

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	17 May 2016
Unique reference number	SC033817
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Direct Care Limited
Registered person address	Rutland House, 90–92 Baxter Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 6HZ

Responsible individual	Rebecca Ouellani
Registered manager	Martin Harris
Inspector	Joanne Vyas

Inspection date	17 May 2016
Previous inspection judgement	Declined in effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
The children's home is not yet delivering good help and care for children and young people. However, there are no serious or widespread failures that result in their welfare not being safeguarded or promoted.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement

SC033817

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is requires improvement because:

- Weak recruitment practice and poor checks on agency workers have the potential to exposed young people to unsuitable adults within their own home.
- The correct procedures have not always been followed when young people have made complaints against staff. This has left young people exposed to potential risk of harm.
- The views of young people are not always acted upon. They say that sometimes they are given an explanation of decisions that affect them and sometimes they are not. For example, the majority of agency workers used have been male, despite young people expressing that they prefer female workers.
- Staff supervision is not always regular, especially for new staff. This means that new staff are not consistently well supported.
- Most young people have made good progress in reducing risky behaviours such as going missing, and self-harm. Drugs and alcohol consumption is also reduced.
- Young people have completed, or are completing, GCSE exams. One young person has completed and passed a Prince's Trust course. They are learning skills that help them to successfully transition into independent living.
- The manager is currently going through the registration process with Ofsted. He has good plans to develop the home and its staff. He is child focused and has a good working relationship with external agencies.
- The majority of staff have worked in the home for less than a year and are not yet qualified. However, they are competent and caring. They bring a range of good skills to the home. Young people like the manager and staff.

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

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 (England) Regulations 2015 and 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
Ensure that staff are recruited using recruitment procedures that are designed to ensure children's safety. The registered person may only employ an individual to work at the children's home; or if an individual who is employed by a person other than the registered person to work at the home in a position in which the individual may have regular contact with children, allow that individual to work at the home; if full and satisfactory information is available in relation to the individual in respect of each of the matters in Schedule 2. (Regulation 32(1)(2)(3) Schedule 3).	30 June 2016
The registered person must ensure that a record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of any investigation (Regulation 39(3)).	30 June 2016
The registered person must maintain in the home the records in Schedule 4 (Regulation 37(2)(a) Schedule 4).	30 June 2016

Recommendations

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

- Ensure children are able to see the results of their views being listened to and acted upon ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 22, paragraph 4.11).
- Ensure that recruitment, supervision and performance management of staff safeguards children and minimises potential risks to them ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 61, paragraph 13.1).

Full report

Information about this children's home

This is a privately owned home for four young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home's statement of purpose says that the home can cater for young people who self-harm, are at risk of sexual exploitation or have been emotionally or physically abused or neglected.

The inspector was aware, during this inspection, that serious allegations of a child protection nature were being investigated by the appropriate authorities. While Ofsted does not have the power to investigate allegations of this kind, actions taken by the setting in response to the allegations were considered alongside the other evidence available at the time of the inspection to inform inspectors' judgements.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
15 December 2015	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
22 July 2015	Full	Good
10 December 2014	Interim	Declined in effectiveness
23 July 2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Requires improvement
Recent experiences for young people in this home have varied. For example, a young person made a complaint against a member of staff that was not immediately recognised as a potentially serious safeguarding concern. Lack of appropriate action left the young people potentially exposed to risk of harm. A young person was critical of some staff for not giving reasons why she could not do certain things, whereas other staff always tell her why. She feels better able to accept not being able to do something if she has a reason. Furthermore, a young person said she is uncomfortable with male agency workers in the house: 'I don't like strangers coming into the house. I would rather be surrounded by female staff.' Staff do ask for female workers, but the majority of agency workers have been male. However, the home is using fewer agency staff now that there is a full staff team. A young person said: 'This is a lovely house and staff are lovely', and 'Staff like to spend time with you, getting to know you.' Young people get on well with staff and other young people in the house. Most young people make good progress in most areas of their lives. One young person has completed her GCSE exams and another is currently going through these, with good support from staff. One has completed and passed a Prince's Trust course. Most young people no longer go missing from the home or self-harm. There is a significant reduction in the use of illegal substances and the consumption of alcohol. Young people learn good skills to help them transition into independent living. They help with cooking, shopping and cleaning. Some young people are on a semi-independence programme, which means that they shop and cook for themselves for most main meals. The physical and emotional health of young people is promoted. They have access to all healthcare professionals, including a therapist who works for the company. The therapist provides training for staff and one-to-one support for young people, and said: 'There is a commitment to help young people here and a readiness to talk about ways forward.' She complimented the incentive scheme which is designed to encourage young people to attend her sessions. This has meant that they are now meeting and engaging with her. This will help to promote the	

emotional health of young people.

Staff help to promote contact with families and friends where appropriate. Staff understand the importance of young people building strong relationships with their family, and facilitate contact.

Young people enjoy a range of activities such as swimming, the health suite, going to the local park and to theme parks, as well as the cinema. Activities help young people to stay healthy, and increase confidence and self-esteem.

The environment is homely and comfortable. Young people have their own private bedrooms which are highly personalised. A young person said the shower is not very good, but said that the manager is 'sorting this'. The manager has plans to change the rooms around and to make the garden more attractive.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Requires improvement
Recruitment practices for staff and checks for agency workers have not been robust. This raises the potential for unsuitable adults to work with young people. Additionally, not all complaints made by young people about staff have gone through the home's complaints procedures. This has potentially exposed young people to harm. Although a high proportion of the staff are new, they are starting to build strong relationships with young people. A young person said: 'Staff are nice. They're friendly and you can have a proper good connection with them.' This helps young people to feel safe and secure. Incidents of young going missing from this home have dramatically decreased, for most young people. This is because they have gained a better understanding of how to keep themselves safe. The 'missing' coordinator within the police said: 'Staff have fully engaged with the missing procedures and have been proactive in trying to locate and recover the girls.' Staff have spoken to young people about what would help them to avoid putting themselves at risk by going missing. Young people have talked about extending free time and taking away their make-up. Staff have implemented these ideas, with some success. Continued partnership working with external agencies and consultation with young people means that two young people have stopped going missing and there has not been an increase in missing incidents for the other.	

Incidents of self-harm have been dramatically reduced. Furthermore, young people rarely take illegal substances or consume alcohol. This means that young people are keeping themselves much safer than when they first came to the home.

Health and safety systems are good at helping to keep young people safe.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Requires improvement
Managers have not been thorough in their vetting of agency workers. For example, it is not clear from the information received from agencies what staff checks have been completed and whether these have been satisfactory. Furthermore, managers have not been challenging enough when staff have had a previous criminal record. This has potentially exposed young people to unsuitable adults. Some staff have not had regular supervision. For example, a new member of staff had only two supervision sessions in three months. This means that new staff are neither closely monitored nor supported. However, staff currently working in the home do feel very well supported by senior staff and the management team, including senior managers within the organisation. The manager has been in post since December 2015. He has not been registered before and is currently undergoing this process for this home. He is experienced in working in children's homes and has had management experience as a deputy previously. He is currently undertaking the level 5 diploma in leadership and management for residential childcare. The manager has good plans to develop the home and its staff. He is child focused and has a good working relationship with external agencies. All requirements and recommendations from the last inspection have been acted on. Most staff have worked in this home for less than a year. Nearly half the team is still working through the probation period. The manager said that he expects staff to enrol on the diploma as soon as they complete their probation. Nevertheless, staff are competent. Young people like the staff, and staff bring a wealth of different skills and experience to the home. For example, outdoor education, youth club work, and dance. Monitoring activities help the manager to have a better understanding of the home's strengths and weaknesses.	

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of looked after children is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place, however, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, 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 who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This 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 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

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