

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC039038
Inspection date	17 February 2010
Inspector	Warren Clarke
Type of Inspection	Random

Date of last inspection	1 September 2009
--------------------------------	------------------

© Crown copyright 2010

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.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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 outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

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

This children's home provides residential care for young people with learning difficulties, aged 12 to under 18 years. The home is purpose-built and situated on the outskirts of a city. It is within easy reach of a range of community resources and public transport.

There are seven single bedrooms with en-suite bathroom facilities, two of which also have a small kitchenette to support young people moving towards independent living. There are two lounges, a dining area and a games room. The home additionally has staff sleeping-in and waking-night facilities and office accommodation. Young people have access to a large rear garden.

At the time of inspection seven young people, average age 16 years, were accommodated and present. They all contributed to the inspection either directly or through observations of how they are being looked after.

Summary

This unannounced random inspection assessed the home's performance against the national minimum standards relevant to the Every Child Matters outcome areas: staying safe and organisation. Where recommendations were made at the last inspection actions taken to address them and their effects were also examined.

This home provides excellent standards of care, which some of the young people recognise and compliment. The demeanour of the young people in the home is one of good humour that young people and staff create and this makes it a most agreeable place in which to live. There is only one area, related to frequency of fire drills, where some attention is needed to achieve full conformity to the national minimum standards.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection, three recommendations were made. These were to achieve greater detail in the record of menus, maintenance of the physical restraint records in accordance with the national minimum standards and clarity about young people's friends visiting them in the home.

The menus are now set out in much greater detail accurately reflecting the food provided and what each young person has actually consumed. This makes it easier to assess that they are provided a suitable and varied diet. A system has been introduced to record physical restraint, which complies to all the requirements of the national minimum standards and ensures that any young person who is restrained is able to have his or her comments recorded. The manager has made it clear to the young people that they are permitted to invite friends to visit the home, but that they need to let staff know beforehand so that it does not disrupt the other young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is not judged.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The sound practices that staff adopt, together with the exceptionally good resources provided, contribute effectively to the young people's privacy. Privacy is consistently promoted and maintained and is reflected in each young person being allocated his or her own bed sitting room all of which have en-suite facilities. These facilities enable the young people to withdraw from the rest of the group when they prefer time alone. Furthermore, any assistance that a young person needs with aspects of personal care can be given and conducted in private and thereby maintains her or his dignity. The young people's bedrooms being fitted with appropriate locks, subject to risk assessment, facilitate them in learning to keep their possessions safe. Promotion of privacy is aligned to a range of safe caring practices which, for instance, require staff to knock before entering a young person's bedroom and protocol about dress and behaviours to eliminate scope for embarrassment or misunderstandings. Strict adherence by staff to clear policies and guidelines ensures that young people's personal information is handled with utmost confidentiality.

Young people are effectively protected from poor quality service and unfair treatment by the fully compliant complaints procedure. Should the young people have concerns about how they are being looked after, the clear and acceptable complaints procedure enables them to present those concerns. The procedure is actively promoted to young people by staff, the visiting Children's Rights Officer and in a range of helpful documents including the Young People's Guide. Whilst there have been no recent complaints, past performance shows that complaints are taken seriously, efficiently considered and properly resolved. In light of the young people's difficulties, staff are especially careful in ensuring that any dissatisfaction they indicate gains full expression. Rigorous and regular scrutiny of the system by the manager and on behalf of the registered provider, also provides a potent safeguard for the young people.

Young people who offer a view say they experience no bullying within the home. Staff are effective and successful in fostering caring and kindness among the young people who enjoy good peer relationships. Some young people exhibit a high level of understanding and caring for others. The majority of the young people understand the concept and nature of bullying as result of anti-bullying initiatives promoted by the Local Authority, schools and in the home. Recognising that some of the young people might be vulnerable to bullying outside the home, staff encourage them to talk about such experiences so that they can equip them to avoid and, if necessary, deal appropriately with it.

Established and successfully tested arrangements are in place to respond to abuse or suspicion of it. These include child protection procedures which are in accord with those of the Local Safeguarding Children Board. Particular care is taken to ensure that all staff are at least adequately equipped to respond to any suspicion or allegation of abuse. Apart from such training being part of every member of staff's induction, they are provided periodic refresher training and care staff complete additional training in the protection of children with special needs. Young people feel safe in the home, comfortable with staff and have a good awareness of personal safety. Where there are concerns the registered person demonstrates that these are shared with the appropriate agencies. Such concerns are properly assessed and any necessary actions are taken.

Arrangements made for the event of a young person being missing or absent without permission, is allied to the sound multi-agency child protection system. Young people rarely absent themselves from the home, but where this has occurred, the local joint agencies protocol which takes full account of the young people's vulnerability, has been invoked successfully.

Staff work effectively to promote the young people's proper social and moral development. They are achieving this within the sound behaviour management policy system that takes account of each young person's circumstances. For example, the behaviour management system recognises that some young people may sometimes behave unacceptably as a symptom of their difficulties. Constructive individual strategies are firmly established to encourage and reinforce those young people to behave well. This successful approach that staff adopts enables the young people to modify or change unacceptable conduct. They do so from being helped to realise that this is right rather than in response to imposition of punitive measures. Some young people who recognise that they occasionally behave unacceptably express confidence in staff ability to treat them fairly, providing reassurance whilst exercising sufficient firmness. Where on occasions staff have had to physically restrain a young person, their training has enabled them to do so safely.

An effective range of health and safety measures informed by risk assessments are effective to safeguard the young people and staff from harm. Staff demonstrate that the system that underpins this is sufficiently robust to identify potential hazards and ensure that where they exist, action is taken to remove or control them. This is demonstrated in areas such as fire safety and protection of the young people from access to substances harmful to health. Staff use risk assessment and health and safety measures to enable the young people to live full and active lives, taking controlled risks where this is necessary to promote normal development. However, only two fire drills have been conducted during the last 12 months. This is insufficient to ensure that young people most recently admitted to the home become familiar with fire evacuation procedure.

A range of robust measures is established to protect the young people from potential abusers. All staff are thoroughly vetted to ascertain their suitability to look after children and young people. This includes taking up references and completing criminal record and other barring checks. All the young people are thriving in the home. Some conveyed their genuine happiness living in this environment and fondness for the staff with whom they feel safe. A minority of young people cite the very good security arrangements that protect them from intruders as being among the things that cause them to feel safe in the home. For some young people their only concern is that at some stage they will have to leave the home to live elsewhere.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is not judged.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is not judged.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is not judged.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

A clear set of working principles underpins the high aspirations that the registered persons have for the care of the young people and which are successfully translated into practice. This is set out in the Statement of Purpose which is up to date and accurately reflects the methods used in the care of the young people and the facilities and services to support this. Young people are helped to understand how the home is run, what is expected of them and what they may expect in the way they are looked after. This is facilitated by the children's guide, which summarises the Statement of Purpose and presents it in a format appropriate to the young people's age and understanding. The young people are exceptionally settled in the home, comfortable and behave with a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Excellent management and leadership of the home ensure there is a stable care staff team, sufficient in number, experience and qualifications. This together with very good facilities cause a consistently competent approach to meeting the young people's needs and the evident progress they are making. All members of the management team have the relevant experience necessary for their posts and lead less experienced staff in meeting the needs of the young people competently. Other care staff members collectively hold qualifications that exceed the ratio laid down in the national minimum standards.

The registered persons make sound arrangements to maintain continuity of management and leadership of the home in the event of the manager's absence. In this event, the experienced and well qualified senior team overseen by the service manager ensures in all circumstances there is little or no disruption to the young people's high standards of care. Similarly, the adaptability and sometimes flexible approach required to meet the young people's needs continues to be achieved by the skilled staff team and their effective communication. This includes formal handover sessions at the end and beginning of shifts and regular staff meetings. The young people believe they are always looked after very well by all staff.

The registered person continues to make all the necessary provision for the support, training and development that staff need to sustain their performance in looking after the young people to the excellent standard achieved. This is reflected in the sound staff induction, and foundation and ongoing in-service training programmes, including sponsorship for some staff to undertake professional social work training. All care staff have regular one-to-one supervision. Combined, these measures equip staff to approach the care of the young people with the confidence, purpose and professionalism required.

The comprehensive system of monitoring the operation of the home is well-established and successful in promoting and safeguarding the welfare of the young people. This monitoring is conducted by the manager and separately by the registered provider's other representatives. It consistently shows that the home is run in accordance with its Statement of Purpose and the national minimum standards. The monitoring is rigorous and critical. For example, a recent report identified a shortfall in the recording and accounting of financial sanctions which have been imposed on young people. This matter has been addressed demonstrating the effectiveness of the management system to remedy deficits. Importantly, those responsible for the home consistently demonstrate in the annual development plan, a clear strategy to ensure that the young people continue to enjoy excellent standards of care.

Young people are being provided care that responds precisely to their individual needs. This is apparent from their records which are maintained on an individual basis and contain all the information necessary to inform planning and monitoring of their care. The records are securely

stored and are organised such as to facilitate young people's contribution and easy access should they opt to see them.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

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

- ensure at least four fire drills, including evacuation of children and staff from the building and fire drills held at night, take place in a 12 month period and are recorded (NMS 26.8).