

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC023741
Inspector	David Putnam
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited
Registered person address	Cheesemans Farmhouse Alland Grange Lane, Manston Ramsgate Kent CT12 5BZ
Responsible individual	Leslie Peter Davenport
Registered manager	Kevin Patrick Flynn
Date of last inspection	25/09/2014

Inspection date	26/02/2015
------------------------	------------

Previous inspection	declined in effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for children and young people	good
Quality of care	good
Keeping children and young people safe	good
Leadership and management	good

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
-------------------	-------------

Children and young people see this as their home. They are helped to settle quickly so that they feel comfortable and safe. As a result, when their starting points are considered children and young people make significant progress in many aspects of their lives. Attendance and engagement with their education improves notably. They become healthier as a result of improved diets, activity and exercise. They develop through play and exploration and make positive friendships in the process. They take increased responsibility for their actions and reduce negative behaviours over time, acknowledging when they have been in the wrong. They keep themselves safe by not going missing or absenting themselves.

Planning for the delivery of care is thorough and demonstrates positive collaboration with placing authorities. Effective working relationships with local safeguarding agencies enhance the promotion of welfare and the ability to deliver safe care. The views of children and young people are valued, respected and acted upon to influence change for the better.

Strong leadership is provided by an experienced and enthusiastic Registered Manager who models a passion to deliver a high quality service. A small but consistent team of staff offers close and caring relationships which children and young people respond to positively. The quality of care provided prompted one

social worker to write to the Registered Manager to express their thanks. After setting the context of the particular child's presentation upon placement they wrote, 'I am thrilled to see how [he] has come on leaps and bounds in your care over such a short period of time'.

Two recommendations are made. To improve further, the service needs to ensure that there is no delay in ensuring that all staff either have or complete the recognised qualification stipulated in national minimum standards. Steps also need to be taken to ensure that the entire home is decorated to the same standard.

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is owned by a private organisation. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for a maximum of three children, who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Children living in the home are able to access education through separately registered provision which is managed by the same organisation. Therapy or counselling is also available to children if this is appropriate.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
25/09/2014	Interim	declined in effectiveness
19/02/2014	Interim	satisfactory progress
12/11/2013	Full	outstanding
08/02/2013	Interim	good progress

What does the children's home need to do to improve further?

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the home provides a comfortable and homely environment and is well maintained and decorated (NMS 10.3)
- ensure that all existing care staff have attained a minimum level 3 qualification. All new staff are to hold the level 3 qualification which must include mandatory social care units; or be working towards it within 6 months of confirmation of employment. (NMS 18.5)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Children and young people grow and develop as individuals as a direct result of living in this home. They make genuine progress across a range of areas. Their development is both physical and emotional. Changes observed over relatively short periods of time cause placing social workers to make comments such as, 'He is like a different child' and 'He has made tremendous progress'.

Diets change through the provision of a healthy and varied menu. As a result, children and young people are supported to move on from eating extremely limited types of food. They begin to enjoy and choose to eat fresh fruit and vegetables that they say, 'will make me strong and give me muscles'. Core health needs are met through registration with primary health services. Comprehensive health care plans target areas that incorporate improvements in both physical and emotional and health. The considered way in which these are produced helps staff to identify and support children to reach milestones in normal child development.

A wide range of activities provide children and young people with extensive opportunities to have new experiences or maintain hobbies and interests. Existing skills and talents are encouraged and built upon. For example, older young people maintain their passion for sport by playing for local football teams. They compete in age appropriate leagues set up through the Football Association. As a result they develop positive relationships in their community, outside the environment of their home and school. They demonstrate genuine commitment to their training in addition to turning out to play each week. Younger children enjoy and benefit from new, age appropriate experiences that allow them to explore the area where they live. Staff from placing authorities highlight that activities such as playing on and exploring the nearby beach are, 'ordinary family activities that are not all about money'. At the same time children are excited by opportunities to visit London, stay in a hotel and attend a local skate park and climbing centre. Their self-esteem and confidence blossom through discovering abilities they previously did not know they had.

All children and young people attend school in line with their personal education plans. Attendance represents significant progress for some who previously struggled to engage in their learning or to cope in social situations with other pupils. They express an eagerness to learn and proudly wear their school uniforms. Demonstrable progress in attainment is reflected in reports from the children and young people's schools. Placing social workers use words such as, 'unbelievable' to describe the progress children and young people make in their education. For example, those who would frequently be excluded as a result of conflicts with other students now attend full time and develop friendships with their peers.

All children and young people currently attend provision delivered by the parent

organisation. These schools are separately registered with the Department for Education and were judged to be good at their most recent inspections. When appropriate, plans are put in place to transfer children and young people to mainstream provision. This enables them to receive an education that matches their individual needs. Furthermore, it provides children and young people with the opportunity to build relationships with contemporaries in the community where they live.

The contact children and young people have with their families is consistently seen as important. They benefit extensively from the commitment of the staff team who make an excellent contribution to work with placing authorities to progress individual care plans. Placing authorities confirm that children and young people are supported to stay in touch with important people in their lives. At times this includes extensive travel. At other times the organisation provides the opportunity and pays for parents to stay overnight at a hotel near to the children's home, enhancing the contact experience for all involved.

Quality of care

good

Children and young people build strong and beneficial relationships with staff. The model of care means that only a limited number of staff work in the home. This consistency and continuity helps children and young people feel comfortable and confident with the adults who look after them. Professionals from placing authorities say that staff are, 'skilled in helping [children and young people] move forward'. They emphasise the benefits to specific children of clear and consistent routines and boundaries. This helps children and young people to develop a sense of security that allows them to recognise that staff care for them and care about them. Consequently, positive attachments are formed that result in improved outcomes for children and young people. An external professional identified that for one child, 'trust in adults has increased'. This has the potential to improve future care planning options.

Children and young people are confident in expressing their views and opinions about a range of issues. The openness of staff and managers helps them to understand that their views are valued and respected. For example, young people are supported to develop their skills of negotiation through discussions with staff that invariably lead to mutual agreements. Children and young people are consistently asked their views about a range of day-to-day events. As a result they are comfortable and confident to approach staff to express what they want and need. The complaints process is known about and understood by all who live in the home currently. This has been used effectively in the past, but more recently children and young people approach managers and staff directly, in the knowledge that matters they share will be dealt with promptly and effectively.

Children and young people are encouraged to personalise their own bedrooms and

are consulted on decoration of communal areas. On the whole the décor in the home is of a high standard. However, the inspection found that certain areas, such as the children's bathroom and the basement kitchen and playroom were looking tired and in need of refurbishment.

Individual placement plans are produced to an excellent standard. The uniqueness of each child or young person is carefully communicated through these documents. As a result their personal needs are recognised by those responsible for their care. A matrix of other documents such as 24 hour management plans, behaviour strategies and personalised risk assessments all enhance the understanding of staff. This leads to a consistency and continuity of approach towards each child, with a clear focus on meeting the care plans of placing authorities. The quality of care provided enables children and young people to make positive changes that improve their future chances. Children and young people begin to take responsibility for their actions. Difficult and challenging behaviours demonstrably reduce, leading to increased opportunities that are willingly taken. For example, those who previously refused to attend school or were excluded now express an eagerness to attend and positively engage with their learning.

Managers and staff establish and maintain effective working relationships with external agencies. They advocate strongly for the children and young people in their care. For example, challenges to education are recognised and met through positive and effective communication between staff in the home and the organisation's schools. Professionals from placing authorities openly express their belief that children and young people receive a good service that meets their needs. They describe the quality of communication from managers and staff as good and say that they like working with them.

Services provided by the organisation ensure that matters relating to physical and emotional health are identified and addressed when necessary. These augment the provision of primary health services. Within the home, safe processes for dealing with medication are consistently adhered to by competent staff.

Keeping children and young people safe good

Children and young people say that they feel safe in their home. Their views are demonstrated through their demeanour and the relationships observed between each other and with staff. Some say that they do not like it when others become angry. They recognise and are clear that this anger is not aimed at them personally. While they do not feel unsafe or at risk, they are clear that it upsets them. Staff demonstrate awareness of these views and are pro-active in taking steps to minimise potential impact. Children and young people are clear that they are able to speak to managers or staff if they are worried. Regular visits from an independent visitor also provide the opportunity to express concerns if the need arises.

Leaders and managers maintain a close working relationship with local police to help safeguard children and young people. None of the children or young people currently living in the home has ever gone missing. However, information about each of them is pro-actively shared with the police to ensure their vulnerability is understood should this ever happen. In return, intelligence obtained from the police has been used effectively to inform considerations by the provider as to the suitability of the home's location. Similarly, positive relationships exist with local safeguarding services, including the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Close liaison with the LADO ensures that any allegations of safeguarding concern relating to staff are promptly and sensitively addressed. Even when allegations are unfounded appropriate action is taken to ensure that children and young people feel protected and the adult involved is supported.

As an accredited trainer in the de-escalation and restraint techniques used within the home, the Registered Manager maintains rigorous oversight of restraint practice. He monitors records and practice thoroughly. This leads to a significant decrease in the frequency of restraints for some children, but a steady reduction over time for all. Comprehensive recording of restraints confirm that this measure of control is only ever used as a last resort, in line with conditions stipulated in the Children's Homes Regulations. Sanctions are rarely imposed, only three have been made since the last inspection. Children and young people acknowledge that they see these as fair and appropriate. They are individually considered to promote improved behaviour and to ensure they are proportionate. Positive behaviour is also encouraged through a simple reward system that children respond to enthusiastically.

Rigorous and robust recruitment processes are overseen and managed by specialist staff in the organisation's head office. Excellent records clearly evidence stringent vetting procedures which help to safeguard children and young people from unsuitable applicants.

Leadership and management

good

The home is managed by a competent and committed Registered Manager who draws upon his extensive experience to drive improvements in the service. Prompt and effective action was taken to address the five requirements made following the last inspection. Through his direction the team of staff have made a confident transition from caring for older teenagers to delivering a service that incorporates children as young as seven and as old as 14 years old. This change in approach to admit younger children is now clearly set out in the home's statement of purpose.

Senior leaders within the organisation have introduced a more systematic approach when a new placement is made to any home. This ensures that the needs of all children and young people, including those already placed in a home, are effectively considered at the point of each new referral. Furthermore, a consistently used template prompts a measured approach and ensures that the rationale for making

decisions is clearly recorded. Robust and efficient steps are also now taken to ensure that all staff are fully aware of all information relating to the care of each child or young person.

Policy on the use of digital cameras and mobile phones is now clarified. Signed agreements are in place with all placing authorities. A realistic attitude ensures that children and young people have similar experiences to their peers. As a result they do not miss out on a visual record of their time in the home being recorded and maintained safely and appropriately.

The quality of supervision is good. Gaps identified at the last inspection were swiftly and robustly addressed. Constructive working relationships between managers and staff provide the opportunity to monitor, challenge and develop individuals to deliver a good quality of care. Records clearly show that staff are able to raise issues that they are concerned about. The performance of all established team members is appraised at least once each year. This opportunity to reflect helps to identify key strengths and make plans to address areas for further development and learning. Ensuring that members of staff progress and improve is a strategic value of the organisation as a whole and the Registered Manager in particular. Consequently, it remains the case that staff benefit from the delivery of a wide ranging training programme.

The Registered Manager is directly involved in the day-to-day care of children and young people. This enables him to build extensive awareness of each individual, their needs and the progress they make. In addition, he imparts a model of the quality of care to be provided which is observed and built upon by the staff team as a whole.

Knowledge about the strengths of the home and areas where further development is required is augmented by efficient monitoring processes. Visits by independent visitors provide challenge and direction. Internal reviews of the quality of care demonstrate a clear focus on improvement. The views of children, young people and important individuals in their lives are sought and demonstrably inform positive changes in the home. Senior managers in the company ensure that organisational learning is understood and communicated. This means that while this home has its own identity, positive developments are recognised, shared and implemented to improve the service to children and young people.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
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.

Information 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 framework of inspection for children's homes.