

SC063116

Registered provider: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This privately owned home provides care and accommodation for up to six children who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Currently, all the children are young boys aged between eight and 12.

Inspection dates: 26 to 27 February 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	good
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	good
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The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 30 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Young children who have experienced early trauma and multiple placement breakdowns, and who often arrive in a state of high anxiety and confusion, experience safety and stability at this residential placement.
- Children enjoy very warm, nurturing and affectionate relationships with staff. One child said: 'The staff tuck us into bed, they play games with us and entertain us, they take us out on trips and are really good at hugs.'
- The majority of children make such good progress in managing their emotions and behaviour that they are able to move on to find their 'forever family' in foster care.
- All children go to school, often after having been excluded when living elsewhere. Their attendance is excellent and they continue to learn at the home.
- Children feel secure in the home's routines and in the boundaries that the staff set. A headteacher said: 'Staff have an excellent knowledge of the children, their behaviour and triggers'.
- Those children who have gone missing from previous placements no longer do so, which is a considerable improvement in their safety.
- The focus on play helps children to catch up on the early years experiences that many have missed out on. They can be themselves and have fun in a nurturing environment.
- Professionals' feedback is highly positive. An independent reviewing officer is very pleased with how a traumatised child has settled and formed bonds with the staff. He said: 'It's nurturing. It's a comfortable, warm place and the staff are passionate.'
- Children receive highly consistent, warm care and positive parenting from the team of staff, who show passion and commitment to help children to thrive.
- Health and well-being outcomes improve considerably, supported by excellent engagement with health professionals.
- Staff observations and insight contribute to improved arrangements for children, for example regarding staying in touch with their families.
- Children are helped to understand why they are looked after and how this is not their fault. They understand that they are at the home in order to be protected, safe and secure until they are ready to move on.
- A child said: 'The adults look after us and play with us. They are strict with our homework, which is a really good thing. The adults teach us how to behave. The home is nice and colourful. My bedroom is nice to sleep in and I feel safe there. The food is nice and cooked well. I don't think that anything could be better. I am very happy living here.'

The children's home's areas for development:

- Managers have not updated the statement of purpose to include details on when children usually move on from the home.
- Attention to a few areas could make the garden and communal areas more homely.
- Some records of restraint are not easy to read, as too much detail is included.
- Staff do not record in the sanctions book what consequences are imposed as a result of children's behaviour, for example when they do not participate in activities or trips out.
- The independent person should include more evaluation and analysis in their report, particularly of restraints and incidents.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
30/03/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
18/05/2016	Full	Outstanding
27/01/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
21/10/2015	Full	Outstanding

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

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions that the registered person(s) must take to meet the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
The registered person must prepare and implement a policy which sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation of abuse or neglect the registered person must, in particular— provide for liaison and co-operation with any local authority which are, or may be, making a child protection enquiry in relation to a child accommodated in the home. (Regulation 34 (1)(b) (2)(a))	31/03/2018
The registered person must compile in relation to the children's home a statement ("the statement of purpose") which covers the matters listed in Schedule 1. (Regulation 16(1))	30/04/2018

Recommendations

- For children's homes to be nurturing and supportive environments that meet the needs of their children, they will, in most cases, be homely, domestic environments. Children's homes must comply with relevant health and safety legislations (alarms, food hygiene, etc.); however in doing so, homes should seek as far as possible to maintain a domestic rather than 'institutional' impression. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', paragraph 3.9, page 15)

Specifically, review the use of signs and notices and the appearance of the garden and the card table.

- The registered person should ensure that all incidents of control, discipline and restraint are subject to systems of regular scrutiny to ensure that their use is fair and the above principles as set out in 9.35 are respected. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', paragraph 9.36, page 46)

Specifically, record all sanctions or measures of discipline and make sure that entries in restraint logs are clear to read.

- Ensure that the individual appointed to carry out visits to the home as an independent person makes a rigorous assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children in the home's care. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', paragraph 15.5, page 65)

Specifically, ensure that there is more rigorous evaluation and analysis of incidents, restraints and other findings.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Children experience stability and feel safe. Many children have experienced multiple placement breakdowns, in some cases more than 20, before moving into this home at a young age. Professionals who are involved in placing children find that they settle and feel secure, and their behaviour improves significantly at the home. An independent reviewing officer said that a child 'experienced care that is consistent and provides him with a safe and stable base to enable him to begin to heal from the previous upheaval and instability he has experienced'.

Children receive excellent support to regulate their emotions and behaviour, and become calm and settled. For example, some are able to reflect on their school day and the choices that they made to remain calm and not become angry. Children seek out staff for affection and talk about how they feel, rather than bottling up their feelings. As a result, incidents and the use of restraint are reduced and children experience calmer periods. A social worker described the significant progress of a child who was previously unable to manage his emotions, saying that he 'now manages his emotions well'.

Children's health improves. For example, some have been supported to have major dental work done, as this has been neglected in the past. Children are now more confident of their smile and more willing to take care of their teeth. Some children who were diagnosed with disorders a long time before moving to the home are finally receiving the medication that they need to manage their symptoms better. As a result, their well-being and behaviour improve. Children are encouraged to improve their diet by trying a wider range of foods and choosing healthy alternatives. Children enjoy mealtimes with staff, and these are very much social occasions.

Staff support children to follow healthy routines for attending to their personal hygiene and getting enough sleep. The boys have good haircuts and dress smartly for school. An independent reviewing officer said: 'He looks happy and relaxed compared to the child I knew. His skin is a good colour and his hair shines, as do his eyes. He stands taller and makes good eye contact, and is happy to talk when I visit.'

Staff afford education high priority. All children have a school placement, and attendance is 100% unless there is a genuine reason not to attend. This is a significant improvement for those children who were excluded from school while living elsewhere. Children are making steady progress from their starting points. Staff share information very effectively with school staff, so all are aware of children's behaviour and needs. A headteacher said: 'I have nothing but the utmost respect for the staff and their practice. The children are always happy, well presented and well cared for, as well as full of ideas and information in class, often from their experiences and conversations at the

home.'

There is a culture of learning at the home. Around the table at mealtimes and while playing games, the staff talk to children about all kinds of interesting subjects and current affairs. There is deliberately low use of electronic and digital media so that children can focus on learning to play and interacting positively with others. Children are doing a 'world project' with staff, which involves choosing a country and learning about its culture, often with craft activities and cooking a typical meal. Children and staff spend a great deal of time together playing, for example with card and board games, doing crafts and building models.

The home has a wide range of books which children can choose from. If they would like it, staff read them a bedtime story. Children are encouraged to read when they return from school while they have their snack and a drink. They see staff enjoying books, so experience positive role modelling to enjoy reading. Staff also practise times tables and spelling to help children to make progress. Staff sometimes make use of the pupil premium for private tuition to boost children's educational progress.

Children have a voice. Staff listen to their views, and this influences what happens at the home. For example, children devise questions to ask prospective new staff during the interview process. At regular meetings, children help to plan what is going on, such as the activities, menus and decor of the home. The inclusion of children's own writing and drawing has improved the children's guide. This helps those who are new to the home to understand what it means to live there. A child said: 'If I ever have a problem or feel sad, I can speak to an adult who will help me to sort things out and be happy again.'

Staff advocate strongly for the children in their care. For example, they help children to complete forms to express their wishes and feelings for consideration at reviews of their care. An independent reviewing officer said: 'Staff advocate for him and will speak out if they don't believe something is in his best interests.'

Children have a strong sense of belonging to the home and regard it as a positive experience to live there. Unless children are placed in an emergency, staff visit them and they have the opportunity to visit the home to help to prepare them for the move. A child said: 'I was visited by two adults who told me lots of things about the house. I then visited before I moved in and was shown my new bedroom. I chose the colours and theme for my bedroom.'

Staff openly discuss moving on from the home with all the children, who regard this as a positive, healthy thing. They understand that children usually move on when they are ready for foster care or when they are ready to start secondary education. Everyone says goodbye to residents who are moving on, for example marking the occasion with a special meal for everyone and a gift. Children stay in touch with staff by telephone or visits, when possible.

How well children and young people are helped and protected: good

In surveys, children said that they feel safe at the home 'all the time'. One child said: 'I feel safe because the adults always keep an eye on the other children and they don't let anyone bully us.' Staff assess the risks to children well, then take action to minimise those risks. Staff update detailed risk assessments with any changes in behaviour. They teach children about how to keep safe, for example about 'stranger danger'. Adults provide close supervision of children when they are out on activities or on trips to other areas. A child said: 'I feel safe when I am outside with the adults, because they stay close to us and make sure that we are not bullied or that someone can take us away.' Since the last full inspection, no children have gone missing from the home or while out on trips. No complaints have been made.

The number of restraints have been high for some children at times, but these incidents generally reduce as they settle and feel secure. Staff are clear that they may use restraint only as a last resort. Staff help children to understand why their behaviour resulted in restraint and what the triggers were, for example leaving a parent after meeting up with them. One child said: 'I was held when I arrived, because I was scared and not being very nice and trying to hurt the adults. I have not been held again.' Restraint logs are not always clear to read, as they contain much information in a small space. This could prevent thorough scrutiny.

There has been significant change in the staff team since the last full inspection but, due to changes also in the children who are resident, this does not appear to have had a significant impact. In addition to a robust recruitment process, the registered manager ensures that staff have 'drive, passion and be able to play'. Children benefit from staff of either gender with varied working backgrounds. The staff meet the needs of children from ethnic minorities although, currently, none of the staff are themselves from an ethnic minority.

The staff focus on talking to children about any challenging behaviour and helping them to consider alternative actions. Rewards also work very well, encouraging children to meet the targets which they set with staff. Records show that staff have not recorded any sanctions since the last full inspection. However, this is inaccurate, as children have had consequences imposed for negative behaviour. A child said: 'If I am naughty, I do not go on activities.'

The manager reported an allegation made against a member of staff appropriately to the local authority designated officer. The conclusion was that this was an unfounded allegation. A child made another allegation and the manager reported this to the area manager and the safeguarding officer within the company, as well as the child's placing authority. Managers made the decision that circumstances around this allegation did not warrant reporting it to the designated officer. However, it is good practice to seek the advice of the designated officer in such circumstances.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: good

A consistent management team has led the home for a number of years. The registered manager demonstrates passion for her work. She has a level 4 qualification and is

working towards achieving level 5. Staff describe receiving good support to help them to work effectively with the children. A member of staff said: 'We regularly discuss the children and their care needs during team meetings, planned supervision, general conversations and handovers.'

Training is extensive. The registered manager seeks out training to enhance staff skills in caring for individual children, for example by approaching health professionals for input and guidance on helping children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. The registered manager is sourcing training in early years development and play, as this is central to the home's ethos. She is also actively considering training on the supervision of time that children spend with family and friends, to support those staff who carry out this role.

Training includes safeguarding risks and how staff can protect children. This supports staff to have a good knowledge of current risks in society, such as radicalisation and child sexual exploitation.

Professionals describe very good communication with the staff team. Staff recognise the potential difficulties when children live away from their local authorities, and ensure that they maintain good communication with independent reviewing officers and social workers. A social worker said: 'The key worker provides an excellent, insightful report to the child's looked after review.' A headteacher described '100% communication' with staff and the registered manager.

School places in this part of the county can be difficult to source. Most children who live at the home attend the company's own schools. A social worker said: 'The children could be better supported to reintegrate into mainstream education, where possible.'

The arrangements to monitor the home are good. For example, the registered manager reviews the service every three months and an independent person visits on a monthly basis to check what goes on. The reports of their visits are useful for the home's development. However, they would benefit from further analysis, for example of incidents and restraints.

The staff look after most children until they are ready to live in a foster family, or until the age of 12 or when they are ready for senior school, with the aim of helping to prepare children for stable placements in foster care or for a move to a residential placement aimed at older children. The home's statement of purpose does not make this clear.

The home is comfortable and clean. Routine checks and fire drills help to keep the building safe for children. Children are proud of their bedrooms, which they decorate according to their interests. The decoration of communal areas is reasonable, but the inclusion of some signs and notices may appear institutional, and the garden would benefit from some attention to make it a more attractive area for children to use. Staff repaired the rails in some children's wardrobes at the time of the inspection.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and 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 whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, 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'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: SC063116

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider: Ethelbert Specialist Homes Limited

Registered provider address: 17 Leigh Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5EU

Responsible individual: Leslie Davenport

Registered manager: Kerri Matthews

Inspector

Jacqueline Graves, social care regulatory inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

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