

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC040633
Inspection date	29/09/2011
Inspector	Angus Mackay
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	23/02/2011
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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 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

This is a six-bedded home which is owned and managed by a local authority. The service is registered for six children, from the ages of six to under 14, at any one time. The service usually accommodates up to five children and the sixth admission would be at the manager's discretion. The home may accommodate children with emotional and /or behavioural or learning difficulties.

Children have access to play and art therapy which occur off site. Children attend school but can be educated within the home, which has a space dedicated for use as a classroom or for homework.

This home provides medium- to long-term care. The principles and values of this service are set out in the Statement of Purpose.

Overall effectiveness

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

Children live in a home which has outstanding management producing a vibrant happy environment for them. Schools, social workers, mental health workers and other professionals enjoy successful working engagements with the home describing them as fantastic, going more than the extra mile, a pleasure to work with. Children benefit from these positive engagements enjoying a wide range of interesting and helpful services addressed at their presenting problems and interests.

Staff are highly skilled at working with extreme behaviours and provide an excellent level of therapeutic care to children. Staff are exceptional at providing exciting and educational activities which children enthusiastically participate in. Children are aided to attend school and have excellent attendance rates and high levels of achievement. Blockages to children's progression are robustly challenged by the managers. An external psychologist commented that managers are, 'very child-centred, hold the child in mind, think of the needs of the group and staff and will stick their necks out for this'.

The home is excellent at meeting children's cultural and religious needs, seeking specialist advice where necessary and learning from children's families. Children are helped to celebrate their backgrounds and learn in dynamic ways about other beliefs and cultures. Families and friends are welcomed into the home and aid children in developing their identity.

Managers ensure that children live in a safe environment with highly-trained and well-supported staff. They employ superb monitoring and evaluation of all aspects of the service, looking to maximise staff performance and children's success. Children are engaged positively in many aspects of the home including recruitment. Whilst they are involved before, during and after their care planning meetings they have little understanding of this and it is recommended they read their files and add personal statements.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children read their files and add personal statements. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children make tremendous progress in attendance and achievement at school. They are well prepared and supported by staff to arrive at school able to engage in the programme. School reports show children are engaging and achieving at school, making progress in all areas. Staff are creative and innovative in creating learning experiences for the children outside of school to enhance their attainment and knowledge. Recent contacts have involved the local library, youth offending workers, police and fire brigade in events designed to enhance the safety, awareness and education of the children. The head-teacher from one school described how well the home worked with the school and how well they prepared the child for school and supported him in homework and by attendance at all events. He went on to say, 'I would add it is a pleasure working with them, they are proactive and always let us know everything which is going on in his life. He is very positive about the staff and we could not be so successful without them.'

Social workers say that the home is excellent at work on culture and identity. The home excels at aiding children to develop a positive self-view and understanding of their background. They are provided with many opportunities to succeed and staff are innovative in producing well-recorded fun events to allow this to occur. Children are aided to construct life stories which are beautifully illustrated and celebrate their cultural roots, family contacts and religion. The life stories are exceptionally detailed and allow children to gain an understanding of difficult and often painful experiences as well as celebrate the positive events. Children are encouraged to celebrate their cultural roots and share this with staff and other children, building up their understanding of their background and their self-esteem. Children are cared for by highly-skilled staff who are supported excellently by their managers in creating a therapeutic environment. The child and adolescent mental health service describe

staff as providing a high level of very specialist therapeutic care to the children. Children benefit from this approach by having what one social worker described as, 'staff skilled at nurturing but also at controlling very difficult behaviour, which is a real skill.' Records, review notes and social workers confirm the progress children make in all areas of their development.

Children are aided in developing or maintaining links with their families. Staff work closely with families developing an understanding of personal care and religious requirements in hygiene and practice. One social worker described how contact had not been happening due to a parent's medical condition and described how when the child moved to the home they prioritised this. She described the home as going beyond what could be expected to bring the parent to the home and make sure the contact occurred. Social workers comment on how open the home is and how involved they get the children in the local community. Children and staff have numerous stories pictures and records of events, including fund raising, charity donations and simple fun days out to evidence this.

All social workers commented that the home is exceptionally proactive with health care ensuring the children have all medical and health needs met. Children are encouraged and assisted by staff to attend all health appointments with general practitioner, dentist and optician. Staff run creative health programmes focussing on good eating and exercise. Through their monitoring exercises managers track children's attendance at health appointments and monitor their height and weight gains ensuring they are in line with expected development. Staff also work closely with social workers on complex disclosure work, to help children address past events and stay safe. Children attend art and play therapy which aids in their building up emotional resilience.

Staff maintain links with social workers and children who have moved on and with their families to aid in transition work. One parent described the excellent work done with her son and how the home has maintained contact with her and him since he left. She described how the home had aided her as well as her son saying, 'they have helped me massively and helped my son make loads of progress'.

Quality of care

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

Children enjoy living in a beautiful home which is bright, cheerful and full of photographic reminders of their achievements, holidays and activities they are planning. Staff engage them in maintaining a warm family environment by helping them to personalise their own bedrooms and encouraging them to respect the home and others in it. Staff are extremely creative in engaging children in activities which are fun, educational and develop a community awareness. For example they have engaged in an extensive project on protecting their environment which has indirectly led to growing their own vegetables, recycling and protecting hedgehogs amongst other things. Children have extensive space within the building to allow for different activities to take place which recognises age and interest differences. The extensive

grounds are very well maintained and include play space as well as their vegetable gardens.

Children are encouraged to cultivate local friendships and to bring friends and family to the home. They enjoy attendance at local clubs, such as cubs, scouts, football and youth clubs, and have friends come and stay overnight at their home. Meal times are pleasant relaxed occasions where staff and children enjoy each others company and staff display sensitivity to personal and cultural choices of food. Staff utilise all occasions to broaden children's knowledge of other countries, cultures and religion. Meal time discussions have brought an awareness of fasting in religions and differing ways of preparing food which are recorded in the themes project and children recalled over dinner. Care plans are exceptionally well maintained and outline clear plans for each child's development which staff implement.

Children receive outstanding assistance from the home in coming to an understanding about their often very complex and extreme behaviours. Where appropriate, children work with external health professionals, including mental health teams. Staff receive therapeutic support in understanding children's behaviours and aiding their work from the child and adolescent mental health service. The therapists say that the staff team, and in particular the two senior managers, have excellent skills at delivering therapeutic work with children.

Staff actively strive for advancement in children's education in line with their potential and their personal ambitions. One young person had expressed a desire to progress to a mainstream school which the home and social worker were strenuously addressing with his current school. Managers ensure that bullying in school is addressed appropriately and that sanctions from schools are appropriate and fair. During the inspection a highly-skilled intervention with a child angry about school was witnessed which led to positive outcomes for him. He displayed a capacity to negotiate and compromise in this situation and agree to a sanction, a deferred reward and understanding of complex, and sometimes seemingly unfair, decisions.

Children are treated with respect by staff who seek to understand their behaviours and work with them to gain positive resolutions. Child and adolescent mental health workers say that the home works with children with severe attachment issues and the home have held children no other home they know could have done. Where staff have gaps in their knowledge about children's backgrounds, managers seek advice and training from families or professionals with that knowledge. This has led to excellent input to children from Traveller backgrounds and particular religious beliefs. Children benefit from the increased awareness of their behaviours and care and religious needs which has enhanced their care and reduced conflicts.

Children are fully engaged in providing comments on line for their reviews and receive a child-friendly feedback form after the meeting. Staff record discussions with young people about their choices, preferences and comments on their care plans. Children can outline plans for their future and are clear that staff support them and discuss this with them but they remain unclear about what a care plan is. It is recommended that they sign and comment on their plan to which staff can then

refer them back.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children live in a home where they feel safe, trust the managers and staff and are successfully engaged in addressing their relationship difficulties. Relationships between staff and children show mutual respect and appropriate warmth and affection. Staff and children work closely together with assistance from therapists to help children to reflect and develop insight into current or past behaviours and experiences. Children benefit from this support and do not go missing from the home. Bullying is addressed very skilfully engaging children in discussion and resolution of any perceived bullying at the earliest point. Children confirm that they feel protected from bullying by staff and by other children. Children have comprehensive risk assessments which seek to expand their boundaries in a safe manner which takes account of their age and capabilities. One child excitedly described how he was being trusted to go to the shop by himself and how much he liked this trust.

Children are looked after by staff who receive regular and enhanced training on child protection and safeguarding. Where specific issues arise with the young people expert guidance or training is sought to aid in keeping the children safe. For example, children placing themselves at risk received input from the local fire brigade and from the youth justice workers on issues including smoking hazards, stranger danger and victim empathy.

Children are cared for by a staff team which is evenly mixed in terms of gender and has mixed ages which aids them in working through issues from past life experiences within their families. Staff are subject to rigorous recruitment processes to ensure the safety of the children. Children are involved in the recruitment of staff and one confirmed that his choices were supported by the choices of the recruitment panel, giving him confidence in the appropriateness of those chosen.

Children are rarely restrained with staff using other techniques to diffuse situations. Staff utilise a therapeutic approach to difficult behaviour seeking an understanding of the reasons for the behaviour, including differing cultural norms. Staff then use this to develop different intervention techniques reducing the incidences of restraint or need for sanctions. Behaviours, sanctions, restraints and incidents are closely monitored for patterns allowing early interventions and clear identifying of triggers. Staff vary programmes and, where necessary, seek external advice from therapists or families to aid them at arriving at successful interventions to protect the children. Recently staff gained insight through specialist training into one child's seemingly aggressive tone which was related to his cultural background. This advice allowed staff to approach this in a non-confrontational manner leading to positive outcomes for the child.

Children's safety in the home is enhanced by regular testing of electrical, gas and fire equipment. Health and safety guidelines are followed and there are extensive risk assessments in place to safeguard children and staff. Extensive decoration and external repairs were being conducted and the safety of the children was ensured by comprehensive risk assessments enforced by the staff team.

Leadership and management

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

Young people live in a home where highly active staff exhibit enthusiasm and commitment generated by excellent supervision, guidance and support from their managers. Staff are empowered and encouraged by managers to display innovation and creativity in meeting the needs of the young people. For example, one member of staff has piloted themed months. These engage children and staff working together on projects which enhance cultural awareness, respect for others, team work and wide ranging educational benefits in a fun way. A recent themed month on food included trips to Notting Hill Carnival and a local Moslem festival provoking discussion about different cultures, their food and what lay behind their celebrations. Children had fun and learning which is reinforced by visual displays in the home.

Young people have confidence in the highly-skilled managers of the home and enjoy care from well-qualified, highly-motivated staff. Managers enjoy the respect of the staff and children and are highly regarded by external professionals. All staff are qualified or are in the process of qualifying to a minimum Children and Young People's Workforce Diploma qualification at level 3 or an equivalent. Managers place high value on appropriate training and encourage staff to undertake enhanced training which is used to improve the interactions with the children. Staff share learning with the team and apply it in work with the young people. A recent example from staff studying a Foundation Degree in Therapeutic Child Care led to a better understanding of one child's behaviour and developed interventions which diffused difficult situations.

Managers make outstanding use of monitoring information and engage staff in gathering this and using it to improve practice. The monitoring in line with Regulation 34 of the Children's Homes Regulations 2011 gathers a broader range of information than specified in the regulation and is a powerful management tool used to drive forward good practice. Managers and staff use easy-to-see graphic displays to track staff work and children's behaviours, allowing them to pick up patterns at an early point and intervene appropriately.

Managers have an outstanding understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their service which are very fully documented in their overall development plan. Children are at the core of the plan which is written in line with guidance on national minimum standards. The service is described by the children and adolescent mental health service as, 'a tremendous resource which provides a service which is priceless'. Managers have met all previous recommendations, enhancing the safety of the children and improving the quality of recording. Managers are proactive in

building excellent community relations, enhancing the safety of children. Children are involved in many community activities, encouraging them to think of others and make a positive contribution. For example, they have been successful in donating toys to children, clothes to homeless people and raising funds for local and national charities.

Equality and diversity practice is **outstanding**.