

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC023743
Inspection date	13/06/2013
Inspector	David Putnam
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	26/03/2013
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This privately owned children's home is part of a large organisation which operates a number of children's homes in the area. The organisation is able to provide schooling for children with special educational needs. The home can accommodate up to three young people who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties. At the time of this visit the home was being used exclusively for boys, but may offer a service to both genders.

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**.

Young people benefit from long term, stable placements that provide them with continuity and consistency following difficult life experiences. A small, committed staff team is led by a passionate and enthusiastic Registered Manager who provides sensitive, but strong leadership. As a result young people make genuine progress in many aspects of their lives.

Staff get to know young people extremely well and build strong relationships which support young people to make positive changes. Work is informed by detailed individual care and behaviour management plans that are agreed with young people.

Currently this home provides care and accommodation for teenage boys, some of whom are preparing to live independently. Young people say that they feel nervous, but excited about moving on. They acknowledge that staff are helpful and supportive in getting them ready for the next stage of their lives.

Young people feel safe in this home. When some express worries about the surrounding area, staff respond; they support young people and alleviate their concerns.

One requirement for improvement is made to ensure that any revision of the home's Statement of Purpose is submitted to Ofsted. Recommendations for improvement are

made in relation to staff training; the consistency and quality of the recording in daily records; and to complete work with placing authorities to explore how all young people can benefit from free time in the wider community.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
5 (2001)	notify Ofsted of any revision of the statement of purpose within 28 days. (Regulation 5 (b))	31/07/2013

Recommendations

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

- encourage children to take responsibility for their behaviour in ways appropriate to their age; in particular explore the use of free time for older children to prepare them for adulthood (NMS 3.6)
- ensure that all existing care staff have attained a minimum level three qualification (NMS 18.5)
- ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people build confidence through the formation of their own identity. This is achieved in different ways, for example, through personal expression of how they cut or style their hair or the clothes they choose to buy and wear. This enables them to communicate a positive view of themselves. For some young people positive attachments with individual staff are sustained over a number of years, providing continuity in their lives.

Young people demonstrate personal insight through the recognition of events or dates that they may find difficult. They are able to confidently communicate their concerns to staff which ensures they receive sensitive and effective support when it

is needed. Counselling is available and used by young people which helps them come to terms with past experiences and personal loss.

Young people's physical health needs are met through registration with all relevant health professionals. Young people say that they are encouraged to make their own appointments with health professionals. This gives them confidence and promotes their independence and readiness for adult life.

An emphasis on healthy eating and healthy lifestyles is communicated within the home. Young people say that they consciously try to eat more healthily and exercise more. Young people confirm that this leads to significant weight loss and improved health outcomes, evidenced by what they describe as, 'feeling healthier.' Staff encourage and support young people in achieving their individual goals. Noticeboards provide appropriate information in an informative way.

Education outcomes for young people are good, especially when their previous experiences and starting points are considered. Young people who have not been in education for significant periods prior to living in the home now manage to attend the parent organisation's registered school consistently. The progress they make enables them to sit selected GCSE examinations. This provides them with the confidence to apply for college courses to continue their education.

Some older young people already attend college and complete level two vocational qualifications in their chosen career. They use their own initiative to apply for appropriate follow-on courses alongside any work placements that are necessary to complete the next level of qualification.

At the time of this inspection not all young people were formally engaged in education, training or employment. However, staff use positive links with businesses in the local community which provide young people with the opportunity for work experience. These opportunities are eagerly taken by young people who develop a work ethic as well as valuable skills to prepare them for further training or future employment. Young people work with staff and external advisors to identify and apply for appropriate college courses.

Regular residents meetings are held. These provide young people with the opportunity to express their views about the day to day running of the home. Not all young people consistently attend these meetings. However, extensive individual work through formal and informal key working sessions provides further opportunity for young people to have their say or explore more personal matters.

Young people are able to describe how they develop a sense of social justice. This leads them to raise money for national charities that are important to them personally. Young people use their initiative and individual strengths to undertake sponsored tasks or produce goods to sell. They are humble, but rightly proud of the contribution they make to the wider community.

The importance of remaining in touch with family members and others who are

important to young people is understood by young people and staff. Staff encourage and support young people to ensure they are able to maintain positive relationships with key individuals.

Currently, a feature of this home is the way in which young people take positive steps in their preparation for independence. Young people say, 'Staff support me and encourage me'. Records demonstrate positive communication between staff and young people. This helps to identify individual strengths and focus on areas for improvement. At the last inspection a recommendation was made to further explore the use of free time for older young people to prepare them for adulthood further. While some progress has been made in taking this forward, this has not yet been fully achieved. Staff and managers continue to liaise with placing authorities to ensure all young people are provided with suitable and safe opportunities to have time on their own.

Quality of care

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

Young people are positive about the quality of their relationships with staff. They feel that staff genuinely care about them and are concerned for their welfare. They say, 'Staff always make themselves available, they listen and help sort out problems and difficulties.' One young person described their home saying, 'It's an amazing place to live.' Another simply said, 'Nice place to live. Nice group of staff.'

Young people say that they usually get on well with each other, but recognise an occasional love, hate relationship. However they go on to say, 'It's like brothers; one day you hate each other and the next you get on with them and appreciate it'.

While the relatively small group of staff has experienced some consistency in recent years there will always be a degree of change. This is noticed more by young people who have lived in the home for several years. Some young people have lived in this home for four years or more. While this provides continuity of placement, young people can be affected by changes in staff who are important to them. One said, 'I don't like it when they move. You get used to talking to them and then there are new ones.'

All young people have individual care plans which are linked to those set by placing authorities and reviewed accordingly. Young people are directly involved in the formation of these plans which outline how individual young people are to be cared for and how individual behaviours are to be managed by staff. This leads to a consistency of approach which is understood by young people and staff alike.

Young people enjoy open communication with staff which provides them with the opportunity to share their ideas, requests or express anything that may be concerning them. Consequently complaints from young people are rare. One said, 'I've never needed to complain but would know how to if I needed to'. Another said they have not had to complain for a long time, but similarly would know how to

complain if they were concerned about anything.

Staff advocate effectively for young people. When necessary, they speak up for the young people in their care. However, they also support and enable young people to take the initiative and speak up for themselves. This augments the confidence and self-esteem of young people and prepares them for the time young people will be living more independently. One young person explained this saying, 'A couple of months ago there was an issue at college, the staff helped me through it.'

Staff emphasise the importance of education for all young people, irrespective of the point they are at. They hold regular meetings with staff in the school run by the parent organisation. Individual education plans highlight the expected tasks to be undertaken by staff to promote the learning of young people. Staff liaise with other professionals to promote the further education of young people after leaving school.

Young people enjoy a wide range of activities. Some activities, such as going on long bike rides, help young people keep fit and healthy. Others, such as paintballing or going to the cinema, are just about having fun. Staff support young people to access facilities within the wider community which promotes a sense of belonging. At the time of this inspection plans were in place for the home's annual holiday. Young people have been consulted on their preferences and have chosen specific activities to take part in while away. Young people were genuinely excited and able to reflect on previous positive experiences.

Young people speak positively and enthusiastically about their involvement with army cadets. This helps to provide them with structure, purpose and identity. Young men in the home are cared for by a staff team made up of women and men. This provides young people with positive role models of both genders. Staff highlight that the cultural and ethnic background of the young people is also matched within the staff team. This helps young people to be positive about their personal identity.

The home is maintained to a high standard. Effective systems allow staff and managers to report issues as they arise. A dedicated maintenance team responds promptly and efficiently to all requests. As a result young people live in a comfortable and homely environment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people consistently and clearly state that they feel safe within the home. The quality of the relationships they have with staff enhances their feeling of well-being. However, some young people express concerns about the area where the home is situated. In particular they have a fear of crime that results in them being worried about their personal safety when walking in the area, especially at night. Managers say that staff are aware of young people's worries and consistently offer to meet or collect young people. This supports, and protects young people as well as, promoting a sense of safety and alleviating their concerns.

Young people rarely go missing from this home. This has significantly reduced over the past year following positive intervention from managers and staff to address the matter. As a result, young people now agree with staff how and when they spend time with their close friends and consistently return to the home when they need to. Local police liaison officers confirm that while this was a problem last year it is no longer an issue within the home.

The positive behaviour of young people is promoted through a personalised target and reward system. By meeting their individual targets young people earn financial rewards that can be saved and used for activities or collected to enhance their weekly allowance. Physical restraint is rarely used within the home. Instead, staff are adept at de-escalating difficult situations to avoid the need for young people being restrained. When restraints do occur they are undertaken by trained staff. Records of restraints and sanctions are completed promptly and reviewed by the Registered Manager which ensures that best practice is consistently followed.

Care plans for young people identify specific risks and outline ways in which the likelihood or impact of these risks can be minimised. As a result young people feel protected and staff are clear about the expectations placed upon them.

Recruitment is managed through the organisations head office. Robust procedures promote the safety of young people by doing everything possible to ensure unsuitable people are not given the opportunity to work within the home. While not all recruitment records are retained within the home, the organisation's head office is only a short distance away. Consequently personnel files are accessible when required.

Robust organisational procedures are in place to ensure that health and safety matters are addressed consistently. For example, all standard checks are up to date; fire drills are carried out regularly both during the day time and at night and regular reviews of the home are undertaken by staff. As a result the safety of the environment is maintained in a way that promotes the health and well-being of young people.

Leadership and management

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

The Registered Manager has now been in post for over a year. She demonstrates passion and enthusiasm in her aim to deliver the best service for young people. This is communicated to the staff team through insightful knowledge and understanding of the individual needs of each young person.

Staff feel valued and supported by the Registered Manager saying, 'I can't praise her enough.' They say that although there is an on-call system staffed by senior managers within the organisation, the Registered Manager always makes herself available to them, even when she is not scheduled to work.

The Registered Manager is supported by a clearly defined management structure within the parent organisation. The organisation also employs health professionals, therapists and counsellors who offer direct services to young people and advice and guidance for managers and staff.

Staff appreciate the quality and frequency of supervision they receive from the Registered Manager. This realistically challenges them and supports them to provide a good service to the individual young people. The performance of each member of staff is appraised annually. Previous targets are reviewed and new ones set to promote the personal development of individual staff, including the identification of specific training needs. New staff are automatically registered for the level three diploma following completion of their probationary period. However, some established members of the staff team have yet to complete this necessary qualification.

The Registered Manager has a clear understanding of the strengths of the home and areas that require improvement. Effective monitoring systems are utilised to review the quality of care provided to young people. Reports produced as a result of these reviews incorporate the opinions of young people and external professionals. The Registered Manager links identified improvements to a focused development plan which is also monitored to recognise where progress is made.

One recommendation for improvement was made at the last inspection. As mentioned previously, this has been addressed but not fully met due to the need to work together with placing authorities to ensure the safety of young people and the wider community when exploring the use of free time.

The home's Statement of Purpose was revised earlier this year. This document is clearly worded and accessible due to the style in which it is written. All necessary elements are systematically and comprehensively addressed. This means that parents, placing authorities and staff can be clear about the aims and objectives of the children's home. However, a copy of the most recent revision was not sent to Ofsted as required by regulations. This shortfall has negligible impact upon young people; however a requirement is made to ensure full compliance with regulations.

Young people say that they often read and sign notes from key working sessions with staff, but currently choose not to read all records maintained about them. However, they are aware of their rights to see these notes either now or in the future. Records adequately reflect necessary detail to inform the reader of the work undertaken with young people on a daily basis. However, some entries lack detail that may be beneficial for young people if they choose to read their records in the future.

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.