

Inspection report for Children's Home

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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The centre is operated and managed by a local authority. It is situated in large grounds on the edge of a town. The provision cares for boys and girls and is registered as a children's home. It is approved by the Secretary of State to provide secure accommodation for up to 43 young people, between 10 and 17 years of age.

The centre comprises of four residential units, a school and administration facilities. The site includes a swimming pool, gym and outdoor play areas on site for use by young people. Music and dance studios, external areas for horticulture and rooms which enable vocational training are also available.

There were 14 young people resident at the time of the inspection, all of who spoke with the inspectors.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

This was an announced full inspection to evaluate the quality of care and security at the centre. The key standards in the Every Child Matters outcome groups were inspected along with progress against the recommendations from the last inspection in September 2010.

The strengths demonstrated by the centre include arrangements for safeguarding and child protection, the auditing and quality assurance systems, anti-bullying work and the commitment to reducing the number of physical interventions. Areas for development identified during this inspection are the individual assessments of appropriate life skills training for young people and the planning for future educational placements.

Improvements since the last inspection

There were two recommendations made at the last inspection. The first was to ensure young people's welfare is promoted by a system that ensures medical emergency information is kept up to date. This has been fully addressed by combining records which ensures that the latest information is held in one place.

A further recommendation made was to ensure that there is a policy and procedural guidance to enable staff to assess and establish if young people can keep and administer their own medication. This has been fully addressed; a policy is in place and used at the centre.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people receive good information on healthy eating and living. They benefit from well balanced and nutritious meals. The menu helps young people understand the food on offer by indicating the healthy options and those which are suitable for those with dietary needs. The opportunity for the young people to try different types of healthy food is provided which is helpful.

Excellent arrangements are in place to ensure each young person is provided with meals that meet their individual needs whether for medical or cultural reasons. For example, young people wanting particularly spiced curries get these and those wishing to lose weight receive support from the chef, nursing and care staff to achieve their targets. To ensure the meals young people receive are as good as possible, the catering staff take account of the need to use heated trolleys to transport the food. They also ensure meals are not provided that could dry out quickly.

Young people see a nurse on admission who develops a health care plan. There are good systems in place to help staff assess individual health needs which include vulnerability, substance misuse, mental health wellbeing and any known risks. Young people are registered with a local health practice and a General Practitioner visits twice a week to undertake admission medicals and provide general clinics. All assessed health needs are met. One young person stated, 'nurses care and help us.'

The health care plan sets out the needs of young people and records all treatments provided, the progress made and any visits by the dentist or optician. This information is available in a medical discharge plan which young people take with them when they leave.

The centre has a good 'in possession' medications policy and associated procedure which helps young people to take responsibility for their own medication. The procedure includes an assessment by a multi-disciplinary team to ensure it is safe for young people to look after their own medication.

Young people's welfare is safeguarded by the centre's policies and procedures for administering medicines and records are well maintained and audited to ensure safe practice is followed. Medical information sheets are kept with the records ensuring up-to-date information can be easily accessed in an emergency. Secure storage is provided for medication in each unit office.

An excellent range of mental health input is available at the centre to support young people and advise the staff caring for them. External professionals contribute to the multi-disciplinary approach to health care at the centre, including psychiatry, psychology and counselling.

Staff at the home demonstrate a good understanding of substance abuse. External

support is available from a specialist substance misuse worker who, when needed, undertakes individual sessions with young people, attends meetings and helps staff to understand the issues young people may have.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people's privacy and dignity is respected at the centre. While there are some necessary restrictions, staff knock on bedroom doors before entering and ensure that young people are able to make phone calls in private should they wish. All confidential information is held securely in a locked cabinet within unit offices.

The complaints procedure is understood by young people and they are given written and verbal guidance about how to make a concern known. Complaints forms are easily accessible without the need to request them from staff and can be deposited in one of the many post boxes around the site. Responses to complaints are made promptly and a full record is held of any investigation and resolution. Records held show a decrease in the number of complaints made since the last inspection. Staff members were observed during the inspection to resolve a number of minor queries with young people, negating the need to access the formal complaint system. All resolved complaints are subject to external scrutiny and young people are confident that their concerns are dealt with. One young person stated, 'it's easy to complain and you get a quick answer'. Independent advocacy provision is available to the young people on a weekly basis and they are also able to raise any matters of concern through this channel.

The safeguarding practice at the centre is extremely good. There are good external links with child protection services and the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Any restraints which occur are made known to the Board and they are invited to review or audit any occurrence; this is good transparent practice. Safeguarding managers oversee the process of referrals and will contact the local authority designated officer for advice where required. Weekly and monthly review meetings are held of all physical interventions. All staff receive safeguarding training. The safeguarding managers also review restraints using the CCTV coverage and associated paperwork to identify any areas for practice development or trends which may have arisen.

There are some good relationships in place between staff and young people and good behaviour is promoted by the setting out of defined expectations and implementation of an incentive scheme. The scheme is understood by young people and enables them to achieve rewards for positive behaviour. The consistent application of the scheme across the centre ensures that all young people are able to achieve and they are treated fairly.

There has been a further reduction since the last inspection in the use of physical intervention. While there was a rise in occurrences for a period of one month, during the last six months, restraints, sanctions and separations have over the longer period declined. Although the number of young people accommodated during this period

has also declined, there is a concerted effort by staff to ensure the number of restraints continues to drop.

All staff undertake training in appropriate physical restraint techniques, however these are used sparingly and only when absolutely necessary. A restraint reduction policy has been implemented and this includes details of how any inappropriate behaviour should be addressed. Staff are increasingly using diversion and diffusion skills to manage negative behaviour and data on the number of occasions this occurs is beginning to be collected. Each young person has an individual risk management assessment plan which is reviewed regularly. The assessments inform staff as to any particular dangers a young person may pose and how to keep them safe.

Well maintained records are available of sanctions, restraints and separations. Young people are able to make comment on and sign the entries. There is comprehensive auditing of the records by senior internal and external managers.

Any bullying issues within the centre are addressed quickly and competently by staff. There is a zero tolerance approach and young people undertake an accredited anti-bullying programme. Young people say that bullying is not an issue and is taken seriously; one young person stated 'staff do not tolerate bullying and deal with it quickly'.

Health and safety and security matters are addressed robustly protecting the welfare of everybody at the centre. Checks of fire detection equipment and practice drills are undertaken regularly. Gas and electrical equipment is maintained under service level agreements. Up-to-date risk assessments are in place for all areas and aspects of the centre.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Support for young people is given according to their assessed needs. There are nominated key workers who carry out individual one-to-one sessions and areas of progress made or amendments which are required to plans of care are discussed on a weekly basis. Staff meetings held in each of the house units include a period of discussion relating to the individual requirements of the young people. This includes clarification of any specialist support required and that appropriate social interaction is being engaged in. Good use is made of external professionals such as psychologists and advocates to meet individual need.

Education is provided on site for all young people. Residential staff provide support by ensuring they are prepared for the school day and assisting them in classrooms and while undertaking any additional work. There are some good relationships between care and education staff which continue to develop with the formation of a 'learning day' programme.

The staff member who previously had an oversight of activities and the themed

enrichment weeks undertaken has now taken on a new role at the centre. This means that the responsibility for planning and delivery of sessions has passed to house unit care staff. The variety and frequency of leisure activity sessions have increased and individual staff demonstrate motivation to ensure young people are purposefully engaged. Good resources are available which enable staff to provide activities to engage with all young people's interests.

Themed weeks are undertaken and these combine education about a subject with the opportunity to experience new pursuits and ways of learning. Recently a health week was held, when young people were able to learn about keeping themselves well, exercise and healthy eating. These themed weeks are well received by young people.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Good admission processes are in place. Staff ensure all relevant information about young people is obtained when they arrive including any religious, cultural and ethnic needs. Staff at the previous placement, social workers and/or staff from the youth offending teams are contacted if necessary to update the information provided. This information along with the mental health and substance misuse assessments undertaken are used to identify any risks or challenges presented by young people and to formulate a placement plan.

Young people receive excellent help and support from staff during their admission and period of induction. Young people report that the staff do not judge them and are helpful when they arrive. There is a wide range of information available for young people on services provided by the home, this includes: information about the advocacy service which is available in seven different languages; a 'trust us to keep your information safe' leaflet; 'info4u' booklet; and a young person's guide in comic strip format. The local authority translation and interpreter services are also available to use if a young person requires these.

Good arrangements are in place to promote contact with families.

Initial planning meetings are used to collate an approved list of contacts for young people and to promote and encourage them towards maintaining contact. Young people say they are encouraged to write to people important to them and they appreciate the flexibility shown by staff to ensure they are able to make and receive telephone calls and still attend the activities they want. The home has access and rooms suitable for visitors who may have mobility issues.

The care planning systems are well managed. Each young person has a clear plan outlining the targets for specific work. This work is done either through one-to-one sessions or group work. Young people have a group work session each weekday and have allocated key workers who are involved in one-to-one sessions addressing their individual targets.

Excellent arrangements ensure a multi-disciplinary team reviews the progress of all young people at least monthly. For those young people receiving the support from the mental health service professionals there are weekly reviews of their progress. These reviews include professionals from all departments at the centre as well as the visiting health care professionals such as the community psychiatric nurse, specialist substance misuse worker, psychologist and psychiatrist.

Young people are given every encouragement to attend and participate in their own reviews. They state that staff provide them with good support and encouragement to say what they feel and want at the reviews. Consultation with young people is good. They have regular opportunities to put forward their views either collectively during unit meetings, in meetings with the catering staff or individually with their key worker.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are helped to prepare for leaving the home and to develop skills for adulthood. There is an independent living skills programme and teaching staff undertake a life skills session with young people each week. Key workers also undertake individual work with young people. Sessions cover topics such as budgeting, cleaning (hygiene), cooking to a budget for one person or a group, care of their own clothing and health and safety awareness. However, this work is not always focused on individual need and ability with no initial assessment of need undertaken or system in place to allocate specific areas of work.

Staff want to ensure all young people are able to achieve and are rewarded for their efforts. The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance accredit the life skills work and young people receive a certificate on completion of each piece of work.

Discharge planning starts when young people arrive at the home and progress is monitored through the monthly meetings and formal review systems. However, the planning is not always robust. For example, during a final review a discussion on future educational provision for a young person was held. Previous reviews had failed to clarify the educational plans in place.

Young people receive allowances and have access to a tuck shop. They are encouraged to consider healthy options from the items on offer. Consultation over the items available took place with young people and the stock held has been widened to include branded toiletries.

The centre provides a satisfactory living environment for young people that is domestic in nature and conducive to their positive care. Living areas are clean, tidy and well maintained. However, the building appears tired with signs of wear and tear and the living areas are reaching the end of their useful life. A new provision is being built on the site which will replace the existing facilities. This is due to be completed by the summer of 2011.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The aims and objectives of the centre are set out in a comprehensive Statement of Purpose. Information for young people has recently been amended and a range of formats are now available, including different languages and comic book style.

The management structure at the centre is working well. Both the safeguarding and case management teams are taking a front line role in the day-to-day running of the centre. They are well supported by a senior management team and the team leader post holders form an effective link between management and the care team. Senior managers have also been undertaking work relating to the building of the new secure provision. There is good support available from external managers.

There is a full staffing complement in post which enables appropriate staffing levels to be maintained ensuring the centre can operate safely. There have been no new appointments since the last inspection meaning a stable staff team is in place. The staff team has a suitable gender balance but is presently not as culturally diverse as managers would wish. The low occupancy levels currently experienced have given some staff opportunities to be involved in development work or more focused work with young people.

While there have been some cutbacks to training available to staff, the previous level available was exemplary which has meant the training programme is still comprehensive and meets staff members' needs. Many staff hold formal qualifications and all other staff are undertaking some form of qualification course. The training packages available assist staff to work effectively with young people.

Informal and formal support for staff is good. Planned supervision sessions are undertaken with additional support in place for less experienced staff. The completion rate of formal supervision is occurring at an average 90 per cent throughout the year. Some staff indicated to inspectors that they felt communication from the centre management was not as good as it had been previously. However, there are a number of methods in place to facilitate communication. There are a range of monthly and weekly bulletins, an opportunity for staff to ask questions to the quality assurance manager, who responds via a newsletter and 'meet the managers' sessions are held. All staff have also been given the opportunity to visit the new building and contribute by commenting on any area they feel requires amendment or enhancement. Weekly staff meetings are also held, however some of the minutes of these meetings indicated that some staff were not attending these regularly.

Regulation 33 visits are undertaken by an officer of the authority, all aspects of the centre's work is looked at and a report written on the findings. Any actions are made known to the centre manager and these are then followed up at the next visit. A comprehensive quality assurance system is in operation. Data is collected in relation

to all areas of work and a monthly management data report is compiled. This is used internally to identify and address any areas for development. External scrutiny and auditing of the data is also undertaken by a corporate parenting panel of the local authority.

All required records are held, either in hard copy or electronically. There is regular auditing of all records by managers who sign to indicate they have seen each record and also raise areas where enhancement of recording is required with the relevant staff. There are good records held in relation to young people which show all the development young people have made. Weekly meetings ensure that all young people's progress is reviewed and any areas which require intervention are identified. Information from these meetings is disseminated to all staff to ensure they have the knowledge to work with young people effectively.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. The care plans demonstrate how each young person's individual needs will be met and take account of individual cultural, medical and religious needs. A young person's awareness of diversity is raised in many ways throughout their stay. A themed week was held which covered the every child matters outcomes, enabling young people to think about every person's needs. Other topics covered recently include religion, discrimination and a disability awareness course, using wheelchairs to enable young people to experience the difficulties of access.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

- ensure future education placements of young people are considered from the start of a placement, with agreed actions being discussed at reviews and included in a leaving plan (NMS 6.2)
- ensure an assessment is undertaken to enable independent living skills work to focus on the identified needs of individual young people. (NMS 6.6 and 6.7)