

# Abbey School for Exceptional Children

Abbey School Limited, 10-12 Abbey Square, Chester CH1 2HU

Residential provision inspected under the social care common inspection framework

## Information about this residential special school

Abbey School is an independent school that specialises in supporting pupils aged four to 19 with autism spectrum disorder and speech, language and communication difficulties. The school is situated in a residential area.

The residential provision can accommodate a maximum of 24 children. At the time of the inspection, eight children were staying for 41 weeks of the year.

The inspectors only inspected the social care provision at this school.

### Inspection dates: 10, 12 and 13 October 2023

<b>Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account</b>	<b>good</b>
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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:** 6 March 2023

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** requires improvement to be good

## Inspection judgements

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

Children thoroughly enjoy coming to the school and being part of the residential provision. Children's bedrooms are personalised with photos of their families and are decorated to their choice. This gives children a sense of belonging. The staff work hard to make sure that the children are having fun and are kept safe inside the residence and when out in the community. This allows children to develop their relationships with staff and helps them to settle into their environment.

Children take part in a variety of activities during residential time. The school has opportunities on site, including sensory play items, climbing frames and football nets. In addition, children take part in activities away from school. Many trips challenge the children's own perceptions of their abilities. For example, children go swimming and out in the community. Adventures such as these mean that children build happy memories, develop their social skills and improve their self-esteem and independence.

Children's transitions to and from school run smoothly. The staff carefully plan these to each child's individual needs. Some children can play on the outdoor equipment before school and some just go straight to school. When children struggle with education, leaders and managers work closely with education colleagues to devise a reduced timetable that works around the child. As a result, one child is now attending school for longer periods of time, which is great progress from their starting point.

Staff regularly seek children's views. There is good use of 'My Voice, My Choice', whereby consultation forms are designed in the child's preferred communication style. This allows staff to gain the children's views and wishes, and, where appropriate, act on these. For example, one child wanted to go swimming and now this is a weekly activity for that child. Additionally, the speech and language team has worked with the staff to capture children's wishes and feelings on videos to help new staff understand their preferred communication style.

Children develop positive relationships with staff who know them very well. Staff are nurturing towards children. Staff use their knowledge of the children to provide individualised care that fully incorporates the children's needs. Children trust staff because of the responses that they receive. This helps them to make and sustain progress.

Staff encourage and support children to develop their independence skills. This includes personal care skills, tasks around the house and the preparation of meals and snacks. The staff support the older children to do their laundry and shop independently. This prepares them well for their journey into adult life.

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

Staff use individualised plans to support children's behaviour. Plans are informed by the relationships that the staff have with the children. Strategies to reassure children are specific. For example, one child enjoys listening to music, while another child likes lots of space. When each child begins to struggle with their emotions, the personalised approach means that children receive the support that they need, when they need it.

Staff comply with the procedures involved with the administration and recording of medication. Medication errors are quickly identified and addressed through discussion with staff and additional training is put in place.

There are a high number of physical interventions. Some records that were sampled are clear and provide a detailed account of the incident that led to the hold and what staff's actions were to mitigate this. However, other records are not clear regarding whether staff used any de-escalation strategies to prevent the intervention.

There are robust recording systems in place for the selection and recruitment of staff. This ensures that there are no unsuitable adults caring for children.

The headteacher speaks with knowledge about safeguarding. She discussed what training the staff have received to ensure that safeguarding is robust in school and in residence. She is competent to respond effectively to any safeguarding problems and has a team to support her to do so. She has plans to develop the way in which she and the safeguarding team respond to children in future. This shows that the headteacher is forward-thinking.

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

Leaders and managers project a culture where there are high aspirations for both the children and the staff. The head of care and deputy are new in post since the last inspection. They know the children well and have formed positive relationships with them. Together, they have a hands-on approach and lead by example. This way of working ensures that the staff are consistent in their practice and encourages the nurturing ethos that prevails throughout the school and residence.

Staff spoke about the new head of care and deputy with high regard. They have noticed changes for the better in the residence. This is creating a positive atmosphere in the team. Staff said that they now feel supported and that their views are listened to.

Staff receive termly supervisions and regular team meetings. This provides staff with a time to reflect and learn new strategies to provide children with better care. This ensures that staff are continuing to learn in their role and that support is offered formally when staff raise any work-related problems that they may face. Leaders and managers talk through these problems, offering staff appropriate guidance. This means that a holistic and child-centered approach is delivered by the staff.

Leaders respond well to external monitoring. The independent visitor knows the school very well and recognises the positive impact that the residential provision has on children. The independent visitor scrutinises practice and offers suggestions to continue to improve the service. Leaders respond positively to suggestions made. This helps to ensure that the care provided to children is of good quality.

Professionals told inspectors about the improvements that have been made to the way in which they liaise with the staff, and that there is more joined-up working with key workers in the residential provision. This includes speech and language therapy being more available for residential staff, so that they can tap into the expertise for support and guidance around the children. Staff receive a range of training around 'total communication approaches'. This ensures that staff are given the skills to communicate effectively with all children using a variety of methods.

The school's governing body monitors the effectiveness of the leadership and management team and the quality of the care in the residential provision. There are regular visits to the residential provision from two board members. They check a wide range of aspects of the setting, including health and safety checks, and speak to members of staff. They provide a report of their findings, which offers challenge and support to school leaders. This means that children continue to receive the high-quality care they need.

The headteacher will professionally challenge others when she feels that their approach to children is not in the children's best interests. This ensures that the children are at the front and centre of everything that they do.

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

### **Recommendation**

- The registered person should ensure that all physical intervention records include what actions staff have taken to de-escalate the situations that may result in restraint, and for staff to avoid restraint wherever possible. Restraint should be used only to prevent injury to any person, including the child involved, or to prevent serious damage to property. ('Residential special schools: national minimum standards' 20.4)

### **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:** 2678223

**Headteacher/teacher in charge:** Dr Katy Lee

**Type of school:** Residential special school

**Telephone number:** 01244 960 000

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## **Inspectors**

Gemma McDonnell, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Judith Birchall, Social Care Inspector

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