

# Archers Brook Residential School

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

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Archers Brook is a residential special school, which is maintained by the local authority. There are 77 young people on roll. Of these, 16 stay to utilise the after-school and overnight stay provision.

Young people attending the school all have statements of special educational need for behavioural, emotional, and/or social difficulties. A significant number have additional difficulties in communication and interaction, and cognition. The last inspection took place on 7 March 2017.

**Inspection dates:** 14 to 16 November 2017

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,</b> taking into account	<b>Outstanding</b>
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
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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:** 7 March 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** Outstanding

## Key findings from this inspection

This residential special school is outstanding because:

- Young people make exceptional and sustained progress as a result of accessing the care provision.
- Young people build and maintain positive relationships with staff, which helps them to grow as individuals in their confidence and self-esteem. As a result, the incidents of inappropriate behaviour are reducing considerably.
- The quality of relationships with parents and carers is exceptional. This contributes effectively to young people's stability and progress in all areas of their development. A parent said, 'I trust them (staff) and, more importantly, (name of young person) trusts them.'
- Young people learn to be much more independent. They confidently undertake a range of roles in the residence and in school, including becoming peer mentors and advisors.
- The highest importance is given to equipping young people with the skills and knowledge to keep themselves safe. As a result, young people are confident to report anything that is giving them cause for concern.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion are central to all school and residential activities. Young people are empowered to expect great things of themselves. Consequently, they flourish with increased confidence, skills and independence.
- Staff have an excellent understanding of each young person's diverse and individual needs. Transitions are very carefully planned in consultation with the young person, their families and the school staff to ensure that they are successful.
- Leaders and managers are at the forefront of sharing good practice effectively with other schools, and are highly effective at working in partnership with the local safeguarding board to support the development of new initiatives. They also play a lead role in training others on the nurturing ethos for caring for young people.
- The residential provision is an intrinsic part of the school community. The governors, headteacher, head of care and senior leadership team value it highly.

The residential special school's area for development is:

- The independent person carries out monitoring visits to the home on a regular basis. On occasion, their reports are not sufficiently evaluative regarding the quality of record-keeping of any sanctions or physical interventions. This is a recording issue and does not affect the quality of care and support provided to young people. (NMS 20.2)

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

### **Recommendations**

- Enhance further the monitoring by the independent person, to ensure that the checks on the school's records of sanctions and use of reasonable force are evaluated. Ensure that any shortfalls are identified and addressed.

## Inspection judgements

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

Highly individualised care and support is provided to each young person. Young people enjoy very positive and supportive relationships with staff. One young person said, '[member of staff] talks to me when I'm sad or worried. He makes us happy when we are sad, and laughs with us.' Another young person said that they 'trust the staff, they help us to do well and are always there for us'. Consequently, young people enjoy their stays. They are making exceptional and sustained progress across all areas of their development.

Transitions into the residential setting are carefully planned. This means that young people thoroughly enjoy their stays, are able to manage being away from home, and are getting the most out of their stays. One young person explained that he enjoyed staying for the after-school activities, but was not quite ready to stay overnight. He said that the staff were helping him to become more confident and that he hoped to begin to stay in residence after Christmas. Staff said that they want young people to enjoy their experience here and not see it as something that they have to do. This is indicative of the careful thought and preparation given to ensuring that there is a successful introduction to staying in school.

Young people have a strong affinity with the residence. They are keen to tell visitors about all the things that they do here. Young people said that they feel they are doing better in school and that they are more able to concentrate while in school. They also acknowledge that the good routines that staff instil, for example when taking their medication and in ensuring that young people have a settled sleeping pattern, mean that they are very well prepared to learn.

The school's paediatrician is complimentary about the staff. They said that the staff act as effective mediators between the doctor and the parents and carers. As a result, young people no longer miss their medical appointments and, ultimately, they receive the healthcare and support that they need. This means that young people are able to immerse themselves in their learning, because staff ensure that young people's health needs and medication routines are exceptionally well catered for and are fully understood.

The school's partnership working with the child and adolescent mental health team (CAMHS) is excellent. The staff are quick to identify when a young person may be struggling. This is helped greatly because of the strong and positive relationships staff have with young people. Staff make very effective use of their mental health training to talk to young people, and are quick to report any concerns so that young people receive the right help and support. A therapist explained that, when working with children who have extreme trauma history, the achievement of getting anywhere near a hierarchy of secure attachments is relatively unusual. The therapist went on to acknowledge that the head of care has been instrumental in building secure attachments for young people. The therapist stated that, 'In the joint phase of

our therapy sessions, the head of care's contribution to [young person's] rethinking his position on male violence has been invaluable.' As a result, the young person is now able to interact comfortably with a number of male staff and is now more able to engage fully in his learning and recreational activities.

Staff use everyday activities, such as mealtimes, to effectively model positive social interactions. Mealtimes are very much a 'family' occasion. Young people and staff sit together and talk about the day's events. These routines are vital in encouraging the young people's confidence to talk in larger gatherings, to understand the importance of listening to one another, and in taking turns to speak. Young people said that mealtimes are fun and the food is 'great', and they especially enjoyed being able to have breakfast. Young people confidently and politely explained to the inspectors that the meal on one night was not 'great', but that this was unusual. The young people's concerns were listened to by staff and they were reassured that staff would talk to the cook about it. This happened.

Young people are continually encouraged to be as independent as possible and to develop skills for life. Young people carry out thirty minutes of homework each night on the residence. They said that this has helped them to focus on their reading and literacy skills and to be able to work more independently. Others are developing a range of practical skills, such as doing their laundry, and preparing and cooking meals. Staff skilfully use every opportunity to help young people to gain skills based qualifications, such as ASDAN awards, that best match their needs and talents. This means that, when it is time for young people to leave school, they have a portfolio to show employers their skills and talents.

The staff are excellent at encouraging and supporting young people's initiative. For example, some young people have set up a car-washing business, whereby they will offer to wash and valet staff cars for a fixed price. Staff helped young people create the 'business' model and have used this as an opportunity to help young people learn about the intricacies of setting up a small business. This has proven to be a highly effective way of channelling the young people's initiative and enthusiasm, while teaching them core literacy and numeracy skills in a practical and enjoyable way. Young people also take pride in supporting a range of local charities. They regularly fundraise and show a tremendous commitment to supporting people in the wider community. This helps them to develop an understanding of the wider world and builds a strong sense of citizenship.

Young people said that they thoroughly enjoy their stays at the residence. They said that there are lots of things to do and staff listen to their suggestions about future events that they would like to take part in. Young people have recently requested a fancy dress Christmas party, which follows on from a very successful Halloween party. Young people excitedly showed inspectors some of the items that they have already made for the party, such as clay models and helping staff to build a snowman out of plastic cups. Young people very much feel valued and believe that their views are taken seriously and, where possible, acted on.

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

## **outstanding**

Young people are safe and feel safe here. A therapist said that one young person now has 'a sense of implicit safety', which has resulted in the young person 'feeling safe enough to sleep here'. This is a massive achievement for him, and one that has been carefully and sensitively supported by the staff.

Child protection and safeguarding are given the highest priority. All staff are well versed in child protection and safeguarding policy and practice. They act swiftly to any concerns about a young person. Staff members use the media exceptionally well to help convey messages about the risks and dangers of issues such as child sexual exploitation to young people. Consequently, young people feel confident to disclose their experiences to staff. Staff have dealt with such disclosures sensitively and effectively. Safeguarding professionals are extremely complimentary about the head of care and his attention to detail regarding child protection issues. They said that the head of care is not afraid to challenge other professionals when he feels their responses are not in the child's best interest.

A key strength is the emphasis on e-safety and child sexual exploitation. A number of students have undertaken training with the police and, in turn, have delivered online safety training to their peers. This is a fantastic personal achievement for one young person in particular. The opportunity to become a role model has significantly enhanced his confidence and self-esteem. Young people are very aware of the action that they should take if they receive a concerning text or request via social media. This means that they are more able to keep themselves safe.

Young people receive excellent support from staff to manage their behaviour. There has been a small increase in the use of physical intervention in residence. This is the result of some new young people settling in to the residential routines. Sanctions are used sparingly. Staff defuse situations effectively and simply by using body language, or by saying the young person's name. This provides a sufficient intervention for the young person to think about what they are doing, and for them to make any necessary adjustments to what they are saying or doing. Because of what they are learning during their stays, young people are increasingly confident to challenge others when they say or do something that is not appropriate. A therapist said, '(name of young person) is much more able to use language to express feelings and to accept discipline and boundaries.'

Young people do not go missing from the residential provision. They also said that bullying is not an issue for them. However, they said that, if it did occur, they felt confident that staff would address this quickly. A number of young people are involved in creating a new anti-bullying leaflet for school. They are working with the charity Stonewall to raise the profile of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community (LGBT). This work is integral to everything that the school and residence are doing. The school council is taking the lead in ensuring that LGBT and mental health are destigmatised across the school and residence. Consequently, young people are empowered to regulate and challenge what others say. This has resulted in a decline in homophobic comments and bullying.

Dynamic risk assessments created in consultation with each young person help to keep young people safe. The residential areas are clean, safe and well maintained. Young people's bedrooms reflect the uniqueness of each young person. Some are covered in posters and have various items from the young people's own homes, while others are more sparsely decorated as per each young person's choice. Communal areas are welcoming and there are photographs of young people on the walls throughout the residence. This helps to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

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

The head of care and headteacher are inspirational and passionate leaders, consequently staff and governors see the residence as a vital and intrinsic component of the school. One staff member said, 'This is an amazing, inspirational place to work and all staff are committed to making a real difference in young people's lives.'

The senior leadership is very forward thinking and is clearly aware of the strengths and areas for development of the service. For example, recruitment practice is more robust. This is because the school now does everything it can to secure references from previous employers and to ensure that the single central register remains current. The school is striving to secure National Autistic Society (NAS) and Stonewall accreditation. This is in direct response to the changing needs of the young people.

The governing body is enthusiastic about supporting high-quality residential provision. The chair of governors regularly spends time with the headteacher and head of care and goes around the school. This promotes good relationships and enables him to see for himself how children are doing at school and in the residence. Record-keeping is secure, although there are some minor shortfalls in the recording of physical intervention and sanctions, which have not been identified in the monitoring process. These are recording issues and do not impact on the care provided.

Leaders and managers are constantly looking at new ways of working with other professionals, such as the NAS and CAMHS workers, to improve the outcomes for young people. For example, 'Mentally healthy learn fest' days have been introduced so that young people know what services are there to support them and what they can do to support their own mental health and wellbeing. The headteacher has also undertaken a 'Voice Review', which was a 360-degree feedback and consultation exercise that included seeking feedback from all of the staff and young people across the school and residence. This is currently being evaluated to inform the next stage of development for the school. However, this is indicative of the drive to look at what can be improved and/or built on.

Regular, good-quality supervision and a range of meetings mean that all staff are fully aware of the diverse and ever-changing needs of the young people. Staff have the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to meet the young people's needs. The staff are highly committed to making a real difference in young people's

lives. As a result, young people continue to make excellent progress across all areas of their development.

Highly effective partnership working with parents, carers and other professionals is fundamental to everything the school does. A parent said, 'I trust them implicitly. (name of young person) rings me every evening that he is there, and if I am worried, I ring the school and they go and check on him for me. I cannot praise them enough.' Professionals are also highly complimentary about the influence and contribution that the headteacher, head of care and staff all have on achieving positive outcomes for young people.

Young people learn to be tolerant of others. This is because the school is highly committed to preparing young people for life in modern Britain. This is achieved through cross-curricular and residential activities, which are supporting young people's understanding of fundamental British values. This not only promotes tolerance for different faiths and cultures, but also gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, and other groups from protected characteristics.

## **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:** SC006621

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## **Inspectors**

Chris Scully, social care inspector (lead)  
Sarah Billett, social care inspector



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