Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC032439
Inspection date	30/10/2012
Inspector	Bridget Goddard
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	05/01/2012

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

Service information

Brief description of the service

This service offers short breaks for up to eight children and young people of either sex. They are between the ages of five and seventeen and have a severe learning and physical disability and/or complex health needs. This service is provided by a local authority and is available to families from across the county.

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**.

This home offers a very good quality of care to young people. Staff are well deployed which enables them to offer a high level of personalised care in a consistent and attentive fashion. Young people clearly enjoy their stays, and can access an excellent range of well-planned activities both inside and outside the home. Young people make good progress in the home, but this is not always systematically encouraged and monitored. The home itself is well maintained with excellent facilities both inside and outside.

Young people are kept safe in the home by good systems and training, and respectful and caring relationships with staff. Young people's health needs are well promoted, for example by the tasty food which is thoughtfully presented and excellent, thorough medication practices. Young people's individual views about their care are carefully responded to, but are not detailed sufficiently at their reviews. Young people are also not routinely consulted over such things as activities.

Staff are well supported by regular supervision and training. The leadership and management of the home is highly effective. It has successfully brought the home through a very challenging time as well as making significant improvements. Record keeping is an area that still requires some attention. The home has forged some excellent partnerships with both education and health services, and these have already significantly improved the quality of care for some young people.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children's physical, emotional and social development needs are systematically promoted (NMS 6.1)
- ensure that all children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support (NMS 1.3)
- ensure that the home assists children to put forward their views, wishes and feelings in each review process, and helps to ensure that these are fully taken into account (NMS 25.4)
- ensure that there is a routine, effective system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when needed. (NMS 22.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people make very good progress in developing skills, for example eating a meal with others around a table, or beginning to use single words. Some young people develop their self-help skills, like picking up their clothes from the floor or helping clean their teeth. This progress helps develop young people's confidence, and they show pride in their achievements.

Some young people also make strong progress in improving their health. For example, some are now at a healthier weight, and others are much more mobile than they were. The home also promotes progress in educational achievement, for example some young people gain credits on their college courses because of activities in the home. This helps young people to develop both their independence skills and their self-esteem. However, although young people clearly make progress in many different ways, the home has not yet developed a systematic way of monitoring, reviewing and celebrating this.

Parents and lead professionals alike value the home's well thought out activities programme. They say that: 'Young people are always out and about experiencing activities in the community.' This gives young people good opportunities to access a wide range of stimulating and enjoyable experiences. Lead professionals are also very positive about the Chat programme, which aims to help young people with independence and social skills. They describe it as 'a very effective tool in helping transition'.

Quality of care

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

Staff are highly attentive and responsive to young people's needs. Young people respond well to this, and both parents and lead professionals say that young people enjoy their stays. They demonstrate this by enthusiastically helping to pack their suitcase, and showing pleasure as they get nearer the home. Parents say that it is an opportunity for their child to have 'a sleepover and go out with friends which is an opportunity they otherwise wouldn't have'.

The home has a large staff group for the large cohort of young people who stay. A recent development is that young people and staff now belong to one unit or another. This means that a smaller group of staff now have more regular and more focused opportunities to get to know the complex needs of a smaller group of young people. This helps staff provide more consistent high quality care. Staff agree with this and think the change has improved their quality of care, for example by enabling a dedicated focus on young people's behaviour. This focus is still at an early stage, but it has already resulted in improved outcomes for young people, such as fewer destructive outbursts. Parents also think that the split has led to 'more consistent care'.

Young people's views about how their individual care is delivered are well-respected. For example, staff enable young people to demonstrate what they want by helping them access the appropriate Pecs symbols. A similar symbol format is prominently displayed around the home, demonstrating how to complain if necessary. Lead professionals say that: 'Staff communicate really well using both Pecs and signing.' However, the home has not yet established systems for consulting generally with young people on such things as home decoration, menus or activities.

Lead professionals report that staff effectively contribute to young people's reviews, in writing and in person. Young people's care plans are personalised, contain appropriate risk assessments, and sound information on young people's communication preferences and wishes and feelings. However, the representation of young people's views at their review meetings does not have a sufficiently personalised approach.

The home has strong and highly effective partnerships with both health and education services. The home's medication processes are particularly strong, demonstrated not only in careful recording, but also in dispensing and thorough assessment of staff training and skill. Staff have detailed training in necessary health procedures, and bespoke joint working plans with particular young people. This means that young people are now able to access a community resource, and to spend leisure time with other young people. The home routinely visits their main feeder school both for reviews, and to share expertise on the best ways to care for particular young people. The home has been proactive in becoming fully involved with a comprehensive, joint school project focusing on behaviour management. This means that young people receive a consistent, high quality response to behavioural issues.

Dedicated staff identify a range of community activities which are then carefully

planned and modified to meet the needs of individual young people. For example, some young people love trees and following forest trails, while others prefer going to the circus. Events are thoroughly planned and individual needs such as staffing requirements are fully taken into account, so that different activity groups are able to have an enjoyable and safe trip out.

Some young people prefer to stay around the home. There is extensive and safe external space, as well as a sensory room, art opportunities, a ball-pond and hot tub. Parents describe the home as being 'rich in sensory experiences'. The home is very well maintained and equipped, with comfortable communal spaces and attractive bedrooms. Young people enjoy the food provided. The cooks maintain a good balance between young people's medical needs and dietary preferences, and serving tasty and nutritious food.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people clearly communicate that they are happy in the home, and demonstrate by their relaxed and trusting behaviour that they feel safe with staff. Parents are confident that their children are safe when staying. They say that: 'The paperwork and systems are good and efficient and the building is safe.'

Safeguarding training is regularly updated. Staff are proactive at keeping young people safe and alert to the possibilities of harm. For example, the manager invited the fire service to the home and reviewed fire procedures. As a result of this, fire assembly points have been updated and fire zone alerts are in the process of being updated. General health and safety checks are reliably carried out.

Staff currently use positive behaviour strategies based on distraction and reward. Lead professionals say that 'staff are really good at being consistent'. Behavioural strategies are generally effective as demonstrated by the home's minimal use of restraint. Sanctions are also used rarely. This all helps to promote young people's safety and well being.

Good staff ratios, appropriately secure premises, and vigilant staff attention mean that ambulant young people are very unlikely to go missing. Nevertheless, there is an up-to-date protocol with local police regarding children missing from care. Earlier this year the home had a significant number of medication errors. The management team took prompt and decisive action to minimise such errors. This strategy has been highly successful and has helped to promote young people's safety.

There is a robust recruitment process which ensures all necessary checks are completed prior to a member of staff starting work. References are followed up by telephone checks. Visitors are checked upon arrival, sign the visitors' record and are supervised on site as appropriate.

The premises are appropriately secure with key fob access on the front door. Staff

can also set alarms in individual bedrooms in line with personalised care plans. This promotes privacy for young people while also providing an additional safeguard.

Leadership and management

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

In the last year a significant number of the previous leadership team left at the same time. This has meant that a larger than normal number of staff have been newly recruited, including a permanently recruited new manager from outside the service. Inevitably, all this has had an unsettling impact on remaining staff and some parents. Initially there was an increase in the number of incidents in the home, and external professionals noted that new staff were 'still finding their feet'. However, the new leadership team took prompt and decisive action in key areas such as medication, staff deployment and behavioural incidents. This action has been highly effective in not only maintaining, but in improving the quality of care to young people. Staff say that the team 'now pull together and are stronger'. External professionals say that there has been 'a massive improvement', and they praise the current 'strong, clear leadership style'. This demonstrates both highly effective leadership and management, as well as a very strong capacity for continuing improvement. This is reflected well in the home's effective development plan.

Staff have regular supervision which is well recorded and appropriately signed and dated. Staff value this opportunity to reflect on their practice, describing it as an opportunity to ' discuss concerns and reflect on link children'. Mandatory training is routinely held and supplemented by more specialist inputs, for example from local behavioural specialists and health professionals. This provision of high quality supervision and training helps ensure that staff are fully equipped and supported to provide good quality care to young people. Team meetings are held regularly and focus on discussing young people in detail. This helps promote a consistent approach to young people's care.

The home's Statement of Purpose has recently been comprehensively updated. There is also an accessible and colourful children's guide. All parties are clear about the role and function of the home, and the services it provides. Records are securely kept and are detailed. However, they are not always clear and easy to follow. The management team monitor the quality of care through observation, discussion, working alongside staff and reviewing key documents. This internal monitoring is meticulously carried out, and the manager's presence in the home is felt both in person and in their written comments. Internal monitoring is well supported by the external visitor who produces timely and thorough reports on their visits which are available in the home for staff and parents to read. An independent advocate also visits routinely and is available to both young people and their parents/carers. All these inputs are well used by the management team to secure a high quality of care for young people.

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.