

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC037762
Inspection date	16/07/2012
Inspector	David Coulter
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	02/02/2012
--------------------------------	------------

© Crown copyright 2012

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.

Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a local authority, purpose-built children's home that operates as a reception and assessment centre. The home is registered to accommodate seven young people of either gender between the ages of 12 and 17 years.

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 **adequate**.

The home has a remit within the local authority to undertake twelve week assessments of young people in care and to recommend appropriate placements that will effectively meet their care needs. The home's Statement of Purpose clearly states its aims and objectives. Over the last eighteen months young people have, after comprehensive assessments, successfully moved on to fostering, supported lodgings and specialist residential placements. However, due to a recent influx of unaccompanied young people seeking asylum in Portsmouth and a shortage of alternative placements, the home has had to respond by offering emergency accommodation. At the time of the inspection three of the six residents were unaccompanied young people. Such circumstances have clearly impacted on the operation of the home and its normal assessment activities have been compromised.

While staff are responding positively to the new circumstances they are clearly experiencing difficulties in meeting the needs of such a diverse group. New working practices and procedures are having to be developed in response to the diverse needs of the current resident group. Staff are clearly aware of the vulnerabilities of the young people in their care and are using risk assessments effectively to identify areas of potential concern associated with their behaviours. Although staff are successful in keeping young people safe in and around the home, they are experiencing great difficulty in positively influencing the often anti-social activities of young people when they are in the local community.

Evidence indicates the home's well motivated and experienced staff team are providing good quality care, however, the short-term nature of the home's provision

is not appropriate to meeting the long-term needs of the current residents and is compromising the home's intended aims and objectives as an assessment centre.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- review the home's Statement of Purpose to ensure it reflects the service being offered. (NMS 13)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The majority of the current residents have been admitted to the home as emergency placements following periods of uncertainty and insecurity in their lives. Young people are clearly benefiting from the safety and stability the home is providing and all are living full and active lives. While staff strive to establish meaningful relationships with the young people in their care communication difficulties and a reluctance on the part of a number to disclose personal information has made it extremely difficult for staff to establish meaningful and trusting relationships. However, they clearly receive support from each other and from friends in the local community.

Although there has been a reluctance on the part of young people to participate in medical assessments, all appear to benefit from good health and none are in receipt of regular medication. Young people are helped to assume responsibility for monitoring their own health and are provided with health related guidance relating to the consumption of alcohol and illicit substances. Young people are provided with a varied and nutritionally balanced diet which incorporates personal tastes and cultural requirements. One young person spoke in positive terms about both the quantity and quality of food on offer and was appreciative of the fact that staff would ensure his meals are appropriately spiced. Although staff offer opportunities for young people to undertake a range of sporting and recreational activities participation levels are currently poor.

Young people can acquire knowledge and skills through education and training placements that will assist them when seeking employment. One of the current residents has already secured a job and is being assisted in developing a range of social and life skills to help him move on to an independent living placement. Although arrangements have been made to provide the asylum seeking young people with access to college courses they have been reluctant to take up the offers.

Young people are helped to maintain contact with members of their families and staff will, if required assist with contact visits. By maintaining links with people who are

important to them, they are in a better position to access a support network when they leave care. The family circumstances of the young people seeking asylum are unclear and their desire to contact their family members is ambivalent.

Quality of care

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

In its function as an assessment centre the home has developed a comprehensive placement planning process that has proved extremely successful in helping young people identify needs relating to their health, education and the acquisition of social and life-skills. The information is used to identify both short and long-term development goals. However, the successful development of personal plans is dependent on the willingness of each young person to fully engage in the planning process. There has been a reluctance on the part of some young people to disclose personal information and submit to medical and educational assessments. As a consequence, staff have had to develop care plans based on limited information and continuously change them in the light of new information and changing circumstances.

Young people's views are sought by staff on all aspects of their lives and they are encouraged to assert their independence within the home by exercising choice over such things as the decoration of their rooms, food and participation in leisure activities. On admission all young people are made aware of how to raise concerns and make a complaint. No complaints have been made since the last inspection. The views of young people are regularly sought on all aspects of their care and a member of staff, fluent in Arabic, assists in discussions with the young people seeking asylum. The cultural and religious needs of each individual are identified and positively addressed. For example, in response to the expectations associated with Ramadan, staff ensure young people can access food both before sunrise and after sunset.

By the consistent application of a set of clear behavioural boundaries, based on respect, staff create a safe and nurturing environment in which young people can develop. Staff are clearly aware of the difficulties some young people experience in linking their behaviour with possible consequences and regularly discuss behavioural issues with them. There is an expectation that young people will tolerate each other and peacefully co-exist. Staff have a zero tolerance of any form of discriminatory behaviour and close supervision helps prevent any bullying. Praise and encouragement is used to reinforce positive behaviour and help young people gain confidence in their abilities. Physical interventions are never used and staff de-escalate challenging behaviours by the deployment of a range of tried and tested diversionary techniques.

In response to the diverse needs of the current residents staff have modified their working practices and discarded group activities in favour of individual approaches. By working on a one-to-one basis staff become conversant with the physical social and cultural needs of each individual and this allows them to act as effective

advocates. However, as a number of young people prefer to spend much of their time with associates in the local community, staff have found it extremely difficult in initiating activities that will lead to the development of meaningful relationships.

Staff promote the concept of self-discipline and there is an expectation that by spending their days productively, in either education or training, young people will develop a good work ethic. Although staff have been successful in assisting young people obtain educational placements the participation by current residents has been poor.

The home, is purpose built, and provides good quality accommodation that is subject to regular maintenance. Each young person has their own bedroom that is designated as their own 'personal space' that they can access at any time. As part of their independence training young people are expected to keep their rooms clean and tidy, a task some clearly find challenging. A recent spate of destructive behaviour has resulted in damage to the fabric of the home. Staff have been quick to address the problem and redecorate to ensure the quality of the accommodation is not compromised.

During their placements young people are encouraged to develop their own interests and hobbies. Recreational facilities and equipment can be accessed both within the home and local community.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The home offers a safe environment that is subject to regular health and safety checks and remains free of any unnecessary hazards. Access to the home is limited and all visitors have to report to staff. The fire alarm system is tested weekly and regular fire evacuations ensure staff and young people remain conversant with procedures. The home has, in recent times, experienced damage due to the destructive behaviour of a number of residents. The damage was fixed appropriately within a short timescale.

Young people are cared for by a stable group of experienced and well qualified staff who have worked with vulnerable young people for many years. All staff have been appropriately vetted and access regular training on safeguarding issues. Staff are aware of their individual responsibilities in regard to the reporting of any safeguarding worries or concerns and aim to ensure that young people stay safe both in the home and in the local community.

Safeguarding underpins all aspects of the care offered by the home and a good risk assessment process identifies the particular vulnerabilities and risks associated with each young person's behaviour and level of understanding. Staff work alongside young people to develop strategies that will minimise risk and keep them safe. For example, all young people are now provided with mobile phones to keep them in contact with staff when they are out in the local community. There are well

established procedures to report young people who go missing and staff liaise effectively with local police and young people's social workers. Although young people still go missing, appropriate staffing levels and effective supervision has been successful in determining where they are going and with whom they are associating.

Leadership and management

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

The home is managed by an experienced and knowledgeable manager who is supported by a stable staff team. Staff spoke in positive terms about the support they receive from the manager. Social workers and allied professionals recognise the expertise that exists within the team. Staff are committed and focused on having a positive impact on the lives of young people by identifying their needs and ensuring they move on to appropriate placements. The management team are clearly aware that the recent influx of emergency placements has deflected the home away from its primary function as an assessment facility and acknowledge it is not currently achieving the aims and objectives set out in its Statement of Purpose. However, staff are working effectively with parents, social workers and allied professionals to meet the complex needs of the young people in their care

Staffing levels are good and continuously monitored and adjusted to ensure young people are kept safe. Good lines of communication have been established between staff operating on different shifts and regular staff meetings aiding consistency in the delivery of care. The home does not use agency staff and young people receive consistent care from people who know them well. Regular supervision provides opportunities for individual staff to examine their practice and aid their professional development. Staff access training opportunities and keep abreast of developments within the childcare field and legislative changes.

The operation of the home is subject to ongoing monitoring by the manager and monthly visits are undertaken by a designated officer. Actions identified from monitoring systems are promptly addressed. Monitoring processes are robust and include tracking the progress of each young person. The home is appropriately resourced and evidence indicates it operates in the best interests of young people, however, the progress of the current residents is variable. While a number have responded positively to the support offered by staff and have progressed in specific areas of their lives a significant number are reluctant to engage and are actively involved in anti-social and self-destructive behaviours. Each young person's progress is reflected in their looked after children reviews. Confidential information relating to the care of young people is stored in appropriately secure facilities.

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.