

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC008490
Inspection date	19/06/2012
Inspector	Valerie Shephard
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	13/01/2012
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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**.

Children make good progress in all aspects of their development in relation to their starting points.

Children are reported to be healthy and eating a wider range of food. School attendance is excellent; the provision of a school within the organisation ensures that all children are able to engage in education from the outset. Children have the opportunity to become involved in a range of activities which helps in the development of self-confidence and sociability. Staff support children's contact arrangements with their families, which enables children to maintain significant attachments.

The home provides a safe and nurturing environment with the provision of therapy. Children say they feel safe. The excellent relationships which exist between the children and staff serve to enhance the therapeutic process.

Care planning is individualised and involves regular consultation with children. Children respond well to positive behaviour management strategies and incidents of missing from home and physical interventions have decreased over time.

In the absence of the Registered Manager, the assistant manager has demonstrated strong leadership and is effectively running the home with minimal disruption for the children. One area for improvement is the resource room which is in need of decoration and refurbishment.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure the home provides a comfortable and homely environment and is well maintained and decorated particularly in relation to the outside resource room. (NMS 10.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children make good progress in all areas of their development due to the excellent care they receive from the staff team. The home provides a therapeutic environment which assists young people to learn to trust adults and start to develop attachments. Children attend school regularly and are achieving educational and behavioural targets. This is in sharp contrast to how the children were at the start of their placement.

Children engage in a wide range of activities in the community. There is a focus on physical activities such as swimming, football, karate, horse riding and dog walking. One child has been nominated to act as home representative on the organisation's young people's forum. There are also opportunities for children to be involved in interviewing new staff for the home. These initiatives engage children in the running of the home and assist with the development of their social skills and feelings of self-worth.

Risk taking behaviour, particular in relation to children going missing from home, has reduced over time. Staff work with the children to help them understand the possible dangers of going missing and this intervention is resulting in positive outcomes. When these incidents occur they are of short duration, and usually involve the child returning to the home of their own volition. The newly introduced My Blue Book provides visual feedback to children on their progress, particularly in relation to their behaviour. This assists in the development of their confidence and self-esteem.

Children benefit from having contact with their families, and staff prepare and support them to maintain this where appropriate. Preserving contact assists children with their identity and consequently the development of a positive self-view.

Staff encourage children to learn self-care skills suitable to their age and stage of development. There is a focus on areas such as personal hygiene and basic money management. One child is on the organisation's own independence programme, where focus is on developing a range of independence skills. These measures serve to give children confidence in their own abilities and valuable skills for the future.

Quality of care

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

The quality of the care in the home is outstanding. Relationships between children and staff are excellent and this serves to aid the development of trust and consequently healthy attachments. Staff are trained in techniques which complement the therapeutic process, such as use of specific words and sensitive and appropriate touching. Children are able to approach staff and ask for a hug, and staff respond positively. Children's well-being is at the centre of practice, regardless of the challenges they pose.

Staff support children to engage in their education and effective relationships exist between home and school. The therapy team attached to the home works well with schools to help them acquire the necessary skills to manage the children in the classroom. This working arrangement provides a holistic approach to the daily care of the children. One social worker said 'This is the best working relationship between a children's home and a school that I have seen.' Children enjoy a healthy environment with the provision of good food and plenty of outdoor exercise. Staff assist children to plan their weekly menus and make healthy choices. Fruit is available in the home and children are encouraged to choose fruit as a snack between meals.

Children are cared for in accordance with their care plans, and staff address their individual diverse needs. An example of this is where children have specific needs in relation to their religion. Staff will seek an appropriate place of worship and will support them to attend. The home has an arrangement with a hairdresser who offers specific services to some children such as hair braiding.

The home is located in a pleasant residential area and is well maintained and designed. The living environment is comfortable and the children have had an input into the décor and furnishings, which includes their own rooms. The only shortfall relates to the outside resource room. This is in need of some refurbishment to improve its appearance and make it a more pleasant place for children to enjoy.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The home provides a safe and nurturing environment and children say they feel safe. Children know how to complain and staff respond appropriately when complaints are made. These actions reassure children that staff listen to them and take their complaints seriously.

The staff know the children really well and are aware of factors which may trigger children going missing. The home has established good relationships with the police and they have a presence in the home. They regularly visit to meet with and speak to the children about risk taking behaviour. If an incident occurs, staff usually know

where the child is and in most cases they return home within minutes. Staff comply with established procedures which include welcoming the child home and praising them for their return. These measures appear to be working, as the incidents of children missing from home have reduced over time.

Behaviour management plans are in place for each child. These are subject to review with the therapeutic team to ensure they are appropriate and likely to lead to positive outcomes. The implementation of consequences assists children to understand cause and effect in relation to their behaviour. There is an emphasis on positive consequences and staff regularly use praise to encourage children to improve their behaviour. In addition a reward system is in place which encourages children to engage in acceptable behaviour. Children are able to earn reward money to spend as they wish.

Staff are trained in the use of physical restraint and it has been necessary to utilise this in relation to the children in the home. However, the number of interventions and the duration of these, have reduced over time. Staff say that often only minimal touch is needed to prompt the child to desist the undesired behaviour.

The home has a robust recruitment procedure with all necessary vetting processes undertaken. This helps to ensure that children are not at risk from adults who could cause them harm.

The home is physically safe and suitable for children to live in. Electronic alarms are attached to bedroom doors to enable staff to hear children if they leave their rooms in the night. The use of this security measure does not create an institutional feel. The home's electric and gas appliances are subject to regular checks and there are no hazards apparent. These measures help to ensure that the children's living environment is safe.

Leadership and management

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

The Registered Manager is temporarily absent from the home. The assistant manager is deputising in the manager's absence, and is running the home effectively and efficiently. Staff changes have been necessary to ensure staffing levels are sufficient to care for the children properly. The impact of the change of staff has been managed as well as possible, to ensure there is minimal disruption for the children.

Rigorous monitoring of the quality of care is apparent under Regulation 33 and Regulation 34 reporting. These monitoring tools are thorough and clearly highlight weaknesses and recommend improvements. There is good monitoring of the progress children make and this informs the future development of the home. Consultation with children takes place through a variety of means. Children engage in regular house meetings and are involved with the running of the home. Children complete questionnaires; for example to seek their views about therapy. Information

from consultation helps to shape further development of the home for the benefit of the children.

The home's development plan is subject to regular review and sets out a range of realistic targets for improvement. One example is the introduction of the new monitoring tool for incidents of missing from home and physical restraint. These measures ensure that the home continues to review its effectiveness in relation to the care provided to children.

Most of the staff have an appropriate child care qualification and the remainder are working towards this. The home provides a full range of core training in subjects such as child protection, safeguarding and physical restraint techniques. Staff also undertake training in therapeutic techniques to enable them to provide care in a way that compliments the therapeutic process. These training opportunities ensure that staff are equipped with the necessary skills to effectively care for children and meet their individual needs.

Staff supervision takes place monthly and is of good quality. In addition the staff team has a monthly meeting with the therapists for development and consultation. This helps staff to manage the feelings which arise as a result of working with children who are displaying difficult behaviour. By supporting them to contain their own responses, staff are able to continue to offer excellent care to children.

The home's Statement of Purpose is thorough and detailed and fulfils statutory guidance. The objectives of the home are clearly set out, including the therapeutic provision. The children's guide is comprehensive and child friendly. Staff discuss this with children prior to their admission, and this is explained more fully on arrival. Consequently children are clear about the aims and objectives of the home from the outset.

Records in the home are stored securely in locked cabinets. Children's files are easy to read and provide information necessary to enable staff to care effectively for them. The recent introduction of 'My Blue Book' tracks improvements in behaviour. This assists children to see a visual representation of the improvements they have made.

Maintenance of the home is high priority and any repairs promptly dealt with. This ensures that the home continues to offer a comfortable, homely and safe environment for children.

The manager has addressed the one recommendation made at the previous inspection.

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.