

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC008271
Inspection date	21/11/2012
Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	22/02/2012
--------------------------------	------------

© 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 for up to two young people who have experienced emotional and behavioural difficulties. A private company owns and operates the setting.

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**.

Overall, young people make good progress in relation to their starting points across all aspects of their welfare and development. This is underpinned by effective and high quality support from staff. Care planning and practice are highly personalised to meet the individual needs of each young person. In particular, all young people benefit from excellent opportunities to maintain contact with their families and people who are important to them. They also benefit from very good emotional support. They therefore develop emotional resilience and genuine understanding of their background. As a result, many young people return successfully to their families and speak very positively about their progress in the home and the support of staff.

Staff in the home demonstrate a good understanding of safe working practice. This is confirmed by young people who say that they feel safe and that staff manage unsafe situations and behaviour well. Boundaries and expectations about group living are generally followed well and there is a consistently positive atmosphere maintained between staff and young people in the home. However, staff do not make the best use of individual risk assessments or records about missing episodes to support their practice. Nevertheless, young people are well safeguarded.

Leadership and management arrangements are strong. The Registered Manager is actively involved in the daily life of the home and matters of significance to young people and staff. Monitoring arrangements work well and staff feel very well supported in their work. New staff have been suitably vetted and young people have been included in the recruitment process. Staff are being well supported and trained for their work and young people are responding well to them. However, the home

itself does not have a record of all the recruitment and vetting checks which have been carried out on new and existing members of staff. In addition, young people's views have not been taken into account during the staff's annual appraisal process. There is no adverse impact on young people resulting from any of the shortfalls identified.

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 home has evidence of all the recruitment and vetting checks which have been carried out on those working in the home. This applies to evidence of when references were completed and who verified them. It also applies to evidence of the level of the CRB check, who initiated the CRB check and the outcome of it, including whether the individual is barred (NMS 16.3 and 16.4)
- consider how to take the views of young people into account during the annual performance and appraisal process for all staff working in the home (NMS 19.6)
- implement a more proportionate approach to risk assessment. This pertains to young people's individual risk assessments which are not adjusted proportionately to take account of young people's actual activity, behaviour and progress over time in the home (NMS 4.5)
- ensure that written records kept by the home when young people go missing detail what action is to be taken in the light of the event and the reasons given by the young people about the episode. (NMS 5.10)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people make good progress in developing a positive self-view. This has enabled them to make and maintain attachments to peers, staff and relatives. They benefit from independent advocacy and psychological support which also helps them to understand their background and develop a positive sense of self. They enjoy very regular contact with siblings, friends from school, parents and other relatives because visitors are made welcome and staff create a positive, conducive atmosphere. One young person who is moving towards a programme of overnight stays back home said, 'I feel like happier because now I can be good and now I have got more respect for people and that - yeah - I can keep it up.' Similarly, young people who have previously been in placement here have developed emotional resilience and improved family relationships which have enabled them to successfully return home about five months ago.

Young people understand the importance of healthy lifestyles and take increasing responsibility for their own health. They adopt good daily routines, sleeping and eating well in the home. One young person says she has learnt to make a lasagne from scratch since being here, while another has recently learnt how to fillet and cook fresh fish. Young people have said about medical appointments, 'Staff help with all the medical support and I do not feel embarrassed to go with them.' For example, staff support gives young people the necessary courage to attend for sexual health screening and advice if they have had unprotected sex. Young people also take their own medication if they are risk assessed as safe to do so. Young people have benefitted from general health screening to identify the extent of hormonal or allergic symptoms and have received regular doctor, dentist and optician checks and treatment. Young people have been encouraged to give up smoking, although this was not sustained for long. Young people have also positively engaged with drug and alcohol support workers. As a result, young people's general health is good and improving.

The educational achievement of young people is good overall and exceptional in some instances. Young people are now attending full time mainstream school every day. They are behaving and progressing very well for the first time in recent years. Others have benefitted from many opportunities to engage in varied college courses of their choosing as well as receiving good support from staff to prepare for interviews and seek work. One young person said, 'They have given me enough help to find a job' and another said, 'These have helped me.' However, some young people have not been able to commit to college, sometimes because of challenges to undertake group activities which they lack the confidence to do. Similarly, some young people have not progressed significantly with their independence preparation because they have continued to misuse money designated for food shopping and have gone missing with it. Despite this, all young people enjoy spending time with one another and with staff and have the maturity to appreciate the support of staff. Young people have enjoyed two recent holidays with staff and frequently go out together to the cinema, shopping or for meals out.

Quality of care

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

Young people have very positive and constructive relationships with staff and one another. They behave appropriately and engage well in the life of the home. They have a good understanding of their placement plan and engage both in their records and in collecting memorabilia of their time in the placement. This is the direct result of staff's genuine and consistent concern with their welfare. All staff work effectively and seamlessly as a team so that young people know and trust all those working with them. Young people said, 'I am very happy with my placement plan and my keyworker is fantastic.' Other young people feel the concern and care of staff as something of a pressure, saying staff, 'Spend too much time talking to me - are too much on my case.' However, young people all clearly know that staff are always demonstrating their care and concern. Parents too are confident in the quality of care saying that they can talk to staff and are made welcome in the home. Parents

comment that their children have done very well. One parent said, 'Staff work really well: they have little chats in a positive way. They take opportunities when shopping to really talk properly and my child really listens.'

Staff use individualised positive behaviour strategies to support each young person to develop skills in managing conflict and developing relationships. They develop achievable weekly targets with young people and adapt their personal styles to each young person. Rewards in money, attention and treats are many and varied according to each young person's choices. This enables young people to regain control of their behaviour and see their long term plans coming to fruition. It also results in young people knowing that their wishes and feelings are central to the running of the home and that they can really have a say about their leisure activities, their food, and even new staff who come to work here with them. Staff work very effectively alongside advocates and helping agencies to ensure that young people's voices are always heard and that they receive the specialised help that they need in an appropriate way. This includes the use of advocates to assist with securing family contact and engaging specialist youth counselling services to provide preventive and restorative work with young people at risk of drug and alcohol misuse, offending behaviour or sexual exploitation. Staff's effective and regular liaison with social workers ensures that essential services are obtained for young people, including medicals and psychological support, for example, to address anger issues.

Young people know how to make a complaint but have not wanted to do so. They say, 'Staff do a good job at making things happen, especially family contact, and everyone gets on dead well together.' Staff ensure that a truly homely, healthy environment is provided where adults and young people spend large amounts of quality time together doing purposeful and enjoyable activities. Staff encourage young people to help them grow simple fruit and vegetables in the back garden. Young people have chosen the décor and colours of their rooms and their photos are displayed around the home. They are involved in the cooking, cleaning and laundry as appropriate to their ages and their friends are made welcome if they visit. Young people's individuality is encouraged to shine through both in daily living and in care planning. Their music and their families are clearly central to their identity. As a result of staff's high quality care, young people value their time here and make good progress within a context of planning to successfully return home or move to independence. One member of staff summed up her role saying young people, 'know I care and want to keep them safe. They know I am trying to prepare them for the outside world, to know early life skills. I am nurturing but I want them to engage and learn to be independent as well.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report that they feel safe in the home and outside it. They can confide in staff if they feel unsafe and are confident that all staff will help and support them. Young people said, 'They keep me safe - they don't let me go out.' This is because staff work very proactively and positively to dissuade young people from choosing to

go into risky situations. Staff help young people appreciate the risks, negotiate safer alternative activities, and facilitate and expect them to keep in touch and respond to boundaries. In this way staff minimise the frequency with which young people go missing. Staff safeguarding practice has been extremely successful with respect to young people who have not gone missing or physically attacked anyone since being in placement. Young people say, 'If I'm upset they talk to me and help me. I don't get angry as much and if I am angry I try and control it more.' This is considerable progress and shows the effectiveness of staff practice combined with specialist support and advice to deal with anger and conflict. Equally, staff take robust action to search for young people, liaise with parents and friends, and cooperate fully with police investigations into persons suspected of exploiting young people. Staff action therefore ensures that young people who do go missing are protected as far as possible and responded to positively upon their return. As a result, young people disclose details of what has happened to them and receive good health and emotional support afterwards. However, the records made when young people go missing do not outline clearly the action to be taken to prevent another occurrence in the light of what is known about what happened. This means that staff cannot refer to written guidance about the up to date plans to minimise further episodes of going missing. This has resulted in one instance where staff appeared to take a young person back to the place they went missing from on the very next day. In the event, staff utilised full knowledge of the first event and made a sound practice decision because the location was actually irrelevant to that episode. Nevertheless, this is not made clear in the records and the information is not therefore available for staff and managers to use or monitor and review when they are considering patterns and trends to inform their practice.

Young people generally respond well to staff because staff are trained, competent and skilled in positive behaviour management and conflict resolution. Restraint does not occur in the home at all. Instead, staff take appropriate action which is consistent yet recognises each young person's particular vulnerabilities and level of understanding. Phones and cash in hand are sometimes withdrawn on safeguarding grounds, but young people can earn trust and do have these things when safeguarding risks are lowered. Care plans and risk assessments clearly identify each young person's individual risks and how they should be responded to. For example, there are clear individualised risk assessments covering absconding, allegations, bullying, cyber-bullying, drug/alcohol use and use of electric hair straighteners. As a result, staff know what to do to minimise risks of abusive, bullying or self-harming behaviour and know how to deal with risky behaviours if they occur. Managers also monitor and review young people's risk assessments on a regular basis. However, staff and managers do not adjust these in the light of young people's escalating or decreasing behaviours. As a result, some young people's risks are being treated as much higher than they currently are. This means that they lack some relevance as a working tool for staff. The impact of this on young people is small because in practice, young people do benefit from choices, freedoms and opportunities to take reasonable risks where their improved behaviour justifies this. Some new risk assessments supersede previous ones, for example, one young person's risk assessment for home contact arrangements. The new risk assessment shows that the contact is no longer supervised and can start to include overnight stays with

details of how staff should manage this.

Leadership and management

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

Young people benefit from a Registered Manager who is long serving, knowledgeable and highly committed to securing positive outcomes for them. She describes herself as 'trying everything known to man' in an effort to keep young people safe from harm and exploitation. This includes effective work with police and numerous local specialist services for young people as well as direct work and engagement with young people. The manager is very available to staff and highly effective in modelling good practice when she works alongside staff. This enables all staff to work confidently and effectively with young people to secure consistently good outcomes for them. There is documentary and anecdotal evidence that good or outstanding outcomes have been achieved and maintained over time in this home, not least by continuing positive contact with young people who have returned to live with their families.

Staff receive regular supervision and appraisal which is of good quality. All staff say they feel well supported. They have good opportunities to progress professionally within the organisation and are promptly given good induction and training. Staff also benefit from occasional multi-agency localised training in areas of relevance to young people's current needs, for example, training about sexual exploitation. As a result, young people are well safeguarded by staff who often stay with the organisation for many years. However, evidence of staff recruitment and vetting is not available in full in the home. At present there are only some details about staff's criminal records bureau checks sited in the home's records. This makes it difficult to verify the suitability of staff should this be in question. Nevertheless, there is no adverse impact on young people because full evidence of recruitment and vetting checks has been retained in the organisation office, including evidence of how recruitment decisions have been made in the light of any concerns arising from checks undertaken.

The manager undertakes robust monitoring of the setting and is open to ideas and information from a variety of sources to ensure that good practice is maintained. She has a particularly good knowledge of, and partnership with, local providers of young people's health and wellbeing services as well as police and youth offending services. In addition, the home enjoys good relationships with neighbours because young people's behaviour in and around the home is consistently good. Young people's health and wellbeing are enhanced by this knowledge and these relationships.

The manager regularly seeks the views of young people, parents and stakeholders about the quality of care in the home and uses this information to develop the home and boost staff morale. For example, one social worker described the home as 'A quality residential provision which has the child at the centre of all planning.' Another social worker said their young person, 'Appears to be settled in placement and comfortable in the environment - staff regularly update the office and the team.'

Similarly, young people's views were taken into good account during recent recruitment of new staff. As a result, young people are responding well to new staff whom they helped to choose. Young people also readily air their views about staff in conversation and through periodic questionnaires. However, managers do not yet make use of young people's views to inform the annual performance and appraisal process for existing staff. This is a missed opportunity to include young people even more in their home and its running and for staff to reflect honestly on young people's views about them.

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.