

# 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 uses an early intervention model primarily for children up to the age of 14 with social and emotional difficulties, often linked to medical conditions, difficulties such as autism spectrum conditions, mental health needs, or speech and language and communication or conduct difficulties. Children who attend the school have education, health and care plans.

Eighty-five children are on the school roll, with 18 places available for residential care. At the time of this inspection, 10 children were staying overnight for one or two nights during the week in term time. Five children access the residential after-school club in preparation for considering overnight stays at the house.

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

### Inspection dates: 24 to 26 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	outstanding
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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 last inspection:** 17 October 2022

**Overall judgement at last inspection:** good

## Inspection judgements

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

Children enjoy their stays at the residential house. Children are treated with dignity and respect. They build secure and trusting relationships with the staff who look after them and, because of the positive relationships, children can talk to staff about any worries or concerns that they have. Children make good friends with each other at the house and told inspectors that bullying is not a concern. Parents and social workers said communication is effective and that they receive regular updates about their child's progress.

The 24-hour curriculum offers early intervention and support to children and their families. The offer of the provision is specific to each child. It has been extended for older children whose needs mean that they would benefit from continued access to the residential provision. This demonstrates a child-centred and individualised approach to care planning.

Children's targets from their education, health and care plans (EHCPs) are embedded in their plans. This ensures that all professionals are working together effectively to meet children's needs and to keep them safe.

Children make progress because of their stays at the residential house. Children are supported to develop their self-esteem and confidence. They are encouraged to improve their independence and life skills according to their age and abilities, preparing them for adulthood. This is done through setting individual targets and aspirational goals. As children become more independent, they have the option to move to the residential bungalow to develop their skills further.

Children have access to a range of recreational and leisure activities in the community to support their social and educational needs. Staff also engage children in creative on-site activities during their stay. Children who are exploring the option of residential care are welcomed to attend the after-school club at the residential house. This helps to ease any anxieties that children may have about staying away from their families.

Children's health needs are met. They have access to additional health services whenever they need them. Staff are suitably trained in medication administration, and they understand the children's health needs. However, children's health plans are not always clear and accurate in relation to prescribed medication, and why it is required and how often it should be administered. This is a recording and oversight issue and has not compromised the well-being of children staying in the residential house.

Children are at the centre of their plans and their views are always carefully considered. Children say they are listened to. They know how to make a complaint or raise concerns with the appropriate people. Some children actively take part in the

school council. In addition, children have access to a pupil voice book and a worry box to share their views, wishes and feelings. These systems are monitored regularly by the staff team and requests are acted on appropriately.

The house is comfortable and homely. Children's bedrooms have been redecorated and they are happy with the changes. Some of the bathrooms still require refitting to bring them up to the standard of the rest of the house. This has been planned for next year. In the interim, arrangements have been made to have the bathrooms redecorated.

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

Children are protected from harm. They all said they feel safe and secure in the residential house. Parents say that the staff know their children well and they are confident in the abilities of staff to keep their children safe.

Risks are very well identified and understood. Staff understand children's experiences and use a trauma-informed approach to support the children. The school's special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) has introduced support squares for all children that link to their EHCPs. Staff use these as an effective toolbox of strategies to support children if they are in crisis. The strategies are maintained and reviewed by all key people involved in the children's care across the school.

Children's residential plans are child-focused and identify creative ways that children wish to be supported should they become distressed. Inspectors observed staff using these de-escalation strategies effectively with the children to help them manage their emotions and to minimise risk.

Positive behaviour is holistically promoted between the residential staff and school staff. This ensures that there is a strong sense of working together as one to support children. Consequences given to children are proportionate, only used when necessary and are in line with the school's trauma-informed approach. The recording of the use of consequences has improved. The head of care oversees all consequences given to children. However, he does not routinely provide an assessment of the effectiveness of the measures used to ensure that there is a regular review of their suitability.

There is a proactive response to safeguarding in the residential service. Staff are very clear on their responsibilities. Children do not go missing from the residential house, as they enjoy staying there. There have been no serious incidents, use of restraint or safeguarding concerns since the last inspection. Staff use their positive relationships with the children to de-escalate situations effectively. This means that children have a strong sense of safety and well-being.

There are very good relationships with other internal and external professionals involved in safeguarding children and following protocols. The head of care has

external supervision and guidance from a professional from the local safeguarding children's partnership. This enables him to provide robust oversight of children's safety and well-being, particularly in his additional role as the designated safeguarding lead.

Regular training is provided to the staff team and the board of governors to ensure that they are kept up to date with current safeguarding practice. This includes training in areas such as the Prevent duty, child exploitation, online safety and keeping children safe in education.

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

The senior leadership team and SENCo work collaboratively together, alongside a dedicated residential staff team. This reinforces the approach of the school and residential provision working together as one to deliver the 24-hour curriculum. Staff are positive role models for the children and can demonstrate the positive impact that staying at the provision has on children's progress. They understand the provision's strengths and areas for development and actively look for ways to make improvements to children's experiences.

Leaders and managers work positively with parents, other schools and external agencies to drive improvements in the quality of care and to enable them to improve levels of communication and share good practice.

Staff receive regular supervisions. They also have their performance appraised to develop their practice and skills further. Staff are encouraged to share knowledge and positive practice at team meetings. The staff are highly experienced and most have worked in the residential provision for a long time. This means that the children have been provided with stability and continuity of care.

Staff have completed a wide range of mandatory training and training tailored to the children's needs. The training system used is underpinned by the model used to devise children's support squares. It is an effective way of engaging staff in key training and delivering online training videos.

The independent visitor's report provides a detailed evaluation of the quality of care in the residential provision. The independent visitor makes appropriate recommendations to drive improvements in the care and support provided to children. She spends quality time with the children and speaks at length with them about their experiences of the residential house. As part of her visits, she regularly meets with the head of care, residential staff, the SENCo and external professionals, such as from the National Autistic Society.

The presence of governors in the residential provision is positive. They spend time in the residential house and attend sports days for the children. The chair of governors meets regularly with the senior leadership team to discuss the quality of care and safeguarding practice. He is child-focused and understands the needs of the children

using the service. However, the residential provision and the independent visitor reports are not a standing or regular item at governing body meetings, to demonstrate that children's experiences and the quality of provision are systematically kept under review.

The senior leadership team has started to embed a new and effective case tracking system. This enables them to have a more thorough oversight of children's records and the operation of the residential house. The headteacher and SENCo contribute to the oversight of the case tracking system. This means an additional layer of scrutiny is provided when assessing the impact of the residential provision on children's lives.

There were no breaches of the national minimum standards.

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

### **Points for improvement**

- The residential provision is a standing or regular item at the governing body meetings to ensure that children's experiences and the quality of provision are systematically kept under review. This should include the governing body's response to each report from the independent visitor.
- Where necessary, a child has a clear plan covering their individual health and welfare needs. This contains relevant health and welfare information and records significant health and welfare needs and issues.
- A clear and unambiguous written record is kept of major consequences. Records include the information in Appendix B. The head of residential provision or equivalent regularly reviews any instances of the use of consequences and examines trends or issues to enable staff to reflect and learn in a way that will inform future practice. Specifically, information should include a review of the effectiveness of the consequence used.

### **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:** Samantha Myers-Whittaker

**Type of school:** Residential special school

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## **Inspectors**

Cheryl Field, Social Care Inspector (lead)

Katie Tomlinson, Social Care Inspector

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