

# Archers Brook SEMH 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, 24 utilise the after-school club and, of those 24, 16 have overnight provision.

Young people who attend the school all have education and healthcare plans for behavioural, emotional, and/or social difficulties. A significant number of young people have additional difficulties in communication, interaction and cognition. The last inspection took place in November 2017.

**Inspection dates:** 9 to 11 October 2018

**Overall experiences and progress of children and young people,** taking into account

**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 provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

**Date of previous inspection:** 14 November 2017

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** outstanding

## **Key findings from this inspection**

This residential special school is good because:

- Children and young people like their school. They enjoy a range of activities on the school site and in the local community.
- Children and young people make good progress, particularly with regard to their education, independence, social skills, and emotional health. They particularly enjoy staying at the bungalow.
- Consultation with children and young people is part of the culture of the school. They feel listened to.
- The school works in partnership with parents and external professionals to provide consistent, holistic care across all areas of the child's life.
- There is an experienced leadership team that provides good support to a qualified and caring staff team. The leadership team understands the strengths and weaknesses of the school and has plans to address shortfalls.

## **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:

The school ensures that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. (NMS 6.3)

A written record is kept of major sanctions and the use of any reasonable force. Records include the information in Appendix 2 (use of reasonable force). The record is made within 24 hours and is legible. Children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records. The school regularly reviews any instances of the use of reasonable force and examines trends or issues to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice. (NMS 12.6)

The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school and takes appropriate action where necessary. (NMS 13.1)

There is a sufficient number of competent staff deployed appropriately, both as a staff group and on individual shifts, to fulfil the school's Statement of Purpose and meet the individual needs of all children resident in the school. (NMS 15.1)

## Recommendations

- 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)

## Inspection judgements

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

Children and young people like their school. Staff and managers place the well-being of children at the centre of this service. Care is provided by experienced, trained staff. Children have positive relationships with staff and with their peers. Parents have confidence in the care that their children receive. Staff know the children's individual needs and personalities well.

Children and young people make good progress especially in their education, emotional health, social and independence skills. Staff know the children and young people well. A parent said: 'Staff do go above and beyond to get to know him.' Children and young people say that staff help them and one child said: 'If there is a problem they will help you if they can.'

The residential accommodation is based within the school, but it is separate and private. Rooms are adapted to meet the individual needs of children. Children can bring personal bedding and other items to personalise the rooms.

The residential experience is linked to developing independence and life skills. Young people aged 14 and over can attend the bungalow, which offers them the opportunity to manage their own environment. Children have the option of accessing the residential service for up to two nights a week during term time. School and care staff provide good-quality information to parents and carers about the residential service.

School staff and residential care staff share information effectively so that each child has a smooth transition from school to residential. There are minimum levels of staff on duty to supervise and provide adequate individual care.

Attendance in school is very good. Residential staff support children and young people within the school, particularly at the breakfast club, thereby creating better links between care and education.

Children who have a range of social needs and abilities enjoy activities and social interaction with their friends and peers. Residential staff who support the activities on offer to children are skilled and child focused. They develop bespoke methods of ensuring that each child is able to participate, even if sometimes it wasn't their first choice of activity. Children learn new skills and enjoy the activities. Parents report

that children are benefiting from participating in new activities, but would also like their children to take part in activities that they wouldn't normally be able to access at home.

Overall, children's records are good. Staff ensure that they have enough information to meet children's identity and cultural needs well. However, the school does not routinely write risk assessments for children who stay overnight in the residential provision.

Healthcare needs of children are addressed well. Staff make referrals to, or make parents aware of, specialist services where appropriate. Staff also liaise with dietitians, physiotherapists and mental health services. Community paediatricians and specialist nurses liaise closely with school staff and visit the school to review health plans.

Children and families receive information about a range of opportunities to share views and make a complaint. There has been one complaint by a child since the last inspection. A member of the senior residential staff team met with the child to ensure that a resolution had been agreed. The child told the inspector that his views were listened to and respected.

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

The designated safeguarding lead, who is also the head of care, has not provided clear and detailed information about a recent physical intervention. Two accounts of the incident significantly differed from one another. One account states a child was held by two staff members and his mobile phone was removed from his person, while another indicates that the mobile phone was handed in to the staff member when it was requested. The headteacher stated that an investigation had been undertaken but was 'disappointed' to find that there was no evidence to support this.

The school does not routinely write risk assessments for children staying in the residential provision. The lack of good-quality guidance for staff puts staff, children and young people at risk. For example, children who display sexualised behaviours or who may be at risk of self-harm do not have written plans of support around them should these behaviours be displayed. However, staff were able to vocalise the steps that they are taking to reduce risk, but these are not recorded on individual plans for children.

Procedures are not always followed when a young person leaves the site without permission. On one occasion, senior management and police were contacted later than the time suggested within the school policy. Furthermore, on the young people's return, staff failed to have a debrief with them about their safety and welfare, despite the young people returning having consumed alcohol.

Positive behaviour is promoted with young people. Staff have strong relationships with the children and young people. Behaviour in the residential houses is generally good. However, staff are not consistent in their practice when using sanctions. There

are few examples when staff use restorative approaches to help children and young people to reflect on their behaviour and think about better ways of managing their own behaviour in the future. Some sanctions have been used that may not be effective at helping the children and young people to manage their own behaviour, for example losing a night's stay in the residential provision when they are caught smoking.

There is detailed information on the school website and within the school that is informed by Cheshire and Cheshire West Council policies and Local Safeguarding Children Board procedures. These policies set out how staff should reduce risks and respond to concerns. Staff have received training and understand procedures regarding allegations against staff who work with children. Staff and leaders are aware of their individual safeguarding responsibilities and are signposted to the local authority's whistle-blowing policy.

Vetting procedures help to keep children and young people safe from unsuitable adults. Health and safety procedures, including fire safety, help to keep children and young people safe.

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

The residential team is depleted following a review of staffing at the school by the local authority. The views of staff are recorded about how they feel about the quality time that they can have with children and feel that this is impossible to achieve within the present staffing structure. Other staff shared with inspectors that the range of activities on offer to children is much reduced. For example, children who stay in the residential provision spend a lot of time in the minibus dropping children off at home following the after-school club. Due to staffing levels, children have to attend one activity together and, although children are given a choice about where they would like to go, those in the minority do not get their choice.

The three staff who work in the residential unit are working split shifts to meet the needs of the children and sleep on the premises every night during the week. There are 24 children who use the residential service over the week. The head of care has £35 a week to provide an enriching programme of activity for all children. Children contribute to the cost of these activities. The residential staff also volunteer their own time to raise funds to support the programme of activities for children who stay in the residential provision. One staff member is making wooden animals to sell at a Christmas fair, another is planning a sponsored event.

Governance and monitoring within the residential provision is weak. A recommendation made at the last inspection has not been met. Reports continue not to be sufficiently evaluative regarding the quality of record-keeping of any sanctions or physical interventions. Records of the termly visits to the residential provision by the governors lack evaluation and a sense of scrutiny around staff practice. For example, in the November 2017 report on the safety of children, the governor wrote, '...I know from staff, safety of children is of the upmost importance to everybody'.

The senior management team works effectively with parents, families and partner agencies to ensure that children do well. There is good ongoing assessment of children's needs and progress. Leaders and staff ensure that children's achievements are celebrated.

The headteacher and head of care are experienced and qualified. The senior leadership team and the residential staff are committed to providing an inclusive, child-centred service in which children are supported to reach their potential.

The headteacher also works closely with leaders of the council. There have been some changes to resources based within the school following a review of the residential provision. The headteacher has ensured that there is effective communication with governors and families during periods of review. However, the last review has made limited progress to enhance the residential provision.

Parents' feedback is overwhelmingly positive. One parent said that his child's experience had exceeded his expectations. The child has learned new skills, developed new interests and grown in confidence. Another parent said that she has been 'blown away' by the care provided by the nurturing staff and the progress her son has made.

## **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

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:**

**Type of school:** Residential Special School

**Telephone number:** 0151 3382141

**Email address:** head@archersbrook.cheshire.sch.uk

### **Inspectors**

**Elaine Clare, social care inspector (lead)**

**Lisa Gregoire-Parker, social care inspector**







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