

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 82 children on roll. Of these, 18 utilise the after-school club and, of those 18, 11 have overnight provision.

Young people who attend the school all have education and healthcare plans for behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties. Several young people have additional difficulties in communication, interaction and cognition. The last inspection took place in October 2018.

Inspection dates: 21 to 23 October 2019

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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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: 9 October 2018

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Young people are thriving because of the high-quality care and support that they receive. Each young person receives a bespoke package of care that meets their diverse needs and is enabling them to make excellent progress across all areas of their development.

Parents and carers are extremely complimentary about the residence and how the staff have helped their children to achieve their individual goals. This includes improving some young people's hygiene routines, reducing their anxieties and building their confidence and self-esteem. One young person said that they are now confident to go out at night, without the fear of being 'robbed'.

Residence is a key part of school life. Many young people choose to come here and see this as a treat. Young people said that they are fully consulted on all aspects of their care and the activities provided. Young people said that the activities are great fun and that they enjoy spending time with their friends.

A key strength of the setting is the progress that young people are making with regards to their emotional health and well-being. Young people who may be exploring who they are can do so freely in a supportive and sensitive environment. Events such as Pride and talks from people from the LGBTQ community help young people to be tolerant, respectful and to celebrate the uniqueness of everyone.

A young person said that they value the support of the school counsellor and holistic therapies as this helps them to relax and to put things into perspective. Another young person said that they felt calmer here, and because of this they 'do not get into as much trouble'.

Young people are much more aware of the needs of others and show compassion for those who are in need. Recently, they decided to send birthday cards to a young person with a terminal illness; this was following an appeal by the young person's family. Young people explored with staff how they would feel if they were in this situation and what they could possibly do for others who are unwell.

Young people are helped to prepare for the future in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them. Young people are encouraged to undertake household chores such as making their bed, keeping their room tidy and, as they get older, preparing meals and snacks. Staff make effective use of the AQA awards to reward young people for their successes. This fosters young people's confidence and self-esteem.

Young people's attainment and enjoyment in school has improved significantly because of coming to residence. This is because they are benefiting greatly from the seamless 24-hour curriculum. Young people achieve better exam results as they have additional study support and the opportunities to just be themselves.

Partnership working with parents and carers is exceptional. Parents said that they

know they can pick up the phone and someone will be there to support them and their child. One parent spoke of the invaluable support provided to their child as they moved on to college. They said that their child still misses school and that, if he could, he would stay at the residence. The parent said that without this support they doubt that their child would be doing as well as they are in college. Another parent said that, as a result of coming to residence, their child now likes school and that this was 'massive' for them.

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

Safeguarding is central to everything that the school and residence do. Staff are trained in safeguarding and understanding child sexual exploitation, county lines, e-safety and radicalisation. This means that staff have the skills and knowledge to observe, identify any potential concerns and take the right action to support young people.

Child protection and safeguarding concerns are managed well. Professionals speak highly of the school and the action that staff take to keep young people safe.

Staff are very aware of the individual risks and vulnerabilities of the young people that they care for. The assessment of individual risks and the action to take to reduce identified risks has improved. This is because of the revised risk assessment procedures that are in place. Furthermore, this is helping to support young people's understanding of risk and what they can do to keep themselves safe.

Young people feel safe to talk to staff about any issues that are concerning them, for example drinking alcohol. Young people know that the staff will listen to them and help them to get the support that they need.

Young people's behaviour is improving. Staff have very positive relationships with the young people, and this is supported by the clear rules and boundaries that are consistently applied. Each young person has a target action plan; however, this would benefit from information as to how young people are being supported to achieve their target.

Staff are inventive in how they help young people to achieve their individual goals. For example, a member of staff made a wooden shoe so that a young person could practise tying their laces. Ultimately, this young person can now complete this task unaided. Sanctions are used when necessary and a record is maintained of these.

Many improvements have been made to the residential environment. This has provided a homelier and cosy lounge area for young people. Young people said that they like to sit and watch a film together. Young people take pleasure in personalising their bedrooms and try to keep them tidy.

Recruitment and vetting process are generally secure. However, on reviewing two files it was identified that, in one file, there are gaps in one person's employment history. In the other file, it only had the year-to-year employment dates, such as 2009–2009 were recorded. This had been explored with both applicants, but no

record was made of the discussions or the outcomes.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are aspirational, confident and ambitious for young people. They want every young person to achieve to the best of their ability. Governance of the setting has significantly improved. There is now a full governing body with improving oversight of the residential provision. The acting chair of governors is ambitious for the setting. She spends a considerable amount of time in school and residence getting to know the staff and young people.

Monitoring reports by the governors are more informative but would benefit from a more critical oversight of the language used in some records, including healthcare plans, sanctions and behaviour action plans. This is to ensure that all records are maintained to the same high standard.

Staff are committed to improving the outcomes for young people. Leaders and managers and staff have reflected well on the last inspection outcomes. As a result, the school has several changes, which are now coming to fruition. This includes providing additional staffing to improve the staff's home and work-life balance.

The setting is very responsive to the needs of the young people and their families. It is successfully reducing the length of some young people's stays to help them to feel secure in the setting as they were struggling with staying away from home. For others, their stays have increased to support the family needs. This has prevented the need for young people to move out of the family home.

Leaders and managers are aware of the strengths of the provision and the areas for development. Staff and young people are consulted well on what they would like to see happen; their views are carefully considered and, where possible, acted on. However, the residence would benefit from the creation of a written development plan which runs alongside the school's self-evaluation form.

A key strength of the setting is the vast array of multi-agency work that is carried out to support the young people and their families. Professionals are complimentary about the staff and the work that they do to keep families together and to ensure that young people have the right support. The head of care and headteacher challenge others effectively when they feel that a young person is not getting the support that they need.

Parents' and young people's views of the service are overwhelmingly positive. Young people said that they enjoyed spending time with their friends, that they feel calmer because they come here, and that they enjoy the activities. Parents are 'amazed' at the progress that their children are making and that they cannot thank the staff enough for all that they do for them and their children.

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

Compliance with the national minimum standards for residential special schools

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

Recommendations

- Enhance further the recruitment practice by ensuring that there is a clear audit trail of the action taken to verify any contradictory or incomplete information concerning an applicant's employment history. ('Keeping children safe in education', paragraphs 144, page 41)
- Monitoring of the service has improved but would benefit from a critical review and analysis of the quality of record keeping. Specifically, the language used in some reports and documentation and the effectiveness of the information provided. (NMS 20.2)
- The school maintains the necessary records and documentation. However, on occasion records such as health care plans, records of sanctions, and behaviour action plans are not sufficiently detailed. This is a recording issue and does not detract from the care and support provided to young people. (NMS 13.7)
- Leaders and managers are aspirational and committed to the ongoing development of the residential provision. A cohesive development plan would further enable managers to regularly review progress to improve specific areas of practice. (NMS 13.2)

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: SC006621

Headteacher in charge: Mrs Samantha Myers-Whittaker

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Inspectors

Chris Scully, social care inspector (lead)

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