

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC031698
Inspector	Anna Williams
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	East Sussex County Council
Registered person address	County Hall St. Annes Crescent LEWES East Sussex BN7 1UE
Responsible individual	Elizabeth Rugg
Registered manager	Helen Denise Simmons
Date of last inspection	12/02/2014

Inspection date	13/08/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	There has been no enforcement action since the last inspection.

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
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This short breaks children's home provides the 43 children who currently access the service a good overall experience. Children are positive about the staff and their short breaks stays. They feel safe in the home. Parents and carers value the service and feel staff know their children's needs extremely well. Strengths of the service include the wide variety of activities and experiences the home offers children who visit. Strong partnership working with external professional's means that children's educational and health needs are well-met during stays. Care planning is detailed and personalised. However, children who visit on assessment stays do not have clear aims for their visits within their individual care plans.

Children's care plans are updated regularly by staff. However, handwritten amendments are not signed and dated by the author of each entry. This risks confusion as to when changes are to start and who is authorising the change. Internal monitoring reports do not contain consultation and feedback from children, parents and social workers to reflect and learn from. One allegation against a member of staff was not shared by the Registered Manager with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) in line with local children's safeguarding board procedures. Areas of shortfall identified within this inspection do not have a direct negative impact on the well-being of children staying.

The Registered Manager has a development plan in place. This describes clear goals and targets for further improvement and includes a child-friendly version. This focuses on key targets to further improve outcomes for children who access the service.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home is operated by the local authority. The service is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to eight young people with learning disabilities and physical disabilities for short breaks.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
12/02/2014	Interim	good progress
31/10/2013	Full	outstanding
11/03/2013	Interim	good progress
26/11/2012	Full	outstanding

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

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
28 (2001)	ensure any entry on children's case records is signed and dated by the author of each written entry. (Regulation 28 (1) (c))	06/10/2014
34 (2001)	establish and maintain a system for monitoring the matters set out in Schedule 6 at least once in every 3 months; and improving the quality of care provided in the children's home; and the system shall provide for consultation with children accommodated in the home, their parents and placing social workers. (Regulation 34 (1) (a and b) (3))	06/10/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure risk assessments of the whole children's home environment are carried out, to identify any potential sources of harm to the children, are recorded in writing and regularly reviewed, in particular for the transfer of hot food and cutlery around the home (NMS 10.8)
- ensure the telephone verification of written references includes all written references received (NMS 16.1)
- ensure staff have access to support and advice, and are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, with particular reference to agency staff who work on a regular basis in the home (NMS 19.4)
- ensure allegations against people that work with children are reported by the designated person to the LADO. This includes allegations that on the face of it may appear relatively insignificant or that have also been reported directly to the police or children and family services (NMS 20.6)
- ensure there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed, in particular the children's daily observation records (NMS 22.1)
- ensure children are cared for in line with their individual placement / short break care plan; with specific reference to ensuring clear aims and objectives for assessment placements (NMS 25)
- review the safeguarding policy to include access to procedures and advice in relation to e-safety. (Statutory guidance, Volume 5, para 2.67)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Children are positive about coming to visit this home and describe the care as 'great' and 'good'. Staff work in partnership with parents and professionals to assess children's needs prior to accessing the service. Together they draw up care plans, protocols and agree a package of care. Children have an individually planned transition into the service, which helps to develop children's confidence and means they can become familiar with the staff. Children who reach the age of 18 are supported to understand their transition out of the home to new placements through a celebration at the end of their last visit. This means that children are prepared emotionally and practically at the beginning and end of their short-break packages. A parent comments '[child] shows me that they are happy to visit because of all the big smiles I get when I mention the respite service name!'.

Children's educational needs are fully supported. As this is a short-breaks service, the primary responsibility for children's educational planning remains with parents and carers, however the home has appropriate communication between themselves and educational settings. This ensures a continuity of communication across all areas of a child's life.

Children engage in a wide variety of activities within the home. These include soft play, a range of indoor activities such as arts and crafts and books, as well as the large garden area. Children use the outdoor space to play on the swings, and use the go-karts, and other open-air play equipment. Children access the community through the use of a minibus, and local facilities are nearby. Children take part in off-site activities such as theatre trips, going to farms, local places of interest such as castles, seeing the steam trains, cinema trips and visiting local parks. Children who visit take part in regular local nearby events such as the annual carnival. This means children are actively involved in the local community, visit new places and have opportunities to try new experiences.

Children successfully develop and make good progress with daily life skills such as road safety, eating and drinking. This benefits children now and in their future. Some young people demonstrate improved personal hygiene and washing skills. This positively impacts on their physical health and personal confidence. Some young people are now more independent with dressing and undressing. Other young people show good progress with communicating their feelings and wishes. Some young people now eat a wider variety of foods and have a more settled sleep pattern. This benefits their overall health and well-being. Some children have significantly developed social skills, especially around meal times. This positively benefits their social interactions. Parents confirm that their children are successfully supported to learn independence skills.

Children who visit the short breaks service for longer assessment stays maintain contact with family and people who are important to them. Staff facilitate and supervise contact appropriately if required. This ensures children maintain appropriate attachments while visiting the home. Parents report that short break diaries are consistently completed by staff, so they are kept fully informed about each individual visit. Friendships between children who visit the service are planned for and promoted.

Quality of care

good

Children enjoy very positive relationships with staff. Observations of children and staff demonstrate relaxed and warm interactions, which are adjusted to meet the communication needs and level of understanding of children. A parent comments 'there is nothing they could do better as a respite home. As a parent I am so happy to see [child] so comfortable and settled there when [child] visits'. Positive feedback has been received from social workers and other external professionals with regard to how the home works effectively with them to ensure children's needs are met during individual, and on-going, visits to the home.

Care plans are individualised to the unique needs of each child and describe in detail their day-to-day care needs. However, children who visit on assessment stays do not have identified goals for their assessment period outlined within their personal care plans. This does not give staff clear aims and objectives to follow to ensure individual children's assessments are suitably focused and successful as part of their longer term care plan.

Care plans are working documents and staff amend them to ensure that they contain up-to-date information on each child. However, these handwritten amendments are not consistently signed and dated by the author of each entry. As a result, it is unclear who has authorised the changes and when these changes are to take effect. This risks confusion within a key document, although no negative impact was identified during the inspection.

The building has appropriate adaptations to ensure the needs of the children accessing the home are met, such as adapted baths and ceiling hoists. Communal areas offer children space to play games, watch a DVD or play a computer game. The building is maintained to a good standard, and in general offers children a very comfortable environment to stay in. However, the dining area is not large enough to allow all children and staff who are in the home the opportunity to sit within the same room and eat, if they wish to. Some children do choose to eat away from the larger group. As a result of these circumstances, some children eat with staff in other areas of the home, including downstairs. Staff carry plates of food for individual children around the home on open trays. The home took immediate action to address this during the inspection, but there is no written risk assessment in place to assess potential sources of harm from the regular transfer of hot food.

One member of staff is allocated as activity coordinator. They create activity plans and ensure these meet the individual needs of children who are visiting. This year the annual summer barbeque for children and parents was themed around the football world cup and celebrated different countries and flags. This offered parents and carers and children the opportunity to come together, openly celebrate children's progress and achievements and have fun. Parents and carers comment positively about this event.

Children who visit the home feel that staff listen to them. Staff skilfully communicate with children using a variety of communication techniques including picture prompts, Makaton signing and social stories. One member of staff is a Makaton trainer, thus ensuring that all staff are regularly refreshed in signing techniques. Children make choices in their daily lives in the home, such as choosing their food, activities to do and games to play. This ensures that all children, including those with complex communication needs, influence the running of the home appropriately during their stays.

Children's diverse health and medication needs are met. Arrangements for dealing with medication are safe and effective. There is a clear audit trail of medication coming into and leaving the service. Children confirm that staff support and help them if they feel unwell. Parents confirm that they feel their children's health and medication needs are fully met by the service.

Keeping children and young people safe good

Children say that they feel safe coming to visit the home. Since the last inspection, one allegation against a member of staff was not referred by the Registered Manager to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Instead, key information regarding the suspicion of harm was shared with the placing social worker. This practice is not in line with Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) procedures and meant a delay of 2 days before the LADO was informed. The management of this allegation does not demonstrate robust practice, although other safeguarding matters have been managed appropriately.

Some children who visit the home have their own mobile phones. The house has tablet computers which, although not connected to the internet, the children enjoy using for the varied applications, and take photos and videos. However, the home does not have an E-safety policy in place to inform children, staff and parents of the procedures for keeping children and information safe on digital media, although no incidents of concern have taken place.

Basic recruitment practice meets regulatory requirements, but does not meet all of the national minimum standards for children's homes. Only one written reference is verified by telephone to ensure it is authentic. Other than this shortfall, recruitment

practice is robust.

There has been no child reported missing from the home since the last inspection. The home has built appropriate links with the local police in relation to proactively working together to plan for any incident of a child going missing. Children do not identify any type of bullying behaviours in the home. High staffing levels and close staff vigilance mean that any type of targeted or negative behaviour by one child toward another is swiftly and appropriately managed. This creates a friendly and relaxed environment for children to stay in.

Individual children's care plans include personalised risk assessments and behaviour management plans. These plans include clear de-escalation techniques to avoid the use of restraint and are effectively implemented by staff. As a result, there have been no incidents of physical intervention since the last inspection.

Children are protected by good health and safety routines in place. Equipment such as the lift and the outdoor adventure play apparatus are regularly serviced to ensure they remain in good working order. The building and extensive grounds are well-maintained and hazard free.

Leadership and management

good

The manager has been registered with Ofsted since January 2012 at this children's home. She has over 17 year's experience of working with children with learning difficulties and complex needs. She has achieved NVQ level 4 in both childcare and leadership.

Children's case files contain records of daily observations, which describe the child's visit to the home. Across children's files, these observation records vary in consistency and quality of language used. Some records describe clearly and sensitively how a child's day has been and how children have been supported through any incidents or periods of anxiety. Other entries in some records are less clear. There is no routine sampling and challenge to the quality of these daily notes. As a consequence, some children's records lack clarity.

Contracted staff and in-house relief staff employed by the local authority receive regular supervision. Agency staff undertake regular shifts in the home to cover shortfalls in staffing. One agency staff member completed at least 16 shifts in July 2014 and continues to do regular work in the home. However, this agency member of staff has not received regular performance management and formal support. This has the potential for the inconsistent implementation of care plans. Contracted staff spoken to are extremely enthusiastic about their work and feel very supported by the senior leadership team. One staff member comments 'I absolutely love working here'.

Staff receive good quality training both within their induction periods, as well on-

going refreshers. Training undertaken since the last inspection includes behaviour management, autism and fire safety. Currently, 80% of the contracted staff team have obtained the diploma in childcare qualification or equivalent. Some contracted staff are actively completing the course, and the remaining 10% are due to commence a suitable course in September 2014. This ensures children are cared for by staff who hold relevant and current skills to meet individual children's needs.

External visits to the home take place on a monthly basis. These reports consider all the areas as required by regulations and national minimum standards. However, in the past year the external visitor has raised only one formal good practice recommendation. Without formal recommendations, these reports do not demonstrate how the Registered Manager takes action as a result of these visits, nor the impact on children these changes have.

An annual parent and carer survey takes place each summer. This consultation focuses on feedback about how the service could be improved. However, participation is low with only two parent and child replies in 2013. In-house audit systems are in place and these monitor the quality of care on a monthly basis. However, internal reports, which are sent to Ofsted on a three monthly basis, do not reflect the internal audits which have been completed. Instead, the reports submitted lack detail and evaluation about the quality of care and are repetitive. In addition, these reports do not contain consultation with children, parents and social workers as required by regulation. This means the Registered Manager is not demonstrating in the internal reports that she is acting upon and learning from feedback in order to further improve the home.

There is a Statement of Purpose in place, and children's guides to the home in a variety of communication formats. These documents clearly and accurately describe the aims and objectives of the home for children, parents and social workers. There has been one formal complaint since the last inspection. This was promptly addressed and resolved. The Registered Manager shows learning and reflection from this complaint and as a result, procedures have been appropriately amended.

The recommendation set at the last inspection has been met. There is now a clear risk assessment in place which demonstrates the safeguarding measures in place to promote children's welfare. For example, it demonstrates clearly why the external doors are secure and the specific times when access to the kitchen is restricted for children's safety. This ensures that restrictions on children's movements are only undertaken in order to promote their overall well-being and this is reviewed.

The Registered Manager has a good understanding of the strengths and development areas of the home. There is an improvement plan in place. This includes a child-friendly version. Child focused aims for the year ahead include 'make sure you and people important to you have a say about what we do'. This means that staff and children are aware of the home's strategic plans and all are actively involved in the shaping of the future of the home.

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.