

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC036917
Inspection date	26/09/2011
Inspector	Rossella Volpi
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	15/03/2011
--------------------------------	------------

© Crown copyright 2011

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home provides short and medium-term residential care for up to five young people of both sexes between the ages of 10 and 17. The home also undertakes outreach work with young people and their families, either to prevent the need for accommodation, or to support them once they have left the home.

This service is provided by a local authority.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

This service is well managed, well resourced and conducted with the best interest of young people in mind.

The quality of care offered is the strongest area. In particular, there are excellent relationships between staff and young people; excellent support; sensitive and skilled consideration of individual needs; of backgrounds and of the complexities of family intervention.

Young people achieve well academically and there is good ambition for them. As a result young people have done better than in previous placements and are very proud of their achievements. They are also engaged in activities that they enjoy, that involve them successfully with the wider community and contribute well to their overall positive outcomes and care plans.

There is excellent partnership working with the range of external professionals involved in the care of the young people, in their physical and mental health. This results in risks being professionally considered and minimised; it also enables a skilled assessment of whether the placement continues to be the best option for each young person. This is particularly important when there are set backs or increased risks and it is done promptly.

Placing social workers and other professionals very much value the way staff support young people; they acknowledge the positive outcomes and say that young people's experiences of the home, as related to them, are very good.

Areas for improvement relate to aspects of monitoring, to the completion of some important documents and to records regarding aspects of care planning reviews.

Areas for improvementStatutory 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
4 (2001)	produce a children's guide suitable for the younger age group (Regulation 4 (4))	01/01/2012
34 (2001)	maintain a system for reviewing the quality of care provided in the children's home that is consistent with the relevant regulation. Specifically ensure that the review reports on the quality of care and provides for consultation with children accommodated, their parents and placing authorities. (Regulation 34)	01/02/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure proper recording and review of the effectiveness of steps taken to support children's needs arising from gender, racial origin and cultural background (NMS 2.1)
- ensure prompt update of the Statement of Purpose and children's guide. (NMS 13.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are well supported to keep healthy; to contribute to the running of the home; to the wider community and to achieve consistently within their potential. For example, young people have passed exams and are following or considering further education courses of their choice. They are well motivated to do so and proud of their achievements, that are always celebrated. For some young people, in relation to their starting points when they arrived at the home, such success in education has been impressive.

Young people are well prepared for a successful transition to independence and adult life. There are individualised plans to support young people to acquire the necessary skills and confidence. Outreach work ensures appropriate help after the young person has moved to a more independent living environment. Some young people who have left and are now young adults have successfully obtained university degrees, followed specific courses that reflected their interests or talents or have

held steady jobs. Many are in touch with the staff team.

Staff appreciate the value of leisure pursuits as a means to enjoy life, aid academic achievement, develop resilience, confidence and a sense of self-worth. Young people benefit from involvement in a range of leisure activities that are carefully chosen with them to reflect their preferences and wishes and that contribute to their physical and mental well-being.

Young people's physical and emotional health needs are well met with specific arrangements to ensure that staff have access to a range of health professionals. This usually works very well, but there are set-backs and sometimes these are significant.

Young people understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and enjoy a variety of foods at the home, which reflect their preferences. Young people benefit also from exposure to less familiar foods, from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, they are supported in acquiring appreciation of many ways of preparing and cooking meals and in enhancing their potential for enjoying a wider range of foods.

Staff encourage young people's open discussion about sexual development and the relationship side of sex. Therefore, young people are offered the opportunity to gain the information and help they need, consistently with their age. Sensitive attention is given to the person's background and to the family's attitude to these matters.

Young people benefit from a staff team who are committed and successful in working with families. Families and other significant people are engaged in consultation; young people are well supported in constructive contact with those who play a significant role in their life. This contributes to young people's feeling of belonging, having a sense of their heritage and maintaining their culture.

Young people establish successful new relationships. They are encouraged to sustain friendships with peers outside the home, including reciprocal arrangements for visits. For example, on a recent holiday, the home funded each young person to take a friend.

Young people are proud of their contribution to the wider community. A recent example of this is their planning and organising of a fund raising event for a national charity, this is due to take place imminently.

Quality of care

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

Young people receive highly individualised and often imaginative support from a team of experienced and dedicated staff. Such support has been effective in reducing risks and in enabling good and, occasionally, excellent outcomes that meet young people's particular needs.

The excellence of the work is acknowledged by professional stakeholders who express complete confidence in the skills and practice of the staff team. Some representative comments are, for example: 'I am very satisfied; I feel that the young person is getting what is needed'. 'As a result of the excellent work done by this home, the young person has made a tremendous journey; the home worked extremely well with the young person, with the family and with me'. 'This home is truly excellent'. 'This was the best possible move for (the young person)'.

Young people, in relating their experiences to external professionals, said that the relationships between staff and young people are particularly good, for example, they are positive, constructive and based on trust.

Considering the obstacles faced, such success in the delivery of care is outstanding. Staff demonstrate consistently high aspirations for young people and work to ambitious plans. They rise to the challenges posed and do not give up on the young people, despite some serious set-backs at times.

Staff are vigorous in supporting young people to access education and health services. Young people engage in a variety of leisure pursuits, including holidays away and day trips. As part of these, for example, young people have pursued a range of challenging physical and sporting activities that they have not tried before. The enjoyment, pride and sense of attainment felt as a result, are well documented in pictures and achievement books. These also serve as useful reminders and tangible proof for the young people of their successes.

Young people's action plans are of high quality and involve them in the planning and review. The staff team have worked very well with the other professionals concerned in the young people's care plans and young people have responded to the care offered. As a result young people's needs have been holistically met.

A particular strength of the care provided is the ability to work in partnership with families. Care is inclusive and this contributes well to the achievement of a number of the desired outcomes for young people. There is good attention to needs arising from culture, race, and gender; for example, these are carefully discussed at staff meetings and inform the care plans. However, the specific work and its outcomes in meeting such needs are not always well recorded in the internal reviews or monthly reports. This poses a risk that the effectiveness of the work done in this area receives less scrutiny than what is done in relation the other individual needs.

Staff are alert to changes in young people's moods or behaviour that may indicate anxiety or worries and work hard so as to prevent such issues escalating. Young people are informed of how to complain both to staff and to external agencies. An effective complaints system is in place and where lessons are identified swift action is taken to improve service provision. There have been no formal complaints made since the previous inspection.

Young people are consulted on a variety of matters affecting their daily life and their future. For example, they contribute to their care plans and have a say on issues

such as activities, holidays, menus and resources. Young people's feelings have influenced matters such as choice of key workers, choice of colleges and contact arrangements, amongst others.

Young people live in a comfortable house that meets their needs. Efforts have been made to embellish the environment so as to convey a homely atmosphere and to ensure that people of different races and cultures see themselves reflected positively. The premises are clean and are furnished to a good standard. Young people personalise their rooms to reflect their interests and individual taste. There has been some extensive work carried out in the home, but this is now near completion and has been managed well to minimise disruption.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

This home is making a good contribution to safeguarding young people in their care. Young people themselves, in relating their experiences to external professionals, demonstrate that they feel safe and secure. Important contributors to this are the stability of the staff team; the way they interact with young people; the sensitive, but firm boundaries set and the good relationships established.

Competent and experienced staff manage child protection concerns promptly and effectively. All staff receive regular safeguarding training, which they feel meets their needs well.

Regular team meetings enable staff to review care plans and risk assessments. This is enhanced by the periodic attendance by a children's mental health professional that enables more in-depth analysis of some young people's highly risky behaviours. Additionally, access to a range of health professionals ensures that individual safer care needs are identified. Significant incidents are well managed with effective joint agency working, helping to ensure that young people are protected and any risk remaining is well understood and carefully considered.

Care plans and risk assessments clearly set out the levels of supervision required to keep individual young people safe. Staff have balanced well the need to, at times, exercise close supervision day and night, with that of respecting privacy and understanding when it is appropriate for young people to spend time alone. When young people have raised concerns that privacy principles were not adhered to, this has been investigated properly.

The close supervision by staff minimises the opportunities for bullying to occur and presently this is not an issue. The incidence of unauthorised absences has been high in the last few months, although it is now reducing. Staff work cooperatively with the young people's families and external agencies so as to minimise risks. There has been some success in establishing the reasons for young people being away from home and in working on this as part of the young person's care plan.

Older young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour and through discussion with staff sensible boundaries are agreed. The number of significant incidents has remained low and there has been no use of physical restraint in recent months. The manager has acted on a previous recommendation about the records of restraint, so that what must be recorded is now clear to all staff.

The use of sanctions has been low and there has been a steady decline in what had been considered, in the past, an over-reliance on financial sanctions. Instead, use of incentives and rewards has proved effective. There has been some use of sanctions as a consequence of young people's going missing. It is not always clear how this would contribute to them wanting to come back or to making them feel welcomed. However, this is under review.

Health and safety systems are effective and therefore they contribute well to ensuring that young people live in a safe environment. Work has been carried out to improve and update the building, which is now in its final stages. The manager of the home has worked with colleagues within the council to ensure that disruption is minimised and that young people are safeguarded during these works.

Leadership and management

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

Young people benefit from a home that is well managed and where care is provided by a stable and competent staff team, who know the young people well. There has been success in making staff feel valued, feel that they can make a difference and that their work is key to the present and future welfare of young people. Young people benefit from this as the staff team is enthusiastic, committed and convey genuine interest for their work. For example, staff said: 'I love my job and I feel as passionate today as I was when I first started'.

Staff work well with families and the other professionals involved in the care and safeguarding of young people. Their ability to continue to do so and to conduct all responsibilities of their roles well are regularly assessed. For example, there are formal supervision sessions and periodic appraisals. There is a programme of staff training that meets staff needs very well. Staff feel well guided and supported. For example, they said: 'I have the best manager'; 'the training is excellent'.

Lines of accountability are clear and external senior managers are visible and accessible. This and the open communication with the range of external professionals, ensure that practice remains open and accountable; it ensures that the high support that staff experience within the team is balanced by proper challenge and review.

Staff are sufficient in number to support young people and to work consistently with them. This is achieved by ensuring a minimum ratio of staff to young people and reviewing this on an individual basis, including the need for waking night staff.

Managers have been successful in creating an ethos of promoting equality and valuing diversity and ensuring that this is integral to the day-to-day work. Furthermore, the diversity in the staff team and the harmonious working relationships results in young people being exposed to a range of positive role models. These include, for example, both women and men in the team and staff from diverse cultural and racial background and life experiences.

Those using the service are clear of what to expect because of the verbal information they receive, because of the careful introductions, the outreach work and family involvement. The Statement of Purpose and children's guide are being updated, to ensure that they reflect the current service and the expectations of the new standards and regulations. However, the process has been protracted and, therefore, users have lacked the benefit of up to date documents for some months now. The children's guide is only geared to the older young people and not, therefore, to the entire age group that the service is set to cater for.

The management team effectively demonstrates its capacity for continuous improvement. For example, the manager takes inspections seriously and uses them to improve practice by acting on issues raised.

There are a number of means in place to monitor young people's welfare, which contribute to continuous improvement and to safeguarding. However, there is not an overall periodic appraisal of the quality of care, consistent with the expectations of the relevant regulation. It is, therefore, difficult to form a proper view of the overall strengths and development needs that managers have identified from the various separate monitoring exercises; their effectiveness as a tool to drive change is consequently limited.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.