

1246521

Registered provider: Hillcrest Children's Services Ltd

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

Part of a private organisation, this children's home offers 52-week care, education and assessment to girls between the ages of 8 and 17 years. It can accommodate up to 14 girls across two homes.

Inspection dates: 27 to 28 September 2017

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

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

The effectiveness of leaders and managers **outstanding**

The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: This is the home's first inspection

Overall judgement at last inspection: Not applicable

Enforcement action since last inspection: Not applicable

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Through considered thought and planning, the registered manager has created a safe and homely environment. A high-quality environment gives an immediate message to the children that they are valued.
- Leaders and managers continually strive for excellence on behalf of children's outcomes. All of the children are making significant progress across all areas of their development.
- Placements are stable and, as a result, children are able to form positive relationships with the staff.
- All of the children are in education. They attend regularly and are accessing the national curriculum.
- Trauma-led risk-taking behaviours have either decreased or stopped altogether.
- Although still in its infancy, the service is developing at an appropriate pace while maintaining its high standards and excellent quality of care.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Formal supervision is not taking place on a regular basis between the responsible individual and the registered manager.
- Further consideration needs to be given to practice of allowing the children to smoke on the premises.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
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This is the home's first inspection.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- The registered person must have systems in place so that all staff, including the manager, receive supervision of their practice. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.2) In particular, the registered manager should receive regular supervision from the responsible individual.
- The registered person is responsible for ensuring that each child's day-to-day health and well-being needs are met. Staff should work to make the children's home an environment that supports children's physical health. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 33, paragraph 7.3) In particular, staff should work towards developing a culture of no smoking in the home.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

This is the first inspection since the home opened in December 2016.

Children live in an extremely safe and nurturing environment. Located in a semi-rural village, the home is already an established part of the local community. It is set within its own private grounds, and children benefit from beautiful surroundings and large, open spaces. The registered manager has created a warm and homely atmosphere by decorating the home using high-quality décor and furnishings. This, combined with the opportunity to personalise their own bedrooms, helps to make the children feel welcomed and valued.

Careful and considerate planning has led to stable placements. The children are well matched and are encouraged to respect one another and to interact together during structured free time. Disagreements and tensions in the group are identified quickly and managed sensitively by the staff. As a result, these incidents rarely lead to disruption. The support and positive engagement given by the staff has enabled the children to build and sustain relationships with each other and the staff.

Well-thought-out staff shift patterns provide continuity of care for the children. Due to staff working for a week at a time, key staff are always available. Staff embrace the core values of the home and consistently apply the rules and boundaries. Children spoken to during the inspection inadvertently gave examples of this by expressing some frustrations about free time, money and bed times. Staff clearly apply the principles of good parenting, which, in turn, has led to secure attachments.

Care delivery is exemplary. The staff and managers know the children extremely well and continually evaluate and reflect on their practice. Focusing on positive behaviour,

the staff use rewards to encourage and acknowledge the children's achievements. Clearly understood goals help children to understand what they need to do in order to achieve these rewards. One child described how she had worked towards getting her hair coloured, while another child spoke about having a manicure. Consequences for behaviour that is more negative are applied less frequently and are appropriate and effective. Children are encouraged by staff to pursue their hobbies and interests such as horse riding and art therapy. As a result, children with low self-esteem have grown in confidence.

The children's attendance and engagement at the organisation's school is excellent. Having previously struggled in education settings, the children are making significant progress. Close working relationships between the staff and teachers help the children to understand the expectations. Notable achievements include one child, who previously did not want to wear school uniform, now taking pride in their appearance and feeling proud to wear their uniform. The organisation's passion to improve the life chances of children looked after is evident through the education provision. Its foundation is built on equality by ensuring access to the national curriculum for all of the children.

Some children smoke cigarettes at the point of moving into the home. A deliberate uniformed response by the staff team is to take proactive steps to help and encourage the children to stop smoking. This includes working closely with health professionals on a programme of prevention. However, in the meantime, children can smoke a limited amount of cigarettes per day within the grounds. While managers are clear that the staff do not provide or purchase cigarettes for children, there is a risk that this practice may lead to children believing that smoking is condoned. Aware of this potential conflict, the responsible individual is confident that the staff will eventually develop a non-smoking culture in the home. This tactic is a conscious decision and approach to keep the children close and to support smoking cessation, rather than to increase the likelihood of them leaving the home and engaging in such harmful behaviour more covertly. During this inspection, the children themselves confirmed that they were receiving help and hoped to give up smoking soon.

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

Managers ensure that excellent safeguarding and child protection practice is central to the well-being of the children. Fully embedded into practice, knowledgeable staff know how to keep the children safe. Comprehensive risk assessments identify areas where children require the most support and guidance. These guidelines help the staff to understand children's vulnerabilities and to develop effective strategies to reduce them. As a result, the majority of the risk-taking behaviours the children previously engaged in, including going missing, have dramatically decreased or have stopped altogether. The effective assessment and management of risk has contributed to children feeling more secure, and has helped them to learn to take more age-appropriate risks.

The model of care and approach to behaviour management is effective and kept under constant review. With the support from managers, the staff understand how a child's previous experiences can affect how they feel and act. One social worker, who had nothing but praise for the team, described how staff had used their knowledge of trauma to manage a child's heightened anxiety. Noting a reduction in the child's behaviours, the

social worker felt that the child was now more confident and was learning to manage her emotions. The social worker also felt that staff 'provide a safe and secure environment'.

Regular and effective information sharing with key professionals plays an important part in keeping the children safe. Regular positive contact with the local police provides the staff with an informal opportunity to talk about issues or concerns. The local police community support officer (PCSO) told inspectors that communication with staff is good and that relevant information is routinely shared. The well-established relationship with the PCSO also means that the children have access to a trusted adult on a regular basis. During the support officer's visits, the children have benefited from advice and guidance on key topics including drugs misuse and bullying.

Children are encouraged to say what is on their minds. The registered manager actively supports this and uses various methods including questionnaires, complaints and feedback from the independent visitor to gain the children's views. This information forms part of the safeguarding culture and the overall development of the service. Key-work sessions are also used by staff to great effect. Records evidence that the staff are working proactively with the children on a range of subjects and that children feel able to talk openly to the staff.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager, who is already suitably qualified, is about to start a level 7 leadership and management course. This example of exceeding qualification requirements sets a high bar for staff to follow and is indicative of the learning culture of the home.

Service improvement continues to be top priority. Led by an inspirational registered manager and deputy, the plans to develop the home are meticulous. Starting from a baseline of good, the management team has created an outstanding provision. Striving for excellence, managers continually look for ways to improve the quality of care provided. Managers' passion and commitment towards raising standards is evident in their style and approach. The open door policy and managers' accessibility is an example of their openness and transparency. Acting as good role models, managers have gained the loyalty and trust from the staff team. The culture and ethos of the home motivates the staff to strive for excellence in their work.

Highly effective monitoring systems help to maintain high standards. Focusing on all aspects of service delivery, the registered manager uses this information to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the service. Comprehensive action plans address the areas for development. Concentrating on maintaining a high-quality and sufficiently resourced staff team, the ongoing recruitment of staff remains a priority, particularly to the leadership team. Leaders envisage that additional management roles will help to grow the service as planned, as well as providing additional management oversight.

Supervision and appraisal arrangements focus on the continual professional development of staff. The learning culture facilitated by leaders and managers enables the staff to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to support the children. Consequently, staff feel valued; they embrace learning opportunities and are able to evidence their learning in the way that they approach the work. Access to a comprehensive range of training

courses and qualifications broadens staff's knowledge further. This foundation supports the staff in meeting the needs of the children in their care.

Regular but informal contact with the responsible individual provides the registered manager with support and advice. However, formal supervision meetings have not taken place at the frequency set out in the policy. While this has not had a direct impact on the overall management of the home, it does not reflect the good practice that exists elsewhere within the organisation. The registered manager and the responsible individual acknowledged this area of weakness during the inspection, and made arrangements for formal meetings to take place in the future.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 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 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1246521

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Hillcrest Children's Services Ltd

Registered provider address: Hillcrest Children's Services Limited, Turnpike Gate House, Alcester Heath, Alcester B49 5JG

Responsible individual: Mark Birkbeck

Registered manager: Bret Noades

Inspector:

Amanda Harvey, social care inspector

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