

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.

The residential offer is an early intervention model primarily for children up to age 14 years with social and emotional difficulties, often linked to medical conditions, difficulties such as autism spectrum conditions, mental health needs, speech and language and communication or conduct difficulties. Children who attend the school have education, health and care plans. They stay for between one and three nights each week during term time.

Eighty children are on the school roll, with 18 places available for residential care. During this inspection, eight children stayed overnight over two evenings.

The head of care has been in post for 11 years and is suitably qualified.

Inspection dates: 17 to 19 October 2022

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

How well children and young people are helped and protected **outstanding**

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **good**

The residential special school provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of previous inspection: 9 November 2021

Overall judgement at last inspection: good

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

Children say that they really enjoy staying overnight at school. They told inspectors about the fun that they have taking part in a broad activity programme, which they choose with their friends, and they appreciate time away from their home life. They enjoy the company of staff, who help them to learn new skills, such as using cutlery, preparing their own food, and setting themselves good routines for healthy sleep and personal care. This progress helps them to be better prepared to make the most of their school day.

Children experience individualised care and support. Residential staff know them well and recognise and value their unique starting points. Staff build positive relationships with children that underpin their progress. Staff go the extra mile to help children to realise their full potential, manage their emotions and past experiences, and get ready to make the most of their education. This is a strength of the school.

Staff are well prepared to help children to make the most of their time in residence. They plan a balanced evening of activity, routine and socialisation that is tailored to the matched groups of children who stay each evening. Some children only stay until early evening before they go home. Inspectors noted how well staff helped them to feel part of the residential group goals and activities. For some children, this meant that they felt confident to begin overnight stays and could decide when and how their plans would change.

When children leave the residential provision, relationships with staff remain strong. They continue to seek the counsel or comfort of residential staff during their school day, and this enables them to access their education more effectively.

Parents and professionals consistently hold staff in high regard. Parents spoke about the significant difference that the school has made to improving family life, getting their child the help that they need both in and out of school, and supporting their child 'to become the best they can be'.

Children, their families, professionals who support them, and school staff work together collaboratively. Children feel empowered to identify the areas that they want to focus on during their time in residence, and their comments about their plans expressed confidence. For example, children wrote, 'I can do this' and, 'I'm going to enjoy doing this'. Their goals include making progress in preparation for adulthood, improving academic learning, and working on areas of need identified in their education and healthcare plans. Keyworkers help children to recognise their progress and build confidence and self-belief.

Some of the bedrooms and bathrooms are less homely than others. Planned improvements to the residential environment will further enhance children's experiences.

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

Children say that they feel safe in school, and inspectors observed that staff work tirelessly to create a positive environment for children to stay in and learn.

Inspectors noted several examples of professional practice that has resulted in sustained improvement to children's lives, including some leading to child protection activity. This is possible because of a strong commitment to safeguarding training, effective and holistic communication systems, and a whole-school commitment to improving children's lives.

Staff guide and support children to begin to understand and manage their feelings, and to recognise the impact that their behaviour, language and attitude can have on others. They promote a tolerant and accepting community, where diversity is celebrated, and safety and security are promoted. A social worker told the inspector that children feel safe in the school, and often prefer to be there than elsewhere because they see it as a haven when they face difficult and traumatic events in their lives.

Leaders promote a holistic approach to understanding safeguarding. All staff are trained to see each child as unique, but also part of the school and wider community. Staff recognise the importance of family and local community influence, the impact of past trauma or unidentified need, and children's experiences and emotions. They work tirelessly to identify risk, predict unsafe outcomes, and interpret children's behaviour to better understand their emotional well-being. Leaders create a culture of transparency and reflection, where professional practice can be challenged, and staff feel empowered to identify and address areas for personal development.

Highly effective systems for sharing and managing concerns, and a determination to challenge professionals to assess and identify children's needs, enhances children's safety and well-being. Staff are committed to find solutions that improve children's outcomes. The principles of early help are embedded within the school's culture. Staff are actively engaged in helping families to overcome barriers to working with professionals by supporting family meetings or attending health appointments.

Staff use sanctions minimally and children are not restrained in residence. Inspectors saw staff use their positive relationships with children to maintain a sense of calm and ensure that all children could get the best from their stay. When children were unkind to each other, staff worked seamlessly to deflect, distract and repair the situation so that each child quickly regained a positive demeanour and could take part in the group. This proactive approach helps diverse groups of children to thrive, builds their self-esteem, and improves their social skills.

Leaders are reviewing the established residential approach for sanctions to fit better with the school's trauma-informed approach. More-consistent evaluation by

managers of how staff use the current sanctions policy will help to identify the areas for change.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

Very experienced and suitably qualified leaders and managers are ambitious and have high expectations for what all children can achieve. They promote high standards of care that help to build stronger futures for children. A stable, experienced, and suitably qualified residential team offers warm and nurturing care that supports children's well-being and development.

Leaders promote child-centred practice. This means that leaders develop, review and maintain systems of recording and monitoring of children's experiences and outcomes. They use effective consultation with all stakeholders, including children, to identify areas for development and improvement. They continuously strive for seamless collaboration between school and residential staff, where all act as equal partners in achieving improvement for children's lives. For example, they improve children's literacy by promoting reading for pleasure in residence, provide craft activities that contribute to a school art award, and use a shared electronic communication system to capture important information about children's experiences.

Parents and professionals are universally complimentary about how well staff share information about children's experiences and progress. Inspectors saw leaders pursuing engagement and collaboration to get improved support for children who were in crisis. Their determination ensured that children were emotionally supported while their needs were prioritised and addressed.

Leaders recognise that a revised residential development plan and more-consistent monitoring will build on well-established, effective care practice and will further improve the quality of record-keeping and oversight of the environment. This aspiration is part of the school development plan.

Governors are trained to understand and explore the school's development plan. They provide effective challenge to ensure that goals are specific and achievable within set timeframes. Equally, they support decisions such as maintaining lower numbers in residence to ensure that children's experiences are the best that they can be. This enables staff to match the personalities and needs of children who use the residence.

Leaders deliver or facilitate a comprehensive training and development programme so that education and residential staff deliver a consistent approach in line with the school's stated aims and objectives. Residential staff supervisions are linked to their appraisal targets drawn from the school development plan. This means that leaders know and address staff development needs.

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

Point for improvement

- 2.1 (Leadership and management) Managers consistently evaluate records of sanctions imposed by staff, and the quality of the residential environment, to ensure that the delivery of residential provision supports children's positive experiences and outcomes.

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

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