

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 that is maintained by the local authority.

Children who attend the school have education health and care plans for behavioural, emotional and/or social difficulties.

Due to COVID-19, at the request of the Secretary of State, we suspended all routine inspections of social care providers carried out under the social care common inspection framework (SCCIF) on 17 March 2021. We returned to routine SCCIF inspections on 12 April 2021.

Inspection dates: 9 to 11 November 2021

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	good
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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 effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 21 October 2019

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children receive individualised care from a stable and committed staff team. Children are helped to build trusted relationships with staff because staff know the children well and spend time with them. Observations of children with staff are positive. Children are comfortable with staff and staff are nurturing and interested in talking to children about their lives.

Children do not make complaints. However, children have opportunities to tell staff how they are feeling or if they are upset about something. One child told the inspector that he can talk to staff if he is worried or upset.

Children attend school. There is good communication between school and residential staff. This means that children receive effective all-round care.

The headteacher and head of care ensure, through regular meetings and discussions, that children's needs are met. They understand children's plans, although information in relation to children is kept in different places. This creates a disjointed picture of staff actions and plans to support children. This makes it difficult to measure children's progress to know that they are achieving their full potential. Leaders and managers recognise this.

Residential staff support activities that children like, for example, swimming. Children are also planning to be involved in activities in the community.

Staff support children to develop their independence skills according to their individual needs, for example, using a washing machine, undressing and dressing, and making a snack using a toaster.

Children are in good health and any health needs are managed by residential staff. Children receive specialised emotional support from health professionals. Staff help parents manage children's health needs when they are at home. For example, staff contact health professionals when parents need help to understand their child's medication and how this helps them.

Leaders and managers carefully consider new children who may want to stay at the home. Children are welcomed gradually. Children are invited to spend time at the home through the day, before leaders and managers consider any overnight stays.

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

Staff identify, understand and manage risks to help children become increasingly safe. Staff have a good understanding of the safeguarding arrangements in school and in the residential setting. Positive relationships between teaching staff and residential staff mean that children receive effective all-round care.

Children can identify a trusted adult. Children told inspectors that they can talk to residential staff if they have any worries or concerns. Children were confident that staff would listen to them and help them.

Children do not go missing from home. However, there are plans in place for staff to follow if this happens. These plans could be strengthened by leaders and managers implementing individual plans for children to address their different needs. Leaders and managers recognise that this will enhance safeguarding practice.

Staff are confident to report any concerns to the designated safeguarding officers. Any child protection or safeguarding concerns are immediately shared with the relevant professionals. Information is recorded and records demonstrate a clear chronology of actions taken. This means that staff can keep children safe. The governors of the school have good oversight of all safeguarding issues. This adds another safety layer to the good practice within the residential setting.

Leaders and managers have effective links with local authorities and designated officers. Leaders and managers meet with other safeguarding leads from local schools. This gives them an opportunity to discuss changes in legislation, rising trends and current practice. They often discuss incidents to share good practice.

Inspectors saw some very good safeguarding practice where leaders and managers recognise areas of concern and take prompt and effective action to ensure multi-disciplinary support and protection for children.

The use of physical intervention is minimal. When this does happen, staff reflect on incidents to consider what could have been done differently, to minimise reoccurrence. Sanctions are generally appropriate. However, there are gaps in the recording system. For example, several records do not have the child's view or the head of care's evaluation, and they have not been signed or dated. This limits the head of care's ability to monitor trends and patterns and does not demonstrate that the child has been given the opportunity to discuss the sanction.

Staff talk to children about internet safety. Parents and carers are invited to internet safety sessions to ensure that residential staff and parents and carers give the same messages to the children. Staff told inspectors that this has been important due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, one member of staff said, 'Some children were isolated and spent more time on their mobile phone and Playstation. Therefore, we have given them the knowledge to access these items safely and the confidence to report anything that worries them.'

The school remained open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and some residential children continued with their overnight stays. Leaders and staff worked under difficult circumstances to provide safe continuity of care and education for children. Staff maintained regular contact with children who were unable to attend school, including visiting them with food parcels so that their welfare could be monitored effectively. A parent told inspectors that, 'The support has been great.'

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Leaders and managers are child focused and aspirational. They are suitably qualified to deliver good care for children. The residential provision is properly staffed and resourced to meet children's needs.

Leaders and managers actively monitor the quality of care. However, this could be strengthened by more consistent review and evaluation to enhance staff practice to continually improve the experiences and care of children.

Leaders and managers ensure that children's plans address their needs. However, children's plans do not consistently detail all children's needs and actions to address these needs. This means that staff do not always know what goals children are working towards, so it is difficult to consistently measure and evaluate progress.

The availability of training has been limited due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, since the previous inspection, staff have completed relevant training, for example reporting and recording.

Residential staff build effective relationships with parents and external professionals. Parents are positive about residential staff. Parents describe staff as providing good experiences for children and supporting children in their development. One parent described how staff have helped her develop a bedtime routine for her child and how this has improved their lives at home. External professionals are also positive about the support and experiences that staff provide for children.

Internal communication through team meetings provides staff with opportunities for reflective practice. Residential staff have regular supervision. Staff told inspectors that this is supportive and helps them in their roles.

There is external scrutiny from school governors, who are actively involved and updated about relevant issues at the school.

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

Recommendations

- The registered person must ensure that any sanctions are reviewed to enable staff to reflect and learn, to identify any trends or patterns. (NMS 12.6)
- The registered person must further enhance monitoring and review in respect of all children's plans and learning from feedback to continually improve the experiences of children. (NMS 13.1)
- The registered person must further enhance the plans for children's development to help them to reach their fullest potential through planned and targeted staff support that consistently matches the outcomes in their education and health and social care plans. (NMS 21.1)

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/teacher in charge: Samantha Myers-Whittaker

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Inspectors

Catherine Fargin, Social Care Inspector (lead)

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