

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC005567
Inspection date	18/09/2012
Inspector	Valerie Shephard
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	23/01/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a private children's home that is part of a large national organisation. It provides care and accommodation for up to four young people with emotional and/or behaviour difficulties.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The home provides a safe, nurturing and therapeutic environment for children. There are excellent relationships between the children and staff which positively enhance the therapeutic process. Children say they like living in the home, like the staff and feel safe.

Care is highly personalised and meets the individual and diverse needs of children. Children make good progress in all areas of their development due to the excellent care afforded them by the staff team. Staff promote a healthy lifestyle with the provision of nutritious food and active leisure pursuits. Children have access to a range of activities which assist them with their socialisation and development of confidence.

The home supports children to maintain contact with their families, where appropriate. This serves to promote their identity and sense of belonging.

The manager and staff are committed to maintaining high standards and sustaining improvements within the home. The Registered Manager inspires the staff to provide excellent care to young people to enable them to achieve positive outcomes.

A social worker said, 'Overall, this is a very good placement for this child.'

The manager has addressed the one requirement made at the previous inspection which related to poor recording in children's case files.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that supervision records detail the time and duration of each supervision for each member of staff. (NMS 19.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Children make very good progress in all areas of their development supported by a highly nurturing staff team. Excellent relationships exist between children and staff and consequently good attachments are developing. Children are able to display affection as a result of the trust which has built up between them and staff. One child said, 'I like living here, I like the staff especially my favourite person.'

Children have an input into their placement plans and have an active role in proposing their weekly activities and menus. Their views on the running of the home are sought in a variety of ways which helps them to feel valued. The use of the home's 'blue book' provides visual feedback to children on their progress in all areas, particularly in relation to their behaviour. This assists them to develop confidence in themselves and boost their self-esteem.

All children are in school and attendance overall is very good comparing favourably to their starting points. Children make good progress in their learning and in some cases are on a level with their peers. There are effective partnerships between home and school which support and enhance children's learning. Staff create fun opportunities for children to continue their learning within the home. Examples include word and number games and trips out to museums and places of interest.

Children benefit from participating in a range of activities in the community and particularly enjoy outdoor sports. Their interests include football, climbing and cycling, and they have begun to take part in athletics prompted by the Olympic Games. Children have the opportunity to take part in the organisation's young people's forum. Participation in these activities helps children with their socialisation and confidence.

Children enjoy good health and benefit by taking part in exercise and eating a healthy diet. Children understand about healthy eating and generally, with assistance, are able to make good choices about what they eat. Children are registered with a doctor, dentist and optician and have access to a therapeutic team within the home.

Children have been involved in going missing from home. Staff support children to

consider the potential risks of this behaviour and missing from home incidences have reduced significantly over time. Children respond to positive behaviour management and are able to discuss targets for improving inappropriate and risky behaviour.

Children gain considerably by being able to continue to see their families, where this is part of their care plan. Staff facilitate contact which enables children to maintain meaningful relationships with significant people in their lives. Continuity of contact assists children in understanding their identity, which in turn aids the development of a positive self-view.

Staff help children to acquire self-care skills suitable to their age and stage of development. They support children to maintain personal hygiene and to take a pride in their appearance. Children are encouraged to make choices about their clothes, where appropriate, and keep their bedrooms tidy. Staff assist them to make simple snacks and drinks. The acquisition of these skills serve to give children confidence in their own abilities and increase feelings of self-worth.

Quality of care

The quality of the care is **outstanding**.

Staff provide exceptional care to the children in the home. The home provides a nurturing environment which creates a basis for the development of sound relationships between children and staff. Children are in receipt of weekly therapy from qualified therapists, and staff are trained in techniques which support the therapeutic process. Examples of these include using the 'easy way - hard way' approach to help children make good choices about their behaviour. A social worker said, 'The staff provide the necessary care and patience; it is a very nurturing environment and I am confident that the child is safe.'

Staff fully support children to gain the most from their education. Staff ensure that children are ready and prepared for school and consequently, their overall attendance is very good. Established links with schools help to ensure that school and home work together for the benefit of children. The introduction of the home's 'education information sheet' informs staff about what is going on for each child in school. For example, current topics on the curriculum and children's daily equipment needs. This simple tool assists staff to fully support children's access to their education. Staff create opportunities for children to continue their learning for fun, using 'word of the week' and 'number of the week'. For instance, children are encouraged to discover the meaning of unusual words, as chosen by staff, and use these in sentences. On occasions where children are out of school, staff create alternative learning experiences, such as a visit to a local museum. This ensures that children continue to have access to learning which supports daily routines.

The home promotes a healthy environment with the provision of nutritious food and access to regular exercise, including outdoor activities. Children plan their weekly menus and staff assist them to make healthy choices including intake of fruit and vegetables. The home's development plan incorporates a target of thirty minutes

daily exercise for each child. To meet this target, staff support children to participate in activities and try new sports such as athletics. Staff also ensure that children have access to other pastimes available in the community, such as table tennis and snooker.

Staff address diverse needs in accordance with children's highly personalised care plans. Details about children's ethnic and religious needs are clearly recorded, and staff strive to ensure that particular cultural needs are met. For example, the home provides specific products for afro hair, or special ingredients for a cultural dish. The home hosts regular 'cultural' evenings to celebrate different cultures and practices. These events not only help with socialisation, but assist children to value their own heritage while learning about other cultures.

The home is in a pleasant area situated close to shops and schools, on the edge of the countryside. Consequently, it offers a range of opportunities for children from a variety of backgrounds. The home is clean, homely and subject to good maintenance. Children have an input into the decoration and use of the home. An example of this relates to the children's request for the home's attached flat to be used as a playroom. Staff have made the necessary changes to change this room into an extra play area. There is now room for art materials, a games console and a table football game. As a result, there are now three separate living areas which provide children with opportunities for different activities.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Children say they feel safe in the home and know how to complain if they are unhappy. Staff are appropriately trained in child protection and safeguarding which helps to uphold a safe home environment.

Each child has a behaviour management plan in place and these are subject to regular review with the child. The home successfully uses positive and negative consequences to effect changes in children's behaviour. This works by assisting them to understand cause and effect in relation to their behaviour. Staff focus on positive consequences and regularly use praise to encourage children to improve their behaviour. In addition, there is provision of a 'small toy' reward system. This enables staff to give an immediate reward to a child, for example, for behaving well or achieving. Children enjoy choosing a small item from the box and this reward assists in their learning about appropriate behaviour. The scheme also helps in the development of children's self-esteem and sense of achievement.

All staff are trained in the appropriate use of physical restraint and attend refresher courses at regular intervals. This strategy is only utilised when a child is behaving in a way which can cause harm to themselves or others. Staff will always use other techniques first in an attempt to diffuse a situation. The use of positive consequences appears to be working, as the rate of physical restraints has reduced dramatically over time. Staff say that sometimes only a verbal prompt is necessary

for the child to stop the undesired behaviour.

Staff are fully aware of the protocols to follow in the event of a child going missing from home. Episodes of children going missing have reduced considerably over time. When incidents occur, staff usually know where the child is and arrangements made for a prompt return.

The home takes a robust approach to the recruitment of new staff. Due to the stability of the staff team, recruitment does not occur often. However, the procedure in relation to all necessary vetting is vigorously undertaken. This helps to ensure that children are not at risk from adults who could cause them harm.

The home is a physically safe environment for children to live in. Regular health and safety checks take place, and appliances are subject to regular maintenance to ensure there are no hazards present. These measures help to ensure that children live in a home which is safe.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **outstanding**.

The Registered Manager provides excellent leadership in the home and has high standards which she successfully transmits to the staff team. Staff say the manager is inspirational and that they want to do their best for the children because of her influence.

Staff feel valued and supported and staff turnover is low, consequently children benefit from a stable and committed staff team. Professional development within the home is encouraged and there is provision for a range of appropriate training for staff. In addition, support and consultation is available from the therapeutic team attached to the home. Staff are assisted to acquire the necessary skills to be able to support the therapeutic process for the children. Regular meetings with the therapy team offers staff the opportunity to discuss strategies and any concerns they have.

Monitoring of the home is rigorous and a range of tools are utilised to highlight weaknesses and recommend improvement. The manager ensures that she addresses issues raised by the Regulation 33 and 34 reports for the benefit of the children. Consultation with children is on-going and is achieved through a variety of means. For example, there is excellent involvement by the children in young people's meetings. Discussion centres on their views on the running of the home and issues such as menu and activity choices. Children participate in their reviews and have input into their placement plans. Children have the opportunity to become involved in the organisation's children's forum and have some input into staff recruitment. The home's development plan is subject to regular review and sets out a range of realistic targets for improvement. Examples include the introduction of the education information sheet and the target of thirty minutes daily exercise for each child. This demonstrates the home's capacity to put the child at the forefront of planning.

All records in the home are up to date and stored securely. Children's files are well ordered and easy to follow to gain a picture of the child's journey and consequently their experiences. Case recordings are clear and legible which assist members of staff to effectively care for the children.

Staff benefit from high-quality supervision which supports them in their caring role. Supervision sessions take place at regular intervals; however, the records do not consistently contain the time or duration of the session. This shortfall does not pose a risk to children, but improvement in this area will support good practice.

The manager ensures that the home is subject to regular maintenance and any repairs promptly dealt with. Consequently, the home continues to provide a homely, comfortable and safe environment for children.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service and to consider how well it complies with the relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.