

Cloughwood Academy

Cloughwood Academy, Stones Manor Lane, Hartford, Northwich, Cheshire CW8 1NU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential special school

Cloughwood Academy is a purpose-built day and residential special academy. It is located within extensive grounds on the Mid Cheshire Campus in Hartford. The academy caters for children aged between eight and 18 years.

There are currently 119 children on roll. The academy provides extended days and residential places during term time. There are 9 residential places with 9 children accessing the provision from Monday to Thursday.

A head of care oversees the residential provision. She is appropriately experienced and qualified.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

Inspection dates: 10 to 12 March 2026

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: 21 January 2025

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children flourish at this school. The care that they receive is individualised and nurturing, which allows them to have a happy and relaxed experience. Children take on challenges that they and their families never thought possible. For example, some children are undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award and are participating in work experience and voluntary work. These achievements are notable given the children's needs and previous experiences, and will help them develop socially, emotionally and intellectually.

Working collaboratively with staff across the school, residential staff use their in depth knowledge of each child to provide individualised, nurturing care and support. This starts when children are preparing to attend residence for the first time. The number of visits and meetings with parents is tailored to each child. A child friendly booklet identifies what residence is about.

Children contribute to their individual plans. They respond well to the supportive environment which enables their personal development. Children benefit from the stable, committed, and highly experienced staff team. The multidisciplinary approach to care planning focuses on promoting the best outcomes for children

Children's medical and wider health needs are well met. Medication is stored securely, and clear records are maintained of all medication dispensed. Staff are excellent at identifying children who require extra support or interventions to prevent concerns escalating. The need for additional resources is identified early, leading to timely referrals to specialist services to support children with their emotional and psychological health.

There is a seamless approach between the school and the residential provision. The children thrive because of the consistent staff responses and daily routines between the settings. Individualised approaches to learning ensure that the children make progress with their studies. For children who have been out of education or have struggled to access school this is a significant achievement.

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 and support children to attend open days at colleges. These things help to reduce children's worries and anxieties and make future success more likely. This is evidenced by high rates of children going on to further education.

Children's independence grows because of their time in residential. Children who have had limited experience in developing life skills have been supported to use public

transport and improve personal care. Staff have helped children to find employment and undertake work experience. Help for children to learn a variety of new skills has led to them making significant progress with their levels of independence.

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

An ethos of safeguarding children is embedded in all aspects of the school. Systems for reporting concerns about children are strong. Staff understand their responsibilities for protecting children. They confidently use the electronic based reporting tool to pass on their concerns to experienced designated safeguarding officers, who take appropriate action including referrals to external safeguarding agencies, when necessary. Successful partnership working between the school's safeguarding lead, external safeguarding agencies and families ensures that all children are protected.

All staff receive comprehensive information and training in how to keep children safe. This is completed as part of whole school training and residential team reflection. This promotes consistency and ensures that everybody knows and understands the key messages emerging from best practice and any changes in legislation and guidance.

Children's behaviour is good. They are highly invested in bespoke incentive schemes that reinforce positive behaviour. On the occasions when incidents do occur, they are managed effectively and sensitively. Children are supported to reflect on their actions and understand the impact of their behaviour. A restorative approach is consistently applied, helping to educate children, repair relationships and reinforce positive choices. However, staff debriefs need to be centralised and the recording of incidents needs to be made clearer with no crossings out.

Staff create individualised safety plans. These plans have specific strategies to keep children safe and to support their behaviour. Children and parents contribute to these plans, which means that they are attuned to children's particular needs. These provide school and residential staff with specific guidance to follow.

Children say they feel safe, and parents express absolute trust in the school. Staff develop close relationships with families which adds an additional level of safety. Staff are in close contact with parents and have a comprehensive understanding of children's backgrounds and family circumstances.

Staff are aware of children's vulnerabilities and proactively support children to learn how to keep themselves safer, drawing on the support of other experts when required. For example, the police visited the children and staff to educate them further about the risks of knife crime. Children have also had external speakers educating them about child criminal exploitation. This gave children an enhanced understanding of the risks in the wider community.

When appointing staff, the school follows safer recruitment practice guidelines. This means that only those deemed suitable to work with vulnerable individuals look after children.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The head of care works seamlessly alongside other school leaders to provide the best experiences for children in residence. She works alongside a strong senior leadership team who are diligent, highly energised and completely focused on improving the future outcomes for children. Their passion feeds through to all the staff, who reflect on the quality of leadership with high levels of positive regard. This creates a highly aspirational culture that drives forward the progress the children make.

There is a highly skilled and qualified established team of residential staff. They have a diverse skill set for example, staff have knowledge of bushcraft, drama and arts and crafts. This means that children have access to a huge range of activities that they enjoy, led by an expert to ensure that they are carried out safely.

Leaders and managers have an exceptional understanding of the holistic needs of children. This is because they have extensive knowledge, experience and skills in working with children in this setting. They know each child personally and are committed to making sure that each child reaches their individual potential. Parents are unanimous in confirming this. One parent said, 'they do a brilliant job, residential has really benefitted him, he is now starting to grow up and be more independent.'

The headteacher ensures that he maintains a strong presence and visibility. He is ably supported by a strong senior leadership team which meets regularly to find solutions to any challenges or concerns. Senior leaders attend weekly safeguarding meetings. The headteacher also ensures that all incident records, safeguarding reports and significant event records come to him for oversight, analysis and feedback to staff.

Staff receive the training they need to care for children well. This includes bespoke training from the school nurse and the designated safeguarding lead, as well as a comprehensive package of mandatory learning. Leaders use research as a way of understanding and modelling best practice. They cascade this learning to staff which ensures that staff have the knowledge to keep children safe and to meet their changing needs.

Staff receive effective support through reflective supervision, group supervision and informal support from leaders, who staff report are approachable and available for advice and guidance.

Leaders and managers provide clear evidence of the progress and plans for each child. Meticulous internal and external quality assurance provides detailed analysis of the care provision. This means that leaders and managers have a clear understanding of the residential services strengths and weaknesses. Firm plans are

in place to ensure that decisive and effective action is taken to drive continual improvement.

Governor and trustee arrangements play an active role in the residential provision. They regularly undertake quality assurance visits and speak to staff and children. They evaluate the school's performance through monitoring reports, complaints and safeguarding incidents. They provide a supportive role and a constructive challenge to the head of care and headteacher to maintain high standards and to drive continuous improvement.

Communication and partnership working with external professionals are excellent. The head teacher ascribes much of the success of the school to the strength of their relationships with families and professionals. Nurturing these relationships ensures that children receive coherent and consistent care across all areas of their lives.

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

Recommendation

- school leaders should ensure that improvements in recording of incidents and how staff debriefs are carried out after a physical intervention.

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: SC006625

Headteacher/teacher in charge: Mr Robert Newton

Type of school: Residential Special School

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Inspectors

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