

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC060118
Inspector	Heather Chaplin
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Five Rivers Child Care Limited
Registered person address	47 Bedwin Street SALISBURY SP1 3UT

Responsible individual	Richard Marshall Cross
Registered manager	Farraday Lisa Crews
Date of last inspection	07/01/2014

Inspection date	23/07/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for children and young people	adequate
Quality of care	good
Keeping children and young people safe	good
Leadership and management	good

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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The home has a good track record of providing high-quality care which is tailored to young people's individual needs, and continues to do so. Parents and independent reviewing officers are very positive about the care provided. For example, one parent said that the staff are 'absolutely fantastic' and that they communicate information about young people very well.

The Registered Manager has a clear vision for the home and a good track record in working with young people who have not been able to cope in other settings, but is nevertheless realistic about needs that cannot be met in this open children's home.

The home recently admitted a young person who had been in another of the company's services for about a year. The aim of the present placement was to provide a single occupancy, nurturing environment with a high level of staffing, in order to sustain the young person in an open setting. This also meant that the young person could continue to attend the same school, where they were attending every day and had been assessed as having considerable potential. To reduce the negative impact of the move, the young person's staff team moved to the new placement with them in order to provide continuity of care. This was good, child-centred practice, and one professional commented that the company's approach to meeting their young person's needs could not be faulted.

For a period, outcomes for the young person improved significantly and it appeared that the move had been effective. However, they remain in crisis and their behaviour has become more extreme. This is not a situation that the home could realistically have foreseen or avoided.

Young people have been able to form attachments with some staff in the home, but over the last three weeks there have been serious incidents which have compromised safety for young people and staff. The young people's behaviour would have been more extreme were it not for the huge efforts on the part of the staff to engage with them. For example, a professional who witnessed one of the incidents commented that although a lot of damage took place, the staff were able to support young people from leaving the premises, which would have placed them at greater risk.

The home's managers have very quickly identified that they can no longer meet young people's needs. They are working with other agencies in order to manage the situation proactively. The home constantly reflects on practice, reviews the strategies in place to manage risks and has instigated multi-agency meetings to address the young people's safety and current needs. This shows that the staff have a very good understanding of safe working practices and are well aware of the limitations of open settings in managing extreme risk-taking behaviour.

Staff support young people to adhere to boundaries through a coherent behavioural management system. Some outcomes for young people have been positive; for example, their educational attendance is 100%, and their previously overly stressful contact arrangements have been reviewed. There are significant periods when they are calm and can engage with staff in the home. Professionals have identified that the children's home is the only environment in young people's lives where there is any engagement at all. Young people also found it difficult to engage with the inspection process, but commented briefly that they were 'alright'.

The home has a skilled and experienced Registered Manager, who also manages another home. She exercises clear leadership and is supported by an excellent, very caring staff team. The teams show a high level of understanding about young people's needs and vulnerabilities. They demonstrate warm, supportive and professionally appropriate responses to young people, even in the most difficult of circumstances.

There are no regulatory breaches. One recommendation has been made in relation to recording the verification of staff references. This is a function that the company manages centrally, so is no reflection on the home itself. There are no shortfalls that impact on the welfare or safety of young people.

Full report

Information about this children's home

A private organisation owns and operates this children's home. The setting supports and cares for one young person who has complex emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
07/01/2014	Interim	good progress
26/06/2013	Full	good
30/01/2013	Interim	satisfactory progress
05/09/2012	Full	good

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

Recommendations

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

- ensure that telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references; in particular, ensure that the outcomes of telephone enquiries are fully recorded on staff files (NMS 16.1)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **adequate**

Young people have only been in the home for four weeks, so at the time of this inspection are still in transition. They benefit from being cared for by a team which includes staff from their previous home. This provides continuity and maintains the positive attachments that they have made over the past year.

Young people came to the company with very profound and complex needs. For the first week in this home, young people made significant progress in terms of their risk-taking behaviour. However, even though their behavioural progress has not been sustained recently, they still engage with staff, continue to go to school every day and to enjoy a range of healthy activities.

Young people have major issues with attachments and resilience. They can sometimes contain the more extreme symptoms of their distress and occasionally show signs of some degree of self-regulation; for example, by not always running away when they have said they are going to do this. However, despite the home's best efforts, outcomes range between extremes in terms of compromised personal safety, through to positive outcomes in terms of education, consultation and activities. The judgement of adequate for this outcome area is the 'best fit' to reflect this complexity.

Young people are very healthy and receive a wholesome diet, which they help to plan and prepare themselves. They have significant skills in baking, which they are encouraged to develop. Although this is positive, young people do not always attend healthcare appointments. They have never in the past engaged in the therapeutic services provided by the company but for a brief period when they first arrived in this home, they did agree to attend. This was also not sustained, but remains on offer.

Young people are very well consulted in this home and with the exception of sharing information that could place them at risk, they participate fully in decision-making regarding their own care. For example, young people are fully involved in planning daily activities and menus, which helps them to feel valued and enables them to develop life skills. They receive twice-weekly key worker sessions to help them to talk about anything that is troubling them. This helps to build some degree of trust and positive attachments with staff.

Young people have 100% attendance at school which is a very positive outcome. They have been able to make some progress with education but are not reaching their full potential. The barrier to this is their unmet emotional needs which make learning very difficult.

Young people engage in a wide variety of community-based activities with staff.

These activities continue in spite of the recent incidents, in order to provide high quality care to young people. This is a good outcome because it helps to increase their engagement with staff and to reduce the risk of them going missing in order to interact in the community.

Young people were not previously benefiting from stressful, long-distance journeys to family contact, but the home is addressing this with the placing authority. The independent reviewing officer commented on the good work done by the home to promote more productive and proactively-managed contact for the young person.

Young people are not yet able to participate in a semi-independence plan. However, they have acquired a number of practical skills in preparation for this, so outcomes in this area are positive.

Quality of care

good

Young people receive consistent, high quality care from a dedicated staff team. They are able to interact positively with staff most of the time. Staff, and the company as a whole, went to considerable lengths to ensure that the difficult transition from one home to another was effected without disrupting the important attachments that young people have made.

The Registered Manager and her staff are extremely good at identifying young people's needs and establishing clear strategies to help them to address their difficulties. The home provides very nurturing, supportive care but has strong boundaries and predictable, reliable rewards in place to create the conditions necessary for young people to start to feel secure.

Although recent incidents have been extreme and sometimes resulted in injuries to staff, the team continues to respond to young people in a highly professional, non-judgemental way. For example, staff make it clear to young people when their behaviour places them and others at risk, but this is done in a climate of understanding. This helps young people to communicate openly about their feelings and to feel accepted even when their behaviour is inappropriate.

Staff and young people hold key worker sessions and weekly house meetings. This ensures that young people's views are fully reflected in the conduct of the home. Staff have a good understanding of young people's communication styles and although they are still trying to establish the triggers for incidents, they analyse the patterns of communication leading up to these very well.

Young people are well aware of how to raise a complaint and some have done so in the past. The home has learned from past complaints and receives any concerns in an open and transparent manner.

Young people have exceptionally good placement plans. These are individually tailored to their emerging diverse needs. The home is good at putting plans into practice. Staff have the skills and confidence to think on their feet and adapt plans to rapidly changing circumstances. For example, the placement plan says that young people do not respond well to physical intervention but recently staff have needed to restrain in emergency situations, in order to prevent serious injury.

Some staff in the home have achieved very positive relationships with parents, and are working in partnership with them. This has helped to progress contact and care planning arrangements for young people.

Young people have access to a wide range of services to support their medical needs. Healthcare planning is very good, with long-standing conditions identified well. Routine appointments are made for young people with dentists, opticians and general practitioners. Young people do not always attend, but have sought medical advice on their own on occasion, which shows that they have learned the importance of seeking qualified help. Young people have access to therapeutic services from a child psychologist but have not yet felt able to engage with this.

Young people's medication is stored safely and securely in the staff office. There is a double-locked cabinet and although no controlled medicines are currently in use in the home, there are appropriate facilities for managing and recording these.

Staff actively support young people to attend school daily and complete their work. Staff support young people at the company's own school nearby. This helps to ensure that young people remain in class and that there are good opportunities for learning. Staff take an active interest in young people's achievements and communicate very well with school colleagues.

With the increasing number of incidents, it would have been easy for staff to decide to limit activities for young people in response. However, the home's Registered Manager has ensured that the quality and frequency of activities are maintained, irrespective of what may have happened in the home. This is achieved through positive rewards; for example, to receive a paid activity the young people must attend school for the whole day. Consequently, young people do this and are then able to enjoy their activities with staff.

The home is located on a very busy main road on the outskirts of a small city. The house itself was damaged during an incident the night before the inspection. Damage from this incident was very rapidly addressed. For example, the fire panel was damaged and was being repaired on the morning of the inspection. The home provides good quality, comfortable accommodation.

The staff and managers have worked extremely effectively with other agencies and services to help support young people safely. For example, there are good relationships with the police, healthcare professionals and educators in order to

achieve the best possible outcomes for young people.

Keeping children and young people safe good

Some young people can no longer be kept safe in the home. This has been identified and acted upon very swiftly, with no delay between the incidents of concern and effective action. For example, a multi-agency risk management meeting took place the day after the most serious incident. The pre-planned looked-after children's review, which took place the day after the inspection, was then able to re-evaluate the young person's needs in the light of the multi-agency meeting's conclusions. This shows that the home is managing a very difficult situation very effectively, therefore this outcome area has been rated good.

External triggers may have led to the recent deterioration in young people's emotional state but the precise cause is unclear. The first two incidents were a week apart and involved going missing. In the past few days the situation has escalated significantly. There have been further incidents of going missing at the end of the school day and young people are becoming intoxicated and associating with inappropriate individuals. They engage in extreme threats of and actual self-harm, show aggression towards staff and have set fires within the home. The staff deal with all these incidents extremely effectively and there are no identified shortfalls in day-to-day practice.

Care plans and risk assessments are under constant review, they clearly identify all known risks and describe strategies to respond to specific situations. Throughout all the incidents, young people have staff to whom they can speak and share their thoughts and feelings. The offer of therapeutic involvement has remained in place.

Staff are acutely aware of young people's vulnerability and have managed to deal with their own emotional response to this without revealing their thoughts to young people. This is because the need to cause concern in others is an identified motivator for some of the more extreme behaviour. Staff are encouraged to access the company's therapists in their own right in order to receive professional advice to support good practice.

To date, young people have gone missing at the end of the school day, at the point of handover to the care staff. Staff have identified the patterns of communication between students at the school that are precursors to this behaviour. They take active steps to address this and on the day of the inspection, even though the young person had stated they would go missing again, the staff managed to prevent this.

The home's relationships with the local police have been valuable in helping to return

young people who go missing very quickly. Staff investigate known contacts, follow young people for as long as possible and alert the police quickly when they go missing. Young people are responded to warmly and positively when they return. They have a good enough relationship with staff to keep in touch on some occasions or ask for a lift home.

The home had to use physical intervention frequently with a previous much younger resident when their behaviour became too hazardous to contain by de-escalation techniques. The present young person had not been restrained until the night before the inspection, when this became necessary. The staff received a thorough debrief in response to this incident which addressed every aspect of the situation. Young people also receive good quality support through individual meetings after incidents to look at what went wrong and how it can be avoided in future. Restraint recording is well managed and there is good evidence of effective management monitoring and guidance. This helps to ensure that there is safe restraint practice in the home. The company has clear anti-bullying policies in place but, as this is a single placement, bullying does not arise.

The home has access to a centralised staff recruitment process which is managed at the company's head office. Generally, recruitment is robust, but not all references appear to be verified. This is apparently always completed but is insufficiently well recorded to evidence this. A recommendation has been made.

There has been one allegation relating to a previous resident of the home, which required referral to the local authority designated officer for child protection. This was investigated and has now reached a conclusion. The home acted correctly in every way during and after this investigation, providing support to the staff member and young person.

The home's environment is generally safe, with excellent health and safety checks in place. Fire records and safety checks are very well maintained.

The manager is aware that the home was first registered seven years ago and the situation with traffic volume on the road outside, as well as with young people's needs, has changed since then. This means that the home may no longer be in the most suitable location for certain types of vulnerable young people. There is no quick or easy solution to this and young people can still gain access to busy roads and railways, even when their children's home is in a rural area.

The traffic volume and speed on the road, which is at the end of a dual carriageway, cannot be easily overcome. The existing protective measures include a high wooden fence and a low traffic barrier immediately outside the gate, which slow down the speed of exit of any young person in a heightened state but in an open setting the gate cannot be locked. The service has worked with the police and other agencies to develop a strategy for responding urgently to this area of risk.

Leadership and management

good

The home has a qualified, experienced Registered Manager who has been in place since 6 August 2012. The manager is proactive in keeping up to date with developments in childcare legislation and practice which enables her to impart this knowledge to her staff team. There are effective deputising arrangements in place to cover the manager's planned absence on maternity leave which may start in September or October. The manager is aware of the regulatory necessity to inform Ofsted of these arrangements.

There was one recommendation made at the last inspection, which has been fully acted upon. The home was asked to review its arrangements for electronic monitoring of bedroom doors. The electronic system has been disconnected because it is not needed for the present young person.

The Registered Manager regularly monitors all the home's activities and the young people's progress. Any practice issues are identified and addressed with the staff concerned.

The manager has a robust development plan in place. There is a good understanding of the home's strengths and areas for improvement. For example, the home has increased its baseline staffing from 6 to 7.5 staff since 2013. This allows staff to have some respite and regeneration and builds in shift cover for training purposes. Behavioural management, supported by a therapeutic crisis intervention trainer who gives staff feedback on all their interventions, is another strength of this home. There is also a diverse staff team where both men and women offer nurturing care. This helps to support young people's needs very effectively. For example, young people whose life experiences have made them wary of men rapidly learn that males can be consistently safe, supportive and kind. This helps them to build positive relationships and enables them to begin to recover from previous trauma.

In terms of future development, the manager is aware that some of her staff team are relatively new to the work and require more experience. This has been addressed with effective supervision and good quality training in all the key areas of need. For example, staff are well trained in attachment, child sexual exploitation, self-harm and drug misuse.

The home has a good quality Statement of Purpose which contains all the information required to describe the service accurately. This enables staff, parents, placing authorities and young people to understand the services on offer.

The current placing authority's reviews are held in a timely manner. The home has in the recent past chased up another authority to obtain missing looked after children's paperwork. The home has also appropriately raised issues regarding the current local authority placement plan which does not reflect the gender or type of placement accurately.

The provider is well aware of regulatory obligations and takes urgent steps, when necessary, to ensure that the home continues to meet the objectives laid down in its Statement of Purpose. The home's staff praised the company for its child-centred approach. Some staff said that they had actively chosen to work there because of the company's positive ethos. Examples were given of how the company has made changes to residency in some children's homes in order to improve the quality of care for young people, even if that means turning down additional placements. An independent reviewing officer also commented that the company had altered the physical layout of a building in order to provide some degree of separation between two young people whose needs were becoming incompatible. This shows that the company has the resources and the vision to think creatively about how to meet young people's diverse needs.

The external monitoring of the home is provided by an independent visitor who writes clear and robust reports on the conduct of the service. Reports show evidence of consultation with parents, young people and social workers to provide a well-rounded picture of the service. The Registered Manager acts on her own monitoring and on these external audits of the service in order to drive improvement.

The home is usually well maintained but is showing signs of damage at the present time. This is all very recent and was being repaired during the inspection to restore the home to a good quality, safe environment. Managers ensure that all health and safety checks are made as planned and that any shortfalls are addressed immediately.

The home has sufficient staff to provide two-to-one care for young people, as determined by their assessed needs. Staff in the home all said that they receive good quality training and regular, supportive and helpful supervision from skilled and experienced managers.

The home keeps exceptionally well-managed records. Young people's files are very well organised and contain clear, constructive, non-stigmatising information that will inform young people accurately and sensitively if they choose to access it in future.

The home has very good relationships with other services and agencies such as the police, the local authority within which it is situated, placing authorities and schools. This ensures a joined-up approach to problem solving and an improved service to young people.

The Registered Manager responds swiftly and appropriately to all significant events and notifies them to the relevant authorities, including Ofsted. This ensures that other agencies have the opportunity to monitor events and contact the home for further information if they require this.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
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.

Information 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 framework of inspection for children's homes.