

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	08/08/2016
Unique reference number	SC043255
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered person	Lincolnshire County Council
Registered person address	Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YL
Responsible individual	Janice Spencer
Registered manager	Cynthia Mountcastle
Inspector	Tracy Murty

Inspection date	08/08/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Improved effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the home contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding

SC043255

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is outstanding because:

- From their starting points, young people make exceptional progress in all areas of their lives. They achieve well in relation to their education, they enjoy positive contact with family and friends, and they have an excellent range of social activities provided.
- Staff place significant value on education for all young people. They work closely and very proactively with education providers within the county to ensure that all young people have formal educational placements. Attendance is excellent and young people complete their secondary education and go on to further education and vocational courses. They are exceptionally well prepared and motivated to achieve to their full potential.
- The home is run by an extremely aspirational and supportive registered manager. She leads a team of highly competent and skilled staff who place the needs of young people at the centre of all their work. Staff feel highly valued and have their professional development needs considered and met to an excellent level.
- Placement stability in this home is excellent. This is largely attributable to the impressive matching consideration undertaken by managers and staff. They ensure that placements are only agreed if the needs of a young person can be met. They also consider fully the views of those young people already placed in the home.
- Staff ensure that young people are protected from harm at all times. There have been no missing from care incidents, and detailed and regularly updated risk assessments support staff to provide individualised care to young people.
- Young people grow in confidence and have increased self-worth because of the commendable care and support provided to them by the staff team. Preparation for moving to independence is detailed and thorough. Staff also enable young people to take age-appropriate risks over time, further increasing their chances of making a successful transition to adult life.
- Two minor shortfalls have been identified as a result of this inspection. These relate to local authority care plans and the role of the designated officer. There have been no adverse impacts on young people or their experiences or progress as a result of these shortfalls.

What does the children's home need to do to improve?

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

- Ensure that all children's case records are kept up to date. This is with specific reference to local authority care plans. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)
- Ensure that the local authority has clear arrangements in place for the management and oversight of allegations against people who work with children. ('Guide to children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 44, paragraph 9.18)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The home is registered to provide care and accommodation to up to six children and young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is owned and run by the local authority.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
09/02/2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
10/11/2015	Full	Outstanding
19/01/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
24/06/2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
Young people receive highly personalised care and support from a very dedicated and skilled staff team in this home. From their starting points, they make significant progress in all areas of their lives. Placement stability is excellent and enables young people to form and sustain lasting and positive relationships, which greatly assists them in relation to their social skills. Staff and managers take great pride in the progress that young people make during their time living in this home. They celebrate their successes every day, no matter how small. The home is decorated and furnished to a very high standard. A significant amount of work has recently been completed to replace all windows and the front door. In addition, bathrooms have been extensively renovated. Young people's bedrooms have also been updated and are highly personalised and welcoming. Young people form very strong and positive relationships with staff and managers. They respond positively to the clear and fair boundaries put in place to protect them. They have a clear and positive understanding of the care and support provided to them. They read their files and comment on them regularly. They have excellent relationships with their key workers and use key work and other direct work sessions to consider their specific needs and difficulties. For one young person who is due to move out soon, the relationship with his key worker has been hugely important. When going to look at his new accommodation, the young person wanted his key worker to go with him, stating: 'If she doesn't like the new place, then I won't.' This reflects the bonds formed between young people and staff, and the quality of their relationships with each other. Young people make excellent progress in relation to their education. For some, their previous attendance and engagement were poor. Since moving to this home, their attendance is 100% and they achieve extremely well. All professionals and agencies contacted during this inspection praised the staff and their ethos of promoting education for all young people. A member of staff has the lead for ensuring that full background information is gathered for each young person relating to their educational histories. Excellent systems are in place for monitoring and tracking all relevant documentation and plans. Young people move on to suitable further education or vocational courses in the local area. They have aspirations for their future and learn the value of education. They take huge pride in their achievements in education, with staff regularly celebrating their successes. The health needs of young people are consistently well met. For some, previous engagement with such services as dentists was very sporadic. The staff team	

provides excellent emotional support to young people to overcome such anxieties. This was evident during this inspection, with staff working closely and sensitively to encourage one young person to attend a dental appointment. Their skills and patience enable young people to feel secure in addressing such anxieties, and lead to excellent outcomes for them. Staff and managers also work very closely with the designated looked after children's nurse. She visits the home every month, stays for the evening meal and engages with young people about any health-related issues or needs they may have. She praises the staff team and managers for their total commitment to meeting the holistic health needs of the young people, stating: 'This home is one of the top ones I visit. They provide excellent care and support, and there is always a lovely atmosphere between staff and young people.'

A key strength of this home is how well managers and staff support young people with very complex emotional and psychological issues. From the point of referral, managers take considerable time to read local authority case files, undertake observation visits of young people in their current placements and discuss their needs with the staff team. Managers proactively seek advice and guidance from health professionals, and work very closely with parents and carers. This leads to highly personalised care and support being provided.

Young people are central to the care and support provided to them. They feel included in all aspects of their care and fully understand all plans and risk assessments relating to them. One local authority care plan considered during this inspection is out of date and needs to be updated to clearly reflect the current placement and carers' details. This minor shortfall has had no adverse impact on young people because all other plans and documentation are up to date and relevant.

There have been no formal complaints made for a considerable period of time by young people or others. This reflects their confidence and ability to speak with staff and managers, assured that any concerns or issues will be resolved quickly and fairly. Young people and staff produce a monthly publication for the home. This highly imaginative monthly journal demonstrates the total inclusion of young people in all aspects of their care, and how strongly their voice influences the running of the home.

Transition planning for young people is excellent. Staff and managers advocate strongly and positively to ensure that young people receive well-planned and appropriate services for when they move on from this home. A recent example of this relates to one young person who is due to move out in the near future. His key worker and the registered manager have worked tirelessly with leaving care and adult accommodation providers to ensure that the right services and support are in place. They prepare young people excellently for their future placements. This includes undertaking independence skills work with them from an early stage in their placements. They encourage young people to make their own meals, manage their own money, learn how to use public transport and meet their

personal care needs. They also fully consider the needs of young people in relation to their current placements, and work with all involved agencies to secure a move to a foster placement or a return to parents, when appropriate.

Young people enjoy very positive and regular contact with family members and others. Staff demonstrate commendable understanding and insight regarding young people's complex relationship issues, and they ensure that agreed contact plans are adhered to. Staff and managers are very skilled and committed to working with parents and carers. As one parent commented, 'My child loves it there as they know that everything the staff do, they are supporting both of us. They are a relaxed and friendly bunch of staff who my child can talk to, as can I.'

Another key strength of the care and support provided to young people relates to the extensive range of social activities and experiences provided. Young people engage in the Duke of Edinburgh's awards, nationally accredited arts awards, charity fundraising events and forest garden projects with a member of staff in the grounds of the home. Such imaginative activities provide young people with opportunities that they may never have experienced before. Their confidence increases and they develop a real and positive sense of belonging to the local and wider community. As one professional involved with the home stated, 'The staff work hard to provide an environment in which the young people can flourish. They work in a holistic, multi-agency way.'

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Outstanding
Staff and managers demonstrate excellent awareness and understanding of the complex needs of each young person living in this home. This is through careful planning for new placements, comprehensive information gathering before placements start and the ongoing diligence of the staff team. Staff devise and implement detailed risk assessments for young people, reflecting the actual and potential concerns relating to them. Such assessments are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that they remain relevant. Young people report feeling fully consulted about potential new placements to the home, with several confirming that staff and managers talk to them about possible new admissions. The registered manager seeks to make only planned admissions whenever possible, in order to consider the needs of current young people and the potential impact of a new placement. This has led to very well-planned and matched placements, with incidents of risk being minimised through excellent forward planning.	

Young people receive close support and supervision, but also have opportunities to develop and increase their independence skills. This leads to young people being able to take age-appropriate risks in such areas as increased time away from the home or use of public transport. Staff and managers show commendable confidence and skill in working with young people to increase their ability to undertake age-appropriate activities, in line with agreed risk assessments. Such excellent practices mean that young people feel valued and learn the necessary skills for when they move to adult services. One young person has been supported to use public transport alone over recent months in preparation for a move to supported accommodation. Another young person regularly goes into town alone, always returning at the agreed time. By giving young people such freedoms and responsibilities over time, they feel valued and report not wanting to break the trust that the staff have placed in them.

There have been no missing from care incidents reported for some considerable time at this home. This reflects the detailed and highly comprehensive risk assessments, behaviour management plans and support provided for young people. As young people's confidence increases and they have more personal responsibility for their own safety, they respond extremely positively and feel secure with the staff team. There are no current concerns for any young person in relation to sexual exploitation or radicalisation. The manager ensures that staff have received recent and relevant training in such areas, in order that they can respond to any signs or concerns in a skilled manner.

Young people know about and understand their behaviour management and support plans. Such plans reflect the actual and potential responses of young people to situations, and help staff to de-escalate potentially risky behaviours with young people at an early stage. Staff demonstrate great skill in how they respond to young people who may be experiencing difficulties in regulating their emotional state. When physical restraint is used, young people and staff reflect on their use after each intervention. As one young person said about moving to this home, 'It has helped me to learn to behave and manage my actions better.'

The regular young people's meetings and the monthly journals produced by young people enable staff and young people to consider any concerning behaviours, opinions or safety issues. A recent meeting considered stealing, with a local police community support officer visiting the home to discuss with young people the potential outcomes from stealing. Such activities and focused discussions provide young people with an insight into how any actual or potential risky or criminal behaviours could impact on their lives and others.

The selection and recruitment of staff is robust, thorough and prevents unsuitable adults from being able to work with vulnerable children and young people. Any allegations about staff are responded to promptly by managers and shared with the designated officer in the local authority. A recent allegation was responded to

very well by the registered manager. Records are detailed and reflect that all necessary policies and procedures were followed. A strategy meeting was held, chaired by the designated officer, but that person has failed to provide the registered manager with clear and detailed confirmation of the outcome of the meeting. There has been no adverse impact on either young people or staff as a result of this shortfall, but the designated officer needs to ensure that they complete any agreed tasks and provide a clear outcome as soon as possible.

Research-informed practice continues to be firmly embedded in the home and is leading to exceptional experiences for young people. Signs of safety and social pedagogy intervention models continue to be used within the home by staff, with young people also clearly embracing such models and understanding how they enable staff to support them with their complex needs.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
The registered manager of this home is an inspirational and dynamic leader. She provides excellent support to both staff and young people. She sets very high expectations for both staff and young people and is clearly very highly regarded. Her highly effective management has strongly influenced the excellent outcomes and progress made by young people. She is supported by an equally committed and inspirational deputy manager, and a highly skilled and dedicated staff team. All agencies contacted during this inspection commented on the very child-centred practice of staff and managers. The views of all involved agencies can be summed up by this one professional: 'I believe the services provided at this home strive to achieve excellency every day with their approach to young people and consideration of their best interests.' Managers diligently consider all potential new placements. They will not consider a new admission unless they and the staff feel able to meet the young person's identified needs. They also fully consider the needs and views of young people already resident in the home. Matching of needs is excellent and has led to a very settled and supportive group of young people. The progress of young people is well known and recorded by staff and managers. Staff demonstrate commendable knowledge of the young people and insight into the progress they have made since moving to this home. They take great pride and satisfaction in the achievements of young people, and reward and praise them on a daily basis. Management monitoring and tracking systems in the home are excellent. The registered and deputy managers work extremely closely and ensure that all	

necessary checks and monitoring systems work to provide detailed and clear evidence of the outcomes made by young people. A senior member of staff also assists in the production of management reports each month. The statement of purpose for the home is clear, and its aims and objectives are understood by placing social workers and involved agencies.

Staff report feeling highly valued and extremely well supported by managers. They receive regular and good-quality supervision and annual appraisals. Succession planning for residential staff at this home and within the local authority has commenced. This is in order to consider future support needs for all staff, particularly those nearing retirement age. Managers at this home have fully embraced this innovative work and have plans to consider it with staff at the next team meeting. There is also a strong commitment from the registered manager to consider the future management and staffing arrangements for this home. This includes enabling staff to take students on placement, completing training in Theraplay, and working with senior managers in the authority and local universities to consider potential sources of residential staff.

Partnership working is highly valued and used by managers and staff in this home. Monthly multi-agency meetings take place to consider the current and changing needs of each young person. These meetings include placing social workers, child and adolescent mental health service staff, police, and looked after children and young people's nurses. The meetings enable all involved agencies to consider agreed actions from previous meetings, and to ensure that young people's changing needs are met at all times. The meetings are innovative and very well received by involved agencies.

Managers at this home act as very strong and positive advocates for young people. They chase and challenge agencies and professionals for any missing information or when they do not feel that a young person's needs are being met. Such commitment is then supported by the visits each month of the independent advocate, who spends time with young people in the home. Managers have also forged very positive relationships with the local community over the years. Young people feel very much part of the local community and access resources with confidence. Managers encouraged young people to take part in a recent charity event, with three young people and staff taking part in a race for a cancer charity. Such activities and engagement of young people reflect the manager's commitment to including the home and young people in local events.

Case records reflect well the holistic needs of young people and how those needs have been and will be met. Young people read their files and key documents and make comments on them. Recent changes have been made to the looked after children review of arrangements reports by the local authority. The reports are now written in a very child/young person-friendly format. They provide real meaning and value, in easy to understand language.

The home has a detailed development plan in place. This sets out the aims of the manager for the service in the short, medium and long term. It fully includes the wishes and views of young people. A vegetable plot has recently been established in the grounds of the home by staff and young people. Young people are growing pumpkins for Halloween, with this initiative forming part of the home's development plan.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people, and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of children looked after is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place. However, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or that result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference that adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This 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 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'.

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