

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC008268
Inspection date	04/05/2012
Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	16/01/2012
--------------------------------	------------

© Crown copyright 2012

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 organisation operating a number of children's homes.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service 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 very effective and personalised care to children. A small, long-standing and highly committed staff group ensure that children experience exceptional consistency and nurture. Care practice is highly individualised, so that children's emotional health and behavioural difficulties are managed very well. As a result, children make good progress across all aspects of their welfare and development. Children are enjoying and benefitting from secure relationships with staff and managers. They state that they feel very safe in the setting and are able to confidently show and express their positive feelings about the adults caring for them. All staff communicate very effectively with parents and the team of professionals around each child. As a result, children are settled and demonstrate increasingly positive and safe behaviour. The manager of the home is effective and diligent at identifying and tackling weaker areas. She has consistently high expectations of what the home can achieve and secures improvements by sharing information, securing relevant training, and regularly consulting children, staff and stakeholders. The minor weaknesses in staff practice and management identified during inspection have little impact on the overall progress of children.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- extend the work undertaken with children's education providers to maximise each

child's achievement and minimise any underachievement (NMS 8.4)

- ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and that this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for (NMS 19.6)
- ensure that records are more clearly expressed and helpful, distinguishing fact and interpretation. (NMS 22.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children are making considerable progress in their confidence and emotional resilience since being in the home. They now have settled and secure relationships with all staff and are much less anxious. They are more confident about their relationships with their parents and demonstrate an improved and more age-appropriate understanding both of their background and the effect of their behaviour upon others. They are able to sleep well and make a positive contribution to the home by participating cooperatively in the routines and activities of a healthy and active lifestyle. Similarly, they are better integrated into their community because they are enjoying very regular contact with parents again, including attendance at church, youth club and social activities with them.

Children are able to actively participate in day-to-day decisions about their lives. For example, they are becoming more involved in mealtime routines and menu planning. They now understand the importance of regularly taking their medication, the effects of medication upon their appetites, and what constitutes a healthy diet. As a result, they are growing, gaining weight and are eating the same meals as their peers at school. Equally, children are able to actively participate in more complex decisions about their lives too. For example, they discuss and write their views about their care and what they want to happen in the future as part of the manager's monthly consultation and monitoring system. Children also show more understanding of the material and emotional benefits to them of reducing their unsafe behaviours. They appreciate their move to a larger bedroom and the new furnishings and possessions they have chosen as rewards. They are also able to describe their own progress with behaviour, for example, saying, 'I had more contact with my family and have gained trust with my staff and family'.

Children are making very good progress with their education. They are now attending school regularly and full time, following a significant period without any school attendance. They are gaining awards for much improved behaviour in school, for example by taking responsibility for their actions and reducing their use of bad language. Children have achieved particularly well in their reading and oral contributions in class. They have made reasonable progress in their maths and science too. Overall, children have made considerable progress from their starting points at the time of placement.

Quality of care

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

Children enjoy very positive and constructive relationships with staff in the home. Children say on their recent monthly feedback forms that 'all staff talk to me and help me with my problems'. Children know that they are at the centre of each staff member's practice and that they have special one-to-one times with each one of them. Staff consistently use routines, boundaries and positive strategies of inclusion and distraction to support children in overcoming their anxieties. This is proving very effective. For example, bedtime stories, preparing food together, listening to music in the car, deciding how to arrange the new bedroom, or advising on deep breathing, are all helping children to make progress. However, staff records lack sufficient factual detail and staff interpretation of what work they are doing and how children are responding. This reduces the usefulness of reading records both to staff and children. The shortfall is small and does not appear to hold back staff in providing consistency of care. Nevertheless, staff work alone on shift at times and require the clearest of records if they are to continue best and most effective care practice.

Staff are proactive and consistent in supporting the educational achievement of children. They engage daily with teachers at school, receiving feedback mainly about behaviour and relationships, so that there is continuity in behaviour management. Staff also read regular school reports about children's academic progress, so that they are aware of children's strengths and weaknesses. Staff show particular initiative to help children pursue short courses in the home and take simple tests of their new knowledge about matters such as food hygiene and drugs awareness. Children benefit both from new and relevant knowledge and from the time they spend extending their concentration, reading, listening and writing skills. However, staff have not always identified that some children would benefit from extra educational input. They have missed an opportunity to find creative and engaging ways to help children close the gap in areas such as handwriting, where a potential barrier to their continuing progress is noted by teachers. The impact of the shortfall is somewhat minimised by the many opportunities that children have to write down their views, wishes and feelings.

The home provides a very healthy environment. Robust cleaning, shopping, mealtime and bedtime routines are employed which are safe and include children well. These routines cater for each child's individual needs and promote their learning about the importance of healthy lifestyles. Staff are also diligent in organising medication routines and children's attendance at all therapeutic appointments. Staff are well informed about the effects of different medications and teach children appropriately about the importance of taking medications as prescribed. Staff are also sensitive to children's emotions surrounding their therapy. Staff provide appropriate emotional support before and after therapy, as well as ensuring that they are well briefed by relevant therapists themselves. Good outcomes result from staff's very positive contribution to each child's health plan. In particular, children's complex emotional and psychological health needs are being met and they are able to say, 'I like it here and they are looking after me well'.

The views and wishes of children influence the running of the home and they feel confident to express their feelings to all staff. This includes the deputy manager, with whom children have a monthly one-to-one meeting, looking at their progress in all areas. There are also very good partnerships with others involved with the child. For example, children are well supported in review meetings and independent reviewing officers comment on both the appropriateness of placements and staff ability to meet children's needs. Staff ensure too that parents are significantly involved with shaping care plans and daily routines as well as contact arrangements while their children are in the home. This is particularly important for some children in relation to their religious and faith needs, ensuring for example, that evening prayer routines and media use is consistent with family beliefs. As a result of staff's attention and sensitivity to these areas, children, parents and professionals are confident that there is consistent, effective communication which places children's welfare at the centre of the home's work.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children say, 'I feel quite safe, well very safe actually'. This constitutes considerable progress for children and indicates a significant reduction in their anxiety. For example, children are getting to sleep and staying asleep regularly now because they feel safe with waking night staff whom they know. Anxieties about the house being broken into or being able to get to the downstairs bathroom safely are much reduced because children trust staff to keep them safe. Similarly, children are now able to behave safely in public and where there is traffic around. They can take direction from staff and calm themselves by spending quality time alongside staff, sometimes undertaking relevant learning about safety and behaviour issues, such as health and safety, fire awareness, self-harm and equality and diversity. The consistency of the small staff team and the number of years' experience they have in the home makes a significant contribution to children's feelings of safety and security.

Children have confidence in all the staff, particularly their key worker, and have not made any complaints. They now rarely lash out at others or damage property. Restraint has never been used with the children in placement because staff are skilled and able to use positive measures effectively. In addition, staff employ safe care practices and are suitably trained about what to do if there are any complaints, allegations, or concerns that children might be being abused. The home environment is physically safe and appropriately secure with hazardous items and risks managed in such a way that there is no institutional feel.

Positive behaviour is promoted very well, using strategies such as star charts, with achievable daily and weekly targets, devised by children and staff together. These star charts address behaviour issues in all parts of children's lives, including at school, out in the community and on contact visits. This enables children to learn the importance of positive behaviour wherever they are. Connected with gaining full stars are various agreed rewards, for example, a fish tank, a football team bed headboard and moving into the larger bedroom. As a result, children feel empowered

to take control of their behaviour and can see that adults are delighted when they are able to reward them. Children comment, 'I have been good for 15 days and I've got into my new bedroom as well! Star charts help me a lot and help me remember my temper'. Children's behaviour towards their peers is improving significantly and their bullying behaviour is much reduced. This is because staff support children to think about the impact of their actions on their peers and parents. They help children to feel the positive effect of apologising and making amends. As a result, children are now able to describe their peers in school as friends and have been able to enjoy giving small gifts to them.

Leadership and management

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

Children benefit from living in a home which is very effectively and efficiently managed by a long-standing manager. The manager can demonstrate clearly the significant and positive progress that children are making and how the home's performance has enabled this progress to happen. She strives to be up to date with research and utilises all the local helping organisations which can provide expertise and assistance to children and staff. The manager is also benefiting at present from short-term operational input from another manager in the organisation who is taking a lead in reviewing the quality of care and conducting staff support. It is intended that these 'fresh eyes' will have a motivational effect on all staff to improve their knowledge, confidence and ideas about identifying and delivering the best quality care. Time has already been spent focusing on gaining a better understanding of the content and focus of the national minimum standards and inspection evaluation schedule. This extra input demonstrates the manager's continuous commitment to making improvements and aims to make what is already a good quality service, even better for children.

The internal monitoring of the home is to a very good standard and has been improved further to take account of previous inspection recommendations. The structure of the home's development plan has recently been rewritten by the manager to better prompt the identification and prioritisation of change and improvements. For example, the plan now shows any areas of development arising from the monthly feedback gained from children, parents or professional partners. The manager ensures that her regular monitoring includes careful analysis of children's behaviour and routines, using both records and frequent discussion with all members of staff. As a result, staff practice is consistently well supported and messages are clearly and promptly shared with the whole team. This ensures that the focus remains clearly on the children in placement and that the potential impact of any new placements is known, particularly when there are vacancies in the service. Reports from the Regulation 33 visitor provide useful feedback from children, stakeholders and staff, but rarely identify or suggest improvements for systems, records, or quality of care. This reduces the usefulness of these reports to managers as a tool for assisting improvements. Nevertheless, the reports still provide an important vehicle to ensure that children's views are separately and regularly canvassed.

Managers ensure that the home is maintained to a high standard overall, including securing resources for regular decoration and replacement of flooring. The staff team work effectively together with well-organised cleaning and safety checks being undertaken and logged. These aspects significantly enhance children's feelings of safety and well-being in the home. All staff have worked over ten years in the home and continue to demonstrate great commitment to the children in their care. They state that they are extremely well supported by the manager and that they continue to receive update training. This training includes all their core responsibilities, such as behaviour management, child protection, safety and first aid training. In addition, the manager organises training sessions with therapists who are working with individual children in the home. This enables staff to develop clear insights into children's specific difficulties; manage their own responses to the work better; and adopt strategies with children which help them progress. Staff are also encouraged and supported to overcome personal barriers to their competence, for example, by receiving help to learn necessary literacy and computer skills for effective recording. The manager also compensates well for the difficulties which some staff experience in these areas and adopts a 'hands-on' approach where regular case discussion with staff and assistance with writing children's progress reports is given. However, a small weakness is found in the timeliness and use of annual appraisals. These do not always take place on time and are not fully used to help staff increase their skills and performance still more to produce outstanding quality of care 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.