

SC031698

Registered provider: East Sussex County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This children's home is operated by the local authority. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to eight children and young people who have learning and/or physical disabilities.

Inspection dates: 29 to 30 August 2017

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account **good**

How well children and young people are helped and protected requires improvement to be good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers good

The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.

Date of last inspection: 1 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is good because:

- Parents and social workers are confident in the care that the young people are receiving. They find that the staff communicate well with regard to the young people, and that effective care is provided.
- The young people benefit from dedicated staff who are committed to providing them with positive experiences, and promote their engagement in the local

community.

- Families are welcomed at the home. Young people are able to spend time with their parents and siblings in a relaxed and comfortable setting.
- An advocate makes regular visits to the home to ensure that the young people's opinions are sought and acted upon.

The children's home's areas for development:

- Fire safety requires urgent remedial attention. Fire doors do not close independently and some damage has not been prioritised for repair, despite the registered manager reporting it. Additionally, there is a culture of propping office doors open, which presents a fire hazard.
- The quality of young people's individual risk assessments is inconsistent. Some fail to identify and mitigate the individual risks for the young people, and have not been updated after significant changes such as education provision.
- Impact risk assessments have not taken place to consider the needs and compatibility of those already living in the home with new permanent placements.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
01/03/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
26/10/2016	Full	Good
23/03/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
17/12/2015	Full	Good

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
12 The protection of children standard In order to meet the protection of children standard, the registered person must ensure that staff: (2)(a)(i) Assess whether each child is at risk of harm, taking into account information in the child's relevant plans, and, if necessary, make arrangements to reduce the risk of any harm to the child.	02/10/2017
12 The protection of children standard In order to meet the protection of children standard, the registered person must ensure: (2)(d) that the premises used for the purposes of the home are designed, furnished and maintained so as to protect each child from avoidable hazards to the child's health. In particular, improve the safety of equipment in the garden.	02/10/2017
After consultation with the fire and rescue authority, the registered person must take adequate precautions against the risk of fire, including the provision of suitable fire equipment in the children's home. (Regulation 25(1)(a))	02/10/2017

Recommendations

- The registered person should ensure that, when considering new placements, they fully consider the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of young people and evidence their judgement supporting compatibility with existing residents. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 56, paragraph 11.4)

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: good

The children living at the home benefit from trusted relationships with dedicated staff. All of the children who permanently reside at the home were introduced through their short-stay placements. As a result of this, the staff have a solid understanding of the children. A social worker commented, 'Staff are brilliant, they know [name of child] really well and understand his needs.'

The staff are observant and skilled at interpreting the needs of the children. They use a variety of communication methods, with their observations being central. A social worker said, 'They know them really well, what helps and what doesn't help – they have a good insight into the children and young people they look after.'

The staff encourage young people to take steps towards independence. An example of this is that one child can now clean his own teeth. His mother commented, 'I told him it was time to clean his teeth and he went and got his toothbrush; he would never have done this before so his understanding and independence skills are improving.'

The children are making progress. For one child this has meant that he is more independent in terms of his personal care. The staff have acted upon advice and guidance from specialist sources to support the child to increase his independence skills. As a result of this, his frustration has reduced and he can now meet some of his needs independently.

The children attend school regularly. The staff promote a culture of learning using individualised approaches for each child. One young person is starting college for the new term. He said, 'I have am half nervous and half excited about college. The staff have taken me out to get me a whole new wardrobe as I won't need to wear school uniform anymore. I've been really spoilt.'

The staff ensure that the children regularly access the local community. Some enjoy walks to the beach and the local woods. One child enjoys playing football, and has joined a local club. The staff recently succeeded in getting more advanced aids for one child, which has increased his independence. He said, 'It's great, now I can go ahead on my own for a while, I have more freedom and don't have to rely on staff.'

The inclusive approach taken by staff ensures that families feel welcome to visit the home. For some children, their parents visit during the week and take part in settling routines. For others, large family gatherings take place at weekends to maintain family life.

The children benefit from visits made by independent advocate who come to the home on a monthly basis. The advocate is skilled in communicating with the children through their individual methods. She supports them to give feedback for their reviews and

produces pictorial records that the children can understand. As a result, the children are able to share their opinions regularly with a trusted adult.

The staff are keen to support the children through difficult behaviours. They work collaboratively with the positive behaviour support team, and are open to adapting their approach in order to support the children. However, new strategies are not always implemented consistently.

The home provides children with a stable environment in which the staff seek to cater for their complex needs. The staff have built trusting relationships with parents and families. One parent commented, 'I viewed 30 schools before agreeing to my son being cared for and I didn't like any of them. Now he is at Acorns full time, I don't have to hope that he is being well care for. I know that he is, as they know him so well.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: requires improvement to be good

Fire doors within the building had been damaged for several weeks to the extent that they did not close. Other fire doors did not close independently or reliably. Although the registered manager had reported this, no urgent remedial action had taken place. Additionally, there is a culture of propping doors open, which further compromises the fire protection in the building.

The garden equipment for the children is unsafe. Large metal spikes have been added to the top bar of the children's swings. The risk assessment for the garden failed to identify the spikes; however, the risk of the children climbing is known. Furthermore, the climbing-frame ladders were taped to prevent access due to concerns regarding one child's ability to climb to the highest point. However, children were still accessing the climbing frame unchallenged by staff. Consequently, the risks in the garden area are not consistently assessed or effectively managed and the area is not safe.

Managers and staff have not consistently ensured that the children's health and well-being needs are met. On one occasion, a child had left the building, fallen and hit their head, yet staff on duty did not seek medical attention or managerial advice. The registered manager has since reviewed the protocol for accidents; its effectiveness remains to be seen in practice.

Risk assessments fail to adequately identify individuals risks, and do not provide staff with strategies to manage or reduce them. They fail to identify risks associated with social media and the education environment, and risks related to children's developmental stages. Examples seen focused largely on the disabilities of the children, omitting behaviours that are noted on their records.

Records do not identify the ethnic or cultural needs of the children, although feedback indicated that staff do understand and meet these.

A permanent placement has been made without a clear assessment of the compatibility of this child with those already permanently placed at the home. Consequently, the risks surrounding the placement becoming permanent were not reliably identified, and the compatibility of the children was not adequately assessed.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

The manager has been in post since December 2016, and has recently completed registration with Ofsted. She is enrolled on the level 5 diploma in leadership and management, and is currently focused on improving areas of weakness that she has identified. This has driven some changes in practice, such as staff bringing the children's files to supervision to enhance managerial oversight and case discussion.

Supervision of staff is regular, but records sampled showed a lack of clarity and action points were not regularly reviewed. This lack of clarity demonstrates ineffective managerial oversight of staff progress in meeting targets. There is, however, good succession planning where staff have been promoted from within to senior roles. Morale in the staff team is good. Many members of the dedicated staff team have worked at the home for a long time.

The experienced registered manager takes a supportive approach to managing her team. She uses a coaching and mentoring approach to develop their skills and uses feedback from the staff to further develop the provision. When asked what it is like working here, one staff member said, 'It's brilliant. There is a relaxed atmosphere, we can talk freely, and our ideas are developed.' This nurturing approach to the staff team is indicative of the registered manager's intent to bring about positive changes to the service.

Training is a priority for the proactive registered manager. She ensures that expert advice is sought when the need arises. When children have presented crisis behaviour, she has arranged external advice and guidance to enhance the staff's skills. This solution-focused approach demonstrates the registered manager's efforts to develop her team.

There is positive inter-agency work taking place. The staff benefit from working with the positive behaviour support team and the child and adolescent mental health team. A social worker from the behaviour support team said, 'They want to be better informed, and it was really invaluable that the team shared their knowledge of the young person so we could work together to find a solution.'

Team meetings are regular, but the current rota does not enable all staff to attend. There are some staff vacancies and there is frequent reliance on agency staff. This is impacting upon the communication between the staff and, at times, leading to inconsistent practice when new strategies are being implemented. An external professional noted that, 'Team meetings aren't always very well attended; it can be quite difficult if you can't access the whole team.'

Monitoring is taking place, but it is not effectively revealing shortfalls or inconsistencies. Examples were found of the opening and closing checks for the kitchen not being recorded, which was not revealed through the current monitoring. The registered manager is clear about what the service can provide and her staff understand her vision for the service's development. She is confident about the behaviours and needs that can be safely managed in the home. There have been occasions when children have outgrown the service. The registered manager worked closely with the placing authority to ensure that the child was supported to move to a new placement.

The statement of purpose provides stakeholders with information about the services that the home provides. The young person's guide gives information to children about the home; what to expect in terms of routines and activities; and who is there to help. Both documents reliably provide the reader with a good overview of the services offered.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, and to consider how well it complies with the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC031698

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: County Hall, St Annes Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex
BN7 1UE

Responsible individual: Elizabeth Rugg

Registered manager: Shirin White

Inspector

Sarah Olliver: social care inspector

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