

Archers Brook SEMH Residential School

Chester Road, Great Sutton, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire CH66 2NA

Inspection dates	07/03/2017 to 09/03/2017	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people	Outstanding	1
The quality of care and support	Outstanding	1
How well children and young people are protected	Outstanding	1
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

The residential provision is outstanding because

- Young people make exceptional progress in all areas of their academic and social development.
- The school and head of boarding work extremely effectively in partnership with a range of professionals.
- The health needs of young people are clearly understood, and the best possible support is in place to promote their health and well-being.
- Feedback from all stakeholders is overwhelmingly positive. Parents, in particular, value the difference that the boarding provision makes to their children's lives and behaviours.
- Young people are safe and become safer as a result of the support and interventions of boarding staff.
- Young people love staying overnight. They value the friendships that they make and enjoy a wide range of positive activities.
- Leaders and managers in the school lead with commitment, skills and passion. They model good behaviour and have clear oversight of all areas of practice.
- Boarding staff bring a strong sense of nurture and care to their work. They develop meaningful relationships with young people and bring out their strengths.
- There is a strong safeguarding culture across the school. Incidents of concern are rare

and, when they do occur, staff take effective action to keep young people safe.

- The leadership team promotes a firm and coherent strategy to promote equality of opportunity across the school and boarding provision.

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

The school meets the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the school's single central register is kept up to date and records all recruitments checks undertaken by the school.
- When recruiting staff, ensure that all reasonable steps are taken to obtain references from more than one recent employer.

Information about this inspection

The school was contacted on the morning of day one by the lead inspector to announce the inspection. The inspection took place over three days, with feedback provided on day three. During the inspection, records and documentation were examined. Interviews took place with the residential pupils, head of care, headteacher and staff to secure their views on the quality of care provided. A tour of the premises and grounds was undertaken. Feedback was obtained from a number of parents and professionals involved with, but not employed by, the school. Evening activities were observed over two nights. These included mealtimes and activities.

Inspection team

Lee Kirwin

Lead social care inspector

Full report

Information about this school

Archers Brook SEMH Residential School is maintained by the local authority and provides special education for up to 76 children, between the ages of 11 and 16, who have social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The majority of children are day pupils. There are currently 76 children on roll. Of these, 18 children use the residential provision. At the time of this inspection, all pupils using the boarding service were male. The residential provision is available for four nights a week from Monday to Thursday. Residential pupils stay for a variety of nights. There is also a range of after-school clubs available to both day pupils and residential pupils. The school provides residential accommodation on the main site. The residential provision was last inspected on 19–21 October 2015.

Inspection judgements

The overall experiences and progress of children and young people

Outstanding

Young people consistently describe their overnight stays in very positive terms. They get on well with each other and make friends. They enjoy a wide range of activities both on site and in the local community. They want to be there and have a commitment to making it work. This means that they make positive individual contributions to the group-living experience. They are considerate of each other's needs and mindful of the impact of their behaviour on others. This creates a calm and constructive environment and teaches them the social skills necessary to build and sustain positive relationships with others.

The inspector enjoyed two evening meals in the boarding provision. Young people were polite and considerate. They enjoyed a healthy banter between themselves and with staff. They were able to articulate their views, and each young person made a positive contribution to the discussion around the table. One such discussion centred on the choice of activities for the evening. The young people were able to express their preferences and were willing to compromise to go with the majority decision. Staff facilitated this discussion with considerable skill and understanding. They guided the group and encouraged each child to contribute, but left the decision in the hands of the group of young people. This values the importance of the voice of young people and is an example of the 24-hour curriculum approach, operating effectively in practice. Because of this, young people using the boarding provision communicate a sense of belonging and kinship.

Parents are consistent in their appreciation for and admiration of the service. They all described how much their children enjoy overnight stays. One parent said of her child, 'He absolutely loves it. He has come on in leaps and bounds.' Without exception, parents commented on the positive difference that the boarding provision and the school have made to their children. In many cases, this progress is more than they had expected was possible, and all described how their child's behaviour has improved. A number of young people, because of improved behaviour, are now able to engage in activities in the community when they were previously unable to do so. Several parents described how family outings are much more enjoyable and positive. They attributed this to the fact that their children have become more confident in meeting new people and are better able to interact with others.

Many of the young people using the service have previously been excluded from other schools due to their presenting behaviour. Parents commented that this school, and the boarding provision in particular, has been able to help their children to make progress when previous education placements could not.

The school has a strong ethos and clear values in relation to promoting equality of opportunity. They have a zero-tolerance approach to any discriminatory behaviour or comments. Young people are taught to respect each other, and any unkind or inappropriate comments are immediately challenged. Young people are encouraged and able to share concerns with staff. This means that young people are safe from bullying or discrimination.

The young people using the boarding provision often have a history of behaviour management problems, and some have a range of diagnoses that impact on their ability to learn and socialise. Staff ensure that young people are not labelled as such and work hard to ensure that young people do not develop a negative ascribed identity. They are encouraged to see themselves and each other in a positive light and supported to reach their full potential in both their academic achievements and social presentation. Young people respond positively to these high expectations. They have a positive view of their futures and are able to work towards goals that are ambitious and forward thinking.

The leadership team closely monitors academic progress for each child. When measured against the whole school, all young people using the boarding provision make above-average progress. The teaching and boarding staff work closely and communicate effectively to ensure that progress is sustained. They quickly identify whether pupils are struggling and work together to provide extra learning support and allocate additional resources.

The quality of care and support

Outstanding

The referral and admission process for the boarding provision is led by young people. Only those young people who express a desire to stay overnight will be considered. The school provides a range of after-school clubs that are delivered by residential staff, and young people usually take part in these clubs as part of the induction process. This gives them the opportunity to get to know the staff and other boarders. It also ensures that, before the young people have overnight stays, staff know them well and are able to assess how they interact with other young people using the service. All overnight stays are carefully planned so that young people staying on any given night get on well and that sufficient staff are on duty to meet their needs.

The staff team is highly experienced, highly skilled and well trained to meet the needs of boarders. They are mostly long serving and work effectively in a long-established, positive culture where the needs of young people are central to practice. Staff are passionate about helping young people to make progress. They celebrate success and use positive interventions to help young people to develop the skills that they need to thrive and benefit from the group-living experience.

Young people commented positively on their relationships with staff. They interact confidently and respectfully with them and, without exception, said that they like all of the boarding staff. Staff have clear expectations in regards to the young people's behaviour. They have a firm but fair approach, which is underpinned by nurture and care. This means that they are quickly able to diffuse any potentially challenging situations. It was noticeable that young people frequently remind each other to be mindful of and respectful to others. One young person summed up the effectiveness of the staff's ability to manage behaviour by saying, 'Rules are easily understood, easy to follow and difficult to break.'

It is noticeable and commendable that, since the last inspection, there has been no use

of physical intervention to manage behaviour. The manager reviews all incidents of challenging behaviour with the staff team and takes effective action to ensure that challenging behaviours reduce or stop completely. Ultimately, if young people behave in a way that is unsafe for them or others, their overnight stays may be reduced or stopped. In practice, this seldom happens. The boarding provision uses a points system whereby young people can earn extra privileges. This encourages positive behaviour.

Each young person has a detailed care plan. This describes in detail how best to support them. Staff know the young people well, they understand what may cause them to become upset and they understand how to intervene in order to reduce their anxieties. They use this knowledge to plan and prepare for overnight stays. An example of this is when staff understood that some young people cope better with more structure and less choice, they planned a detailed programme of set activities. With a group of young people who could cope with more choice and would benefit from learning to manage a more flexible routine, they facilitated a discussion to involve them more in planning the evening's events.

The quality of the partnerships between the provider and health professionals is exceptional. Residential pupils have access to a drop-in clinic operated by the school nurse. This provides a confidential space for them to talk about any physical or emotional health problems. Young people can use this to access confidential support and information in relation to sexual health. She provides training and information for staff to ensure that they are competent in order to support young people with health needs, such as epilepsy or diabetes. She is registered with the Nursing and Midwifery Council and is a qualified paediatric nurse. When asked for feedback on the quality of care offered by the school, she said, 'I think it is a wonderful school. Staff are very nurturing. If I had a child that needed this service, I would be delighted for them to attend.' She meets regularly with the head of boarding to ensure that the health needs of boarding pupils are met.

The head of boarding also works very closely with the community paediatrician. She describes their working relationship as 'excellent'. She runs regular clinics at the school and describes the attendance rate at these clinics as high, with very few missed appointments. The head of boarding provides detailed feedback on the pupils' behaviour both in the school and during overnight stays. She trusts his judgement and values this feedback. She uses this to review medication and to contribute to assessments. This ensures prompt, expert assessment for young people who may have undiagnosed medical conditions. It also ensures that young people are not misdiagnosed. For those that require medication to promote their well-being, this is prescribed at the optimum dose. The boarding staff make use of detailed, well-informed and up-to-date healthcare plans to guide their interventions and support to young people.

The special educational needs coordinator in the school provides detailed assessment and support plans for each pupil. Importantly, these assessments guide staff to build on young people's strengths. Boarding staff use this information to understand what young people are good at and how each young person can be best supported to thrive, learn and make progress.

The physical environment provides ample space and facilities for young people to have

fun and stay in comfort. Boarding pupils have access to the school sports hall, gym facilities and a well-equipped play room. Each young person has their own room. They are encouraged to personalise this with posters and personal possessions. Young people comment positively on the sleeping accommodation. They report being comfortable, feeling safe and sleeping well.

Staff frequently organise trips and outings in the local community. These include swimming, trips to the local skate park and visits to community events. One young person regularly attends cadets, and staff support this attendance by providing transport and escorting him.

Parents are unanimous in their praise for the quality of care provided to their children when they are staying in the boarding provision. Communication is excellent, and parents feel that staff listen and respond to any issues or concerns that they raise. They describe staff as being caring and welcoming and report that they display a very good understanding of their child's needs. One parent described how the school had supported her by using a consistent agreed approach to encourage her child to improve his personal hygiene. This resulted in her child being able to improve his self-care skills.

Young people are encouraged to take part in household tasks and lend a hand. They help with clearing tables and tidying. Young people also learn to make snacks and cook meals. This, alongside the progress that they make in terms of their social development, helps them to learn valuable skills for independence.

The school has far more male pupils than female pupils. At the time of this inspection, no female pupils were using the boarding provision. The inspector interviewed two female pupils who had recently used the boarding provision. They spoke positively about their experiences of overnight stays and commented that they got on well with staff and other residents. They felt safe and enjoyed a range of positive activities. They reported that they stopped using the boarding provision because their circumstances had changed.

How well children and young people are protected

Outstanding

Young people are safe. They develop positive relationships with each other and with staff. They are articulate in communicating their wishes and feelings and confident that staff will listen and address any concerns. They know how to complain and have a number of confidential avenues to do so. In reality, there have been no significant complaints or safeguarding concerns in relation to the boarding provision or boarding pupils.

The designated safeguarding lead for the school is also the head of boarding provision. He is very experienced and knowledgeable about child protection procedures. He has undertaken specialist training for the role and keeps this regularly updated. He has an excellent oversight of welfare issues across the school. He is visible and accessible to staff and boarding pupils. He has excellent oversight of safeguarding practice, he knows the young people well and he is well positioned to ensure that care plans and risk

assessments promote young people's safety. The local authority designated officer for child protection gave positive feedback about the school's approach to safeguarding. She said that the school swiftly seeks advice when concerns arise and works effectively in partnership to ensure that young people are safe.

Staff working in the boarding provision and teachers in the school are thoroughly vetted to ensure that they are of good character and suitable to work with vulnerable young people. Not all checks undertaken were recorded on the school's single central register. This has the potential to undermine the management monitoring of safeguarding in this area. In one example, the provider did not take all reasonable steps to obtain more than one reference from their recent employers. This reduces the information available to the school in relation to previous staff conduct and performance. In reality, there were no concerns in relation to this member of staff and therefore no impact on safeguarding practice or the quality of care delivered to young people.

Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal. Managers support staff to manage the emotional impact of the work and set high expectations in terms of conduct and performance. Staff appreciate the support that they receive, and this ensures that they are never left in situations that are unsafe for them or young people.

The boarding provision is well maintained and regularly inspected to ensure that it is safe. Young people regularly practise fire drills, staff undertake fire marshal training and all fire equipment is properly serviced and maintained. The head of the boarding provision makes use of independent health and safety reports to maintain high safety standards. He takes prompt action to address any identified risks.

Individual risk assessments identify areas of vulnerability in relation to each young person. Staff have clear safety plans in place to reduce the risk of harm to young people. Boarding staff have a good understanding of child protection procedures. They are alert to risks presented by the internet, risk in relation to radicalisation and risks in relation to sexual exploitation. The designated safeguarding lead has undertaken specialist training in relation to child protection and the use of the internet. He is aware of the range of social media that young people are exposed to and regularly updates staff knowledge in this area. Young people do not have access to mobile phones in the boarding provision as these are not permitted. Young people accept this and cooperate with staff requests to hand in any mobile devices. There is a mobile hands-free phone that young people can use to contact their parents.

The school's policies and procedures in relation to safeguarding are regularly updated and support a strong safeguarding culture in the school as a whole. When necessary, procedures and guidance are in place to underpin safe practice in relation to young people using the boarding provision.

The school balances risks with the need to allow young people freedom to develop independence skills. Young people are appropriately monitored at all times during their stay in the boarding provision, but staff are mindful to allow them space so that they do not find this intrusive. The security of the building and school grounds is very good. This ensures that only visitors who are authorised are allowed access to the school premises. Young people cannot leave the premises without authorisation or without being noticed.

Young people do not go missing, and staff have clear guidance in place to take action in the event that this occurs.

Social workers for young people in the residential provision provided feedback to the inspector. One social worker feels that the commitment and expertise of staff led to significant improvements in a young person's behaviour. Staff provided advice on support to parents to manage challenging behaviour. The social worker was of the opinion that this was a significant factor in reducing risks, to the extent that the young person was removed from the child protection register. Another social worker gave a similar account and reported that social work involvement with a family was no longer needed because improvements to the young person's behaviour and reduced conflict in the home meant that the family could manage without her support. This shows that young people are not only safe, but become safer as a result of staff interventions and the boarding provision.

The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers

Outstanding

The head of boarding provision is an integral part of the senior leadership team of the school. He works closely with the headteacher to provide a 24-hour curriculum in order to help young people to make progress in both their education and social development. They are both outstanding role models for the school. They lead with passion and commitment to ensure that the welfare of young people remains at the heart of the service.

The head of boarding is well respected by his colleagues, parents and the professional network. Without exception, all comment positively on his knowledge and professionalism. He understands the young people well and promotes close working partnerships to ensure that the whole school and families work together to provide the best possible, all-round support for young people to thrive. One parent commented that he frequently goes 'above and beyond' to help young people. This comment was mirrored by social workers and health professionals in the school. By modelling good practice, the head of boarding provision ensures that the high expectations and standards of the school are carried into practice.

Staff appreciate the support that they receive from their manager. He is accessible and approachable and regularly consults staff on matters of service and strategies to care for young people. Staff feel trusted to carry out their roles and work effectively as a team. The head of boarding creates a safe environment for staff to openly discuss problems and areas of challenge. They work collaboratively to overcome difficulties and are resilient in the face of challenging behaviour. He takes effective action to manage performance and gives clear direction to staff in terms of the expected standards of care. He is suitably qualified for his role and keeps his knowledge updated through regular training.

The head of care closely monitors the quality of the service and the care provided to young people. He makes use of feedback from others to inform service development. This includes the views of staff, parents, young people and other professionals. He acts promptly in response to feedback from independent visitors. He is an effective

administrator and keeps his eye on the ball in relation to all areas of practice and service delivery. He ensures that sufficient staff are on duty at all times. He deploys staff resources effectively to ensure that there are always staff on duty who have the requisite skills and experience to meet the needs of the group of young people staying overnight.

The school governors play an active role in the boarding provision. They regularly undertake quality assurance visits and speak to staff and boarding pupils. 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 boarding in order to maintain high standards and to drive continuous improvement.

As mentioned previously in this report, there is a strong commitment to promoting diversity and equality of opportunity across the school and boarding provision. The headteacher has a hidden histories poster in her office. This highlights key milestones in history and great role models for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. She is undertaking a training for trainers' course provided by Stonewall and is delivering training to staff across the school. This ensures that the school and boarding environment is a safe space for young people from the LGBT community in which to learn and develop a positive sense of self. This also promotes an ethos of tolerance and understanding for all pupils in the school and boarding provision. This shows that leaders are leading and setting a positive example for staff and pupils.

The boarding provision was rated outstanding at the previous inspection. Leaders and managers have maintained high standards and continue to improve the service. They have taken on board recommendations made at the previous inspection to improve practice. The independent visitor reports are much improved and focused on the quality of care experienced by young people. The school has also reviewed and improved its procedures in relation to assessing risk for young people who may go missing and those assessed as vulnerable to child sexual exploitation. At the time of this inspection, none of the pupils using the boarding provision was deemed to be at risk in relation to these areas.

What inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspections of boarding and residential provision in schools: the inspection framework'.

Judgement	Description
Outstanding	A school where the experiences and progress of children and young people consistently exceed the standard of good and result in sustained progress and achievement. The outcomes achieved by children and young people are outstanding, and the impact the boarding/residential provision has had in supporting this progress and achieving these outcomes is clearly evidenced.
Good	A school providing effective services which exceed minimum requirements. Children and young people are protected and cared for and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.
Requires improvement	A school where there are no serious or widespread failures that result in children's and young people's welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. However, the overall outcomes, experiences and progress of children and young people are not yet good.
Inadequate	A school where there are serious and/or widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected or their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded or their care and experiences are poor and they are not making progress.

School details

Unique reference number

Social care unique reference number

SC006621

DfE registration number

This inspection was carried out under the Children Act 1989, as amended by the Care Standards Act 2000, having regard to the national minimum standards for residential special schools.

Type of school

Residential special school

Number of boarders on roll

53

Gender of boarders

Mixed

Age range of boarders

11 to19

Headteacher

Date of previous boarding inspection

19/10/2015

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