding matters promptly and identifying patterns and trends in both staff performance and young people's experiences.

Staff understand the increased vulnerability of disabled young people. The training they receive contributes to this knowledge. They act quickly to report any concerns that they may have, and these are escalated promptly to external professionals when necessary. Parents confirmed that they are routinely informed of any incidents. All staff can articulate clearly the factors that contribute to an increased risk of abuse.

The school has an electronic information-sharing programme that enables relevant staff to have access to sensitive information about concerns regarding individual young people. This means that all staff can provide immediate details of any concern and there is prompt attention from the designated safeguarding team. It captures in one place the steps taken to address the concerns and ensures that young people are not unduly stressed because of repetition of enquiries. Authorised staff can access the record, to gather information and follow advice about how best to support young people for whom there are concerns.

Parents spoke positively about the quality of safeguarding practice in the school. One parent said: 'When I emailed school about an issue, the school acted immediately – everything is so transparent. The way that they handled things was excellent.' He went on to describe how proactive the response was, ensuring whole-school learning about e-safety and the inclusion of specialist presenters about this to a school assembly. This approach avoids young people feeling stigmatised or isolated because of their experiences.

Residential staff offer practical and emotional support to help young people to develop their understanding of how to stay safe. They use a wide range of activities such as crossing the road safely or one-to-one conversations with young people about their relationships and how to manage their feelings of anger and frustration. This approach helps young people to build a toolkit of personally helpful strategies to navigate their teenage years more safely.

Staff understand the importance of 'seizing the moment' to support young people to discuss issues in the wider world and how the issues might have an effect on them. For example, an informal group conversation about the behaviour of politicians, anti-Semitism and how false or misleading news reporting affects an understanding of the truth, led into a discussion about how young people could recognise false behaviour and claims on the social media sites that they visit. Young people enthusiastically contributed to the discussion, and staff were able to reinforce clear messages about safe internet use to a group who are highly vulnerable to online exploitation.

Staff are trained to use a behaviour management approach that has its foundations in respect, tolerance and seeing the world from the young person's point of view. Staff are highly skilled in promoting positive choices and distractions that young people can use to help them to stay calm. Inspectors observed staff intercept situations of potential upset and conflict and help young people to resolve their difficulties. These approaches are highly personalised and young people respond well to them.

Attention to detail about the things that matter most to young people means that the residential experience is a happy one, and young people learn how to manage their emotions. Use of restraint is extremely rare, and, when it is used, it is always managed sensitively and used for a brief time until other strategies take over. The emphasis for staff and all young people is: 'What can we learn together about these difficulties, and how can we improve?' One parent said: 'When staff deal with her ups and downs, they do it with great patience and care. There is no blame.' This approach enables young people to learn how to explore their feelings while protecting their independence and self-esteem.

Highly effective and proactive planning takes place to ensure that risks and complexities arising from young people's needs are understood at the point of admission. Young people have usually been pupils in the school for two years before they stay overnight and there is excellent collaborative planning between the school, residential staff and families. This approach increases the likelihood of successful early overnight stays.

Although young people do not go missing from the residential provision, the staff are aware of the policy and local area procedures. They know the process that they need to follow should this happen. Off-site activities always include a robust and dynamic risk assessment that includes an assessment and allocation of staffing levels dependent on the individual needs of young people and the environment they are visiting. This helps young people to stay safe and experience successful community engagement.

### **The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding**

All leaders and managers act as positive role models. They promote an ambitious vision for the school and residence and have high expectations about what young



people can achieve. The quality of care and support is closely monitored and measured in terms of what difference the school and residential experience are making for young people. Only excellence is good enough. Managers know the individual young people exceptionally well and are accessible to them.

Leaders and managers have ensured that high-quality care has continued through two significant service reviews. Essential, and often difficult, changes in staffing arrangements have been made to provide for the financial security of the provision. Leaders have inspired all staff, including those negatively affected by those changes, to focus on ensuring the continuity of a much-loved and highly effective residential service. It is a testimony to their efforts that staff morale has been rebuilt through difficult circumstances. This means that young people continue to thrive in the residence. They receive support from staff who themselves feel thoroughly supported.

Staff said that they are well managed. They feel valued and believe that managers have the best interests of the young people at heart. The staff demonstrate delight in young people's achievements. Senior care staff have refreshed the supervision model used. They have assiduously researched best practice and have developed an innovative reflective practice model that all staff recognise as a fundamental tool for securing ongoing improvements. Senior residential staff regularly complete recorded observations of practice and share 'lessons learned' with staff and young people. This practice is worthy of wider dissemination due to its impact in driving improvement. Training is also highly valued and made available for staff to pursue specific professional interests and facilitate succession planning. For example, both senior care staff have achieved an accredited management qualification.

Residential placement plans have been revised and improved. They reflect the aspirations set out in the aims of the whole school for young people to be better equipped to be ready for the next phase of life after school. Staff are in the process of transferring records to the new improved format. This process has resulted in some minor confusion about where individual documents are currently stored. Staff know young people very well and communicate very well across the whole of the setting; this means that there is sufficient information available to promote understanding of the individual needs of each young person and their plans are updated regularly.

The school works hard to maintain communication with families. Regular coffee mornings and open sessions are being established and are well attended. Staff seek regular feedback and learn from this to improve the services further. For example, one parent explained that they had worked with the staff to resolve a problem with the kind of washing powder used, and this has resulted in a more comfortable stay for their young person.

Leaders have responded thoughtfully and thoroughly to all recommendations from the last inspection to ensure that high-quality improvements have been made. A

committed approach to monitoring and improvement is embedded within the school. Leaders are reviewing and improving the tools they use to evaluate the impact of the changes to the residential service delivery upon young people and their families. The residential development plan mirrors the whole school plan and sets out achievable steps that can be monitored for progress. Regular practice audits take place. Governors have received training and have worked with leaders to revamp the structure and focus of their unannounced visits to the residence. All quality assurance information is routinely considered in governors' subcommittee meetings and prompt action is taken to address any shortfalls.

The school has a dynamic culture where young people's happiness and development, combined with an endlessly enthusiastic and passionate staff team, lead to a continuously improving service.

## **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:** SC006624

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## **Inspectors**

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