

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC063814
Inspection date	13/09/2012
Inspector	Caroline Oldham
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	03/02/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home provides care and accommodation for up to children and four young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, aged between seven and 17 years and is owned by a registered charity.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

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

Overall effectiveness

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

Each child or young person is highly involved in their individualised placement plan, which is designed to meet their specific complex needs. These are reviewed and updated regularly. All children and young people enthusiastically say that they like living in the home; they regard it as a 'home' and not just a 'house', and they are clearly fond of the staff team. Children and young people show warmth, compassion, and care towards each other, and the staff team. Staff talk passionately about the children and young people and their progress. They encourage skills and hobbies to enable children and young people to achieve. Consequently children and young people making excellent progress and grow in confidence. They make positive contributions to the home, such as landscaping the garden and building a pond, choosing colours and soft furnishings for the rooms, and recruiting staff.

Leaders and the manager have comprehensive systems in place to monitor progress, to analysis trends and issues, and these then inform clear action plans. The manager has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home, and works closely with the staff team and the children and young people, to develop the care and facilities further. Staff receive regular, formal supervision, and training which covers both mandatory courses and a significant range of specialised training, focused on the needs of the children and young people. Consequently, children and young people make significant progress across all aspects of their welfare and development, in relation to their starting points. They respond very well to the clear routines and boundaries, and focused, individual time with staff.

Children and young people are kept safe through comprehensive, imaginative

working practices, and staff have a very good understanding of safeguarding issues, and the welfare of children and young people. Sanctions and restraints are rarely used, and restorative practice is usually applied where necessary. Most children and young people very rarely go missing, and are learning how to keep themselves safe. Significant time is given to help them reflect on their behaviour and to learn from it, and so children and young people make significant progress in keeping themselves safe. They say that they feel very safe and happy, and there are no incidents of bullying.

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people are making exceptional progress in developing a positive self-view and building confidence and self-esteem. For example, they take pride in their appearance, and are developing clear views of their identity and sense of self. They are very proud of their achievements and new skills, such as landscaping the garden and horse riding. Children and young people are actively involved in the community, sometimes through a local scheme for rewarding active participation. They also helping with fundraising activities such as baking cakes for a stall, volunteering and getting involved with children with disabilities. Some young people also represent the home at the charity's wider forum for children's homes, and others have been involved in making a film about being a child in care. Consequently they are developing confidence, excellent social skills, friendships and alternative networks of support, and show thought and compassion for others.

Staff help children and young people to understand their background through individualized work, and help them to explore their views and emotions. Staff actively support the work of therapists and consequently children and young people learn more about themselves, and in the safe and nurturing environment start to grow and develop self-worth. Children and young people are imaginatively involved in most aspects of the running of the home, and equipped with the necessary skills as they gain responsibilities. For example, they have been actively involved in staff recruitment, and have received training on interviewing. They are currently reviewing how the menu is compiled, and children and young people have suggested alternative means of eliciting ideas to create greater variety. These problem solving skills are excellent skills for greater independence and self-reliance.

Children and young people are encouraged to enjoy an active lifestyle and consequently their levels of fitness are very good. They all love to cycle and swim, some enjoy horse riding, others gardening, dancing and gymnastics. Variety and new ideas are encouraged, and children and young people enjoy the extensive opportunities that staff offer them. They eat freshly cooked meals and are encouraged to eat vegetables and fresh fruit. All children and young people attend their health appointments, and long standing issues are appropriately addressed. Consequently children and young people are very fit and healthy, and are learning the importance of a healthy lifestyle.

All education packages are highly tailored to meet the needs of the children and young people; they regularly attend school, college and work experience and enjoy learning, and make significant progress. In some instances these exceed expectations enabling children and young people to remain within mainstream education. All young people learn to become more independent as they mature, and move to a formal programme in the years before they leave. Consequently when young people move on from the home they successfully sustain jobs and college courses, and manage independent living very well.

Children and young people benefit from appropriate contact with family, friends and other people who are important to them. Staff support contact visits to ensure that they are well managed, and positive experiences. As a result these visits and other contacts, children and young people form healthy attachments and benefit from contact with people who are important to them. Some move on from the home to live with a parent and others develop strong, alternative support networks.

Quality of care

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

The home has a lovely 'family' atmosphere and children and young people get on exceptionally well with staff, and show compassion and care for each other. They enjoy light banter and the frequent opportunities for one-to-one time due to the high staffing ratios. Young people take pride in their achievements such as showing magic card tricks, and children enjoy sharing role play such as putting teddies to bed. Staff are very skilled at helping children and young people understand why it may not be possible to act upon their wishes, and encourage negotiation, awareness of the needs of others, potential risks and consequences. Children and young people say they feel involved, but like the boundaries as it keeps them safe.

The children's guide has been reviewed and revised by the young people; it is available in two formats. The printed booklet contains lots of photographs and easy to read information including the complaints procedure, and the audio book shows photographs of staff with short verbal messages. Both books are given prior to admission to help a child or young person gain a greater understanding of the home and what it has to offer. Children and young people say that they know how to make a complaint, although they have not done so. Their prominent 'Grumbles' book identifies any small dissatisfactions, and regular meetings also enable children and young people to express any issues that they may have. Children and young people are treated with considerable respect, and their views are frequently sought about matters such as; activities, holidays, staffing and menus, and they also get involved in designing documentation relating to their files. This far-reaching involvement ensures that children and young people do feel actively involved in the day-to-day running of their home.

There are highly individualised, detailed placement and care plans that set out the specific, individualised needs of the children and young people and, these include information about religious and cultural backgrounds and personal identities. Some

children and young people are exploring their sense of self, and are well supported by therapists and the staff team. Children and young people are actively involved in the plans that concern them and the information recorded about them, and their views are appropriately expressed in the documentation.

Social workers speak very highly about the home, and the very good progress that the children and young people make. They say that children and young people form very good attachments to staff, and that staff work closely with other agencies to provide good packages of care, such as, education programmes. They all praise the communications between staff and the local authority, and report that they are kept well informed. On admission children and young people are registered with local health professionals, and all health needs are actively pursued. Staff work proactively with other agencies to meet the children and young people's on-going physical, emotional and psychological needs. Consequently neglected medical issues are swiftly identified and progressed, and medication reduced as children and young people gain greater insight, more self-control and manage their behaviour. Children and young people are encouraged to be active through a range of sports and activities, and currently enjoy bike riding, swimming, horse riding, the trampoline and football.

Each child and young person has highly individualised education plan, according to their need. Staff are highly involved in securing the very best arrangements for each child and young person. This involves staying to support a child at school, and liaising with the teaching staff to provide appropriate programmes of work. One headmaster commented that they were 'very impressed with the progress' that one young person had made during the academic year. Another school reported that since the child had been in the home they had significantly and positively revised their views. In addition, staff help children and young people each evening with homework. This substantial input gives children and young people excellent support and encouragement, and they make immense progress given their starting points. The home is very well furnished and decorated and there is an on-going programme of refurbishment such as a new bathroom and some redecoration. There is a beautiful garden with a recently installed pond, most of the landscaping, both the design and construction, was undertaken by a young person. The home is situated near a town centre with the usual amenities and public transport facilities. A car is available for activities further afield.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people are kept safe in the home through comprehensive risk and behaviour management strategies. Children and young people say and demonstrate that they feel very safe and secure. Consequently they feel confident to share sensitive issues and feelings, knowing that they will be listened to and treated with respect. This demonstrates the children and young people feel very safe and secure. There are no issues of bullying within the home, and staff quickly resolved

any potential issues to prevent any escalation of such behaviour. There are very comprehensive risk assessments for the children and young people in the home and on various activities, and these are regularly updated. Additional security arrangements are put in place according to the age and ability of the children and young people. There have been some incidents of children and young people going missing, but the significant number of incidents relate to one young person where staff made exceptional efforts to keep them safe. Consequently children and young people are kept very safe.

There are excellent individual reward schemes devised in conjunction with the children and young people. The relationship that staff have with children and young people is crucial to the behaviour management process, and the philosophy of the home is one of restorative justice. Through individual work and group meetings children and young people learn alternative, positive ways to manage their behaviour. A professional working with one child said they are a 'changed child' since coming to the home. One young person said: 'There is more structure here. They know how to manage your behaviour, so they know how to keep you safe. For example, if you 'kick off' they know what to do, they take you out or they take the others out, so you don't have an audience. They give you space, they know how to care for you.' Sanctions and restraints are extremely rare and all incidents of negative behaviour is discussed to enable reparation. Positive behaviour is frequently rewarded. As a result, children and young people may initially cause damage and display negative behaviour, but they quickly begin to respect the staff and the ethos of the home, and make significant progress in managing their behaviour.

The staff team remains very stable, with most staff in post for a number of years. There has been one appointment in recent months. However, the staff recruitment and selection process is rigorous, and comprehensive checks are made to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children and young people, and they are kept safe from harm. Children and young people are actively involved in the recruitment process and their views incorporated into the selection decisions.

The environment is very well decorated and maintained, and kept safe through a system of internal safety checks and risk assessments. In addition, services such as electricity, electrical appliances and fire fighting equipment are regularly checked by the appropriate professional companies. Fire drills are carried out regularly. Visitors to the home have their identification checked on arrival, and they are signed in and out.

Leadership and management

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

The manager is actively involved in all aspects of the running of the home, and successfully balances working the occasional shift and maintaining a comprehensive overview of the whole operation. She is well supported by a deputy and a stable staff team. The staff team hold additional responsibilities to develop their skills and areas of expertise. Staff are highly enthusiastic about their work and take immense pride in

the progress and achievements of the children and young people.

There is a Statement of Purpose, which clearly sets out the aims and objectives of the home. The home has made minor amendments to the Statement of Purpose to keep it up to date. Placing authorities confirm that they are clear about the aims and objectives of the home, and what services and facilities it provides. Social workers say that children and young people respond well to the clear boundaries and routines. Children and young people understand the purpose of their placement in the home and their future plans. The manager has a comprehensive system to monitor and improve the quality of care. She actively involved children and young people as well as the staff team. Consequently documents and systems are dynamic and clear. The home has been proactive in setting aside systems that were time-consuming and took staff away from spending time with the children and young people, and have introduced alternative systems for recording and documenting. These alternatives are frequently more pictorial, enabling easier access by younger children and those less confident with the printed word. The manager completes monthly reports, which identify patterns and trends, and set out clear required actions. There is also a comprehensive development plan in place, a section of which is reviewed at each staff meeting. Consequently the home is continually making progress and reviewing plans with the skills, knowledge and support of the whole staff team, and frequently the children and young people.

Staff receive regular supervision, and say that they feel valued and very well supported. The staff training programme is broad, including mandatory and highly specialised training to support the varied need of the children and young people. The registered person ensures that there are monthly monitoring visits and these include consultation with children and young people. The manager identifies the impact that living in the home has on children and young people, demonstrating the significant improvements, such as, engaging with school and making dramatic learning improvements, and significant improvements in behaviour. Where there have been any significant events, these have been notified to the relevant authorities in a timely manner. Staff take appropriate action to safeguard children and young people following an incident and review risk assessments.

Staff rotas show very good staffing levels, which ensure that children and young people receive the levels of care they need. Additional staff cover is provided at busy times to enable all children and young people to have some one-to-one time with a member of staff on a very regular basis. The home is financially well resourced. Children and young people's individual needs are clearly set out in the care planning documents. The staff review these regularly as progress is made, and social workers are kept fully informed through monthly and three- monthly reports. Clear outcomes for children and young people are identified and reviewed. All files are kept in a locked cabinet in a separate office.

Staff have substantial, close working relationships with many other agencies, including, children's mental health services, local police liaison officers, and schools. They also maintain good relationships with the local community and neighbours.

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.