

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC008268
Inspection date	03/12/2013
Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	03/09/2012
--------------------------------	------------

© Crown copyright 2013

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home provides care and accommodation for up to two young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties. It is part of a large, private organisation operating a number of children's homes.

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 retains the good judgement grade given at the previous full inspection in May 2012. Young people continue to make good progress in their physical health and education, despite the enormous barriers to this posed by significant complexities in their mental health. Young people's stability is underpinned by effective, high quality support from a consistent team who have built positive relationships with them. In addition, there is highly personalised care planning and practice, which is tailored and reviewed in conjunction with all agencies working with each young person.

A good understanding and execution of safe working care practice ensures that young people, and those around them, are as safe as possible within a changing context where significant unsafe behaviour is emerging. As a result, young people confirm that unsafe situations and behaviour are well managed by staff and the boundaries and expectations of group living are followed so far as is possible.

Leadership and management arrangements are sound. The newly registered manager leads and supports the team effectively, but does not use existing recording tools to best effect in the areas of staff support, behaviour review and consultation. Whilst these shortfalls do not impair the quality of home's direct work with young people, there is little good evidence of how evaluation and review prompt the identification of issues or priorities for improvement.

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 the views of the child's family and Independent Reviewing Officer are sought regularly on the child's care, (unless in individual cases this is not appropriate) (NMS 1.4)
- ensure that records of staff support, advice and supervision are made and signed by the member of staff and supervisor, detailing the time, date and length of the supervision (NMS 19.5)
- improve the reviewing of incidents of challenging behaviour, examining trends or issues emerging from this and enabling staff to reflect and learn to inform future practice (NMS 3.21)
- improve the effectiveness of monitoring activity, including all complaints and significant incidents, so that the current quality of the home is clearly known and any issues of concern are identified and addressed. (NMS 21.1 and 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people have knowledge and understanding of their background and have made, and sustained, attachments to staff in the home over a period of years. For example, a young person showed how important a member of staff is to him through a card he made, saying, 'I am sorry for always fighting - can we start over?' Young people also retain regular contact, both face to face, and by phone with their parents, despite the challenges posed by changes in their long term care plans.

Young people are actively and positively involved in activities with peers in the community. For example, they visit a local climbing wall, have tried the golf driving range and tennis lessons, and regularly play pool and use the internet café. Whilst on holiday with staff, they were confident and able to join with a group playing football on the beach. Young people's relationships with staff and the support and supervision staff give, enable young people to maintain generally appropriate play with friends in the street, or to have school friends over for tea. This is in spite of the significant increases in staff supervision currently required for safeguarding reasons.

Young people understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. They take some responsibility to maintain their personal hygiene and regularly take the medications prescribed to them. They are eating a balanced diet and their appetite has improved recently. They are not smoking or misusing drugs or alcohol and their sexual health risks are removed because they presently have no unsupervised time away from the home. Young people receive very regular psychiatric support and benefit from regular medication reviews as well as therapy provided in association with community mental health services.

Young people are able to actively participate in day-to-day decisions about their lives

and take a part in reviewing their placement plans and weekly targets. Recent weekly written comments from young people include, 'I have got on well with all the staff this week'; 'I have been up and down'; 'I've had a really bad week and not got on with anyone'; and, 'really pleased with my week'. Young people are articulate and computer literate, using these skills to express their views, wishes and feelings on wider surveys too, such as those sent from the office of the Children's Rights Director.

The educational achievement of young people is good, given the barriers which their emotional health and behaviour difficulties pose. For example, a teacher recently commented how well a young person has done in maths, saying, 'he is making good progress in understanding 'mean, median, mode and range'. Young people attend school very regularly and routine liaison each day between the home and school ensures that behaviour issues are fully understood and responded to consistently.

Quality of care

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

Staff work proactively and positively with other agencies, including parents, therapists, social workers and police. Where young people's high level of need requires a sole placement, the service has protected this. This is intrinsic to placement stability because it ensures that young people's complex emotional health needs are addressed appropriately and sensitively. For example the family and systemic psychotherapist recently commented, 'staff contribute to our understanding of this young person in a warm and vivid way, retaining a real sense of dedication and concern that the system may not appreciate the level of support all professionals need in this complex situation.' Similarly, social workers and psychiatrists comment on high quality interagency cooperation including the regular and timely sending of reports, attendance at all multiagency meetings and the good management of young people's care. Because of this commitment and effectiveness, stability for young people with very complex needs is maintained, even during periods when problems necessitate further forensic assessment and recommendations for placement.

Staff use individualised positive behaviour strategies to support young people to manage inner conflict and develop positive relationships, irrespective of the barriers they experience. The service ensures that present high levels of adult supervision are maintained by staff who know young people well and who work in line with individual care plans. Staff are skilled in listening to young people's concerns and responding calmly to challenges they make. They involve them consistently and centrally in day-to-day decisions, helping them feel safe in a good routine, yet appropriately stimulated by activities that they enjoy. Young people respond to this well overall and enjoy the praise and reward they get when things go well. They often engage positively in looking at their records and recently wrote on their latest monthly care plan report, 'I think you (staff) have been trying hard.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people feel very safe in the home and do not go missing. This is because they can talk to staff about their thoughts and feelings, and are able to disclose things they have done. It is also because staff work very effectively with all agencies, including police, and therapeutic services who know young people well. However, young people's highly complex needs mean that they have displayed more extreme and very challenging behaviours since the last inspection. This has resulted in all contact visits with family being supervised by staff and an increased staff ratio at all times. The consultant psychiatrist describes how staff have coped very well with some extremely challenging and threatening behaviour and recognises that this behaviour is, 'more and more oppositional - more about the young person than the placement.

Risks and protective factors for individual young people are clearly identified and agreed between all agencies. All staff are trained and confident in safeguarding, first aid and behaviour management, as well as being thoroughly vetted for their suitability to work with vulnerable young people. The home environment is also kept clean and safe by two adults with one young person. Extra care is taken with sharp objects and chemicals in response to recent increases in risky behaviour. Similarly staff are highly vigilant when supervising play in the community, to ensure that bullying or targeting of younger children does not take place.

Staff and therapeutic professionals regularly discuss care plans and support one another. Staff deployment ensures a high staffing level and staff are constantly vigilant. They discuss serious and unsafe behaviour incidents and the feelings that the work gives rise to; however, the reviewing of behaviour incidents and sanctions within the home is poorly evidenced. As a result, staff and managers do not clearly identify any trends or issues to inform future practice. Nevertheless, it is recognised by the team of professionals that triggers to unsafe behaviours are rarely identifiable for this young person, and that sanctions are unlikely to prove effective. Staff therefore adopt safe, consistent, calm, often humorous or distracting techniques in their everyday practice to help young people feel safe and calm. There is minimum use of restraint and on the few occasions when it has been necessary to protect persons from serious harm, it is always followed up in discussion and reflection with the young person.

Leadership and management

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

Management arrangements have delivered good continuity of care and leadership in the home for young people. The new Registered Manager knows young people and his staff team well because he works as part of the small consistent staff team. Staff have confidence in him and he additionally benefits from being ably led by an area manager who used to be registered for this and two other small homes. Overall, the manager has a sound grasp of the systems used by the organisation and is able to provide adequate management given the limited hours available to him for

management tasks.

The manager continues the good relationships the home enjoys with the local community and neighbours. His development plans have an appropriate amount of emphasis on building maintenance and result in continuously good standards of repair and decoration in the home. The manager is also able to demonstrate the difference the home makes to young people. He requests feedback from young people, social workers and other professionals from time to time. However, the manager does not integrate feedback clearly into his monitoring and appraisal activity and has not ensured that the views of the child's family and Independent Reviewing Officer are sought regularly about young people's care and used to inform practice.

The manager's monthly monitoring activity is not effective, evaluative or specific in examining the activities of the home over the month. This means that the current quality of the home is not clearly shown in monitoring reports and any issues of concern or urgency are not clearly identified with plans to address them. Trends, patterns and areas for improvement are not identified. These shortfalls do not pose any risk to young people's welfare, but they hold back new initiatives to continuously improve the already good quality care.

The manager ensures that staff receive essential training and the support and supervision which they need. At present, there are detailed handovers and lengthy discussions between staff during the school day. In addition, monthly interagency meetings with community mental health service professionals provide additional support for staff with the particular stresses of their current work. As a result, staff remain resilient and positive about their work. However, some formal supervision sessions have recently been missed and other support and supervision sessions are not being recorded or signed by the supervisor and supervisee. This shortfall in meeting national minimum standards affects staff and managers in the event of disputes about the levels of support being provided.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.