

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC386522
Inspection date	14/06/2013
Inspector	Denise Jolly
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	15/01/2013
--------------------------------	------------

© Crown copyright 2013

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Service information

Brief description of the service

This service is a privately run children's home. The home provides long-term care and accommodation for three children who may have emotional or behavioural difficulties.

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 **adequate**.

Staff provide a good quality of care to children and young people. Despite inconsistent management of the home, the service has continued to develop since the last inspection, and this has resulted in improved outcomes for young people in some aspects of their lives. A permanent, qualified manager is in post, who has applied to be registered with Ofsted.

Key workers prepare and review plans of care that reflect the wishes and views of young people, and provide realistic targets to support improvement in their outcomes. Not all young people feel they need the support of staff, despite them being committed to help them achieve their goals for successful independence. Some young people are in the process of returning to their families following successful school careers, and prefer to work directly with local transition support staff.

Children say that relationships in the home are generally good, and they like living there. However, due to changes in staff, and the recent departure of young people from the home, they are adjusting to the loss of familiar faces and the uncertainty this brings. Children and professionals recognise the positive aspects of the return of a previous manager of the home, because it limits further disruption to the consistency of their care. Additionally, they value their relationships with permanent staff. Children say they feel safe and well cared for.

The manager and deputy manager have development plans in place, although they do not represent the views of all stakeholders. The plans address the shortfalls identified in this inspection regarding the use of temporary staff, and lack of clarity in

risk assessments and care plans. While these shortfalls have not affected the welfare of young people, they limit progression of the service provided to them.

Areas for improvement

Statutory Requirements

This section sets out the actions which must be taken so that the registered person/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
34 (2001)	ensure there is a system for improving the quality of care provided in the home that provides for consultation with children in the home, their parents and placing authorities (Regulation 34 (1b), (3))	31/07/2013
25 (2001)	ensure that the employment of any persons on a temporary basis will not prevent children from receiving such continuity of care as is reasonable to meet their needs (Regulation 25 (2))	31/07/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that information about the child, in particular risk assessments and care plans, is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child. (NMS 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Children confirm they experience improved outcomes in many aspects of their lives and that staff in the home offer good support. Over time, they make progress to understand their backgrounds and experiences. This helps them to plan for their futures and identify strategies that enable them to overcome hurdles to developing a positive self-view. Children enjoy warm and nurturing relationships in the home, with their needs clearly identified. A social worker said, 'I am so happy with the care given, staff accepted the child as a whole. The child has benefited from strategies using traditional values, that have really worked. I have never seen them so content.'

However, in recent months all children and young people experienced disruption to their relationships due to changes in the management of the home and in some of the staffing. This impacted negatively on their progress for a period, until a previous

manager returned and restored stability. Social workers recognise that children had become unsettled by the changes, but that they have since overcome their anxieties about unfamiliar staff, and are now continuing to progress.

All children and young people say staff help them to enjoy contact with their families when appropriate. Sadly, several young people experienced a close bereavement in the recent past. They have relied on the support and understanding of staff to help them overcome emotional and behavioural difficulties arising from their loss. Some children attend weekly therapy sessions with staff to explore their feelings, and get the help they need.

Children enjoy improved physical and emotional health, and attend routine medical appointments to ensure they remain fit and healthy. Staff encourage and support young people to engage with specialised health and therapy professionals to improve their knowledge and understanding of good emotional health. Social workers acknowledge that children have made this progress and observe that they are happier and more settled in the home.

All children and young people attend school regularly and some achieve success in their chosen courses. Staff work hard to support all young people's engagement with education. From their starting points, all young people demonstrate progress in this area, despite some ups and downs. Children with additional learning needs spend time with staff completing a range of tasks to increase their confidence in literacy, numeracy and independence skills. They say they enjoy completing such activities as photograph diaries or danger awareness booklets, and proudly show them to visitors.

Some young people have taken exams that will ensure their progression to college, and others have entered mainstream school after long periods of absence. As children prepare to enter secondary school from primary education, they benefit from well-organised programmes of visits, to ensure they are familiar with their new surroundings and make a confident transition. Children and young people value their time at school, and enjoy the social and developmental opportunities provided.

Children say they feel safe and happy in the home, and recognise staff do their best to keep them safe. They interact well with staff, and enjoy participating in activities with them to promote good relationships in the home. This has included going on holiday together, or sharing meals they have helped to prepare, according to their age and abilities. Young people demonstrate their affection for the younger children by spending time with them, sharing appropriate interests, such as music, and playing games with them.

Young people understand the rules of the home, and say these help them to improve their behaviour and independence. When young people have disagreements, staff help them to try and negotiate a satisfactory outcome, to such matters as playing music too loudly. When this is unsuccessful, young people accept staff direction based on the rules of the home and a common sense approach. This helps young people to develop the skills necessary to become successful young adults.

Young people rarely go missing from the home. However, when they demonstrate behaviour that places them at risk, such as misusing alcohol or engaging in inappropriate relationships, they know that staff will respond promptly to their behaviour, and encourage them to explore the impact of their behaviour on themselves and others. If young people are moved to temporary accommodation for their own safety, they soon request a return to the home to work with familiar staff to overcome the barriers to their progress. A professional said, 'Young people thrive in a nurturing home that operates using traditional family values.'

Children and young people are fully involved in making choices about their day to day and future lives. They negotiate daily with staff about their needs and choices regarding activities, visits or shopping. They participate in young people's meetings to explore the rules of the home and to think about issues affecting their health and welfare, such as being aware of 'stranger danger' or taking turns to look after the home and keep it tidy. Young people participate in a varied range of leisure activities that help them to develop self-awareness and reflect their age and interests. Together with staff they go on caravan holidays, learn to play the guitar, and have horse riding lessons, in addition to more routine activities like going for bike rides and picnics.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from qualified and enthusiastic staff dedicated to understanding their individual needs and wishes. Staff do their best to encourage children and young people to contribute to their individual placement plans according to their age and understanding. Staff use informal meetings and activities that encourage children to reflect on their feelings and goals for the future. Some young people who are engaged in planned moves out of the home prefer to speak for themselves, and make their own arrangements with their social workers. Managers persist in requesting relevant documents from social workers, and transition workers, to ensure that the home supports young people to make progress with approved plans and actions. Staff get to know the young people very well, and are fully committed to enabling them to understand and overcome their difficulties and achieve positive outcomes.

Staff provide young people with positive and constructive models of communicating views and challenging behaviours that offend others. They encourage older teenagers to act as positive role models for younger children and to accept some responsibility for good conduct in the home. Staff use appropriate humour and a common sense approach to maintain order in the home, and educate young people in positive social interaction. This low key and competent approach means that most of the time the home is a peaceful, happy place where children and young people like to bring their friends to visit. One child said, 'I want to stay here for ever.'

Young people contribute to the development of the home by sharing their views and ideas in regular house meetings, shared social activity, and individual consultations.

Young people recently contributed their ideas about the refurbishment and redecoration of the bathroom. Key workers spend time with young people, to ensure they communicate directly about matters of importance to them such as family contact or safety concerns. Young people are confident that adults listen to them, and are satisfied with feedback about any complaints they make. Independent adults, such as advocates, provide additional support to children who do not have frequent contact with their families. Young people say they are very happy with the quality of care they receive.

Young people live in a healthy environment that actively promotes their physical and emotional well-being. They have good access to community health services and enjoy a wide range of physical leisure activities, such as swimming, dance and drama, and riding their bikes. As a result, children and young people develop routines and hobbies that support healthy and productive futures. Meals are prepared by staff, and reflect the preferences of children and young people. Staff encourage good routines at mealtimes, and support children's understanding of expectations by providing picture prompts if necessary. Children say they like their visual reminders, as they have helped staff to put them together and they are good reminders of what to do.

Staff ensure the daily routine of the home supports participation in education. Staff take an active interest in children and young people's education and development. Staff liaise effectively with education professionals to identify appropriate educational opportunities for young people. They work collaboratively with education staff to ensure young people have the opportunity to achieve their academic potential. Staff promote the importance of education, and children and young people respond well to their interest and encouragement. Consequently, they attend school regularly and progress according to their ability. They participate in activities arranged by school such as computer clubs and educational trips. Staff are interested in the things young people have done at school, and teatime is often spent discussing their day.

Staff value the unique characteristics of individual children and work hard to meet their needs. Care plans focus on how to help children achieve in their daily lives and overcome challenges, such as helping them to understand personal safety, and reflect young people's different ages and interests. This means that younger children access simple booklets and play games with staff to explore themes such as road safety, stranger awareness, and what to do in an emergency, while older teenagers discuss in greater detail subjects like substance misuse, internet safety and behaving appropriately at school. All such discussions are reinforced through mutually respectful relationships and the sharing of a clear value base, to help children and young people to make good choices.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people say they feel safe and are well cared for in the home. Staff understand and promote positive behaviour management, and act as positive

role models to educate children about how to respond to frustration and anxiety. Staff spend lots of time with children, guiding them to think about their feelings and how to ask for help rather than keeping problems to themselves. Staff provide children with a range of experiences and activities, such as trips to beauty salons or organised days out, to help them to understand the difference between adventurous and risky behaviour. Staff are diligent about keeping young people safe, and know and understand the procedures to be implemented should any concerns arise.

Open communication, and the vigilance of staff to risks young people encounter when they are out of the home, ensures staff respond swiftly to changing circumstances that affect the safety of young people. When young people engage in unsafe behaviour, such as meeting with inappropriate adults that places them at risk of exploitation, staff promptly communicate this to all relevant agencies, including the police, to help protect young people from unsafe choices. The home coordinates and delivers action plans that include tracing the movement of young people so that they may be returned to the safety of the home. Their prompt action enables protection professionals to work with young people and plan strategies to help keep them safe.

When young people do not respond to the guidance of staff, and are moved to a secure setting, staff continue to maintain contact, to reduce the impact of separation on their emotional wellbeing at a time of trauma and disruption. Social workers observe that staff do the best they can, in often difficult situations, to support young people to consider the impact of their actions upon their safety and welfare.

Staff only rarely use restraint or impose sanctions to resolve behavioural difficulties. Staff complete clear accounts of measures used to restore order and reduce risk to staff and young people in the home, and there is regular oversight of these accounts. Managers speak to staff and young people about any restraint that has taken place, and identify any actions required to improve behaviour in the home. Mostly, staff give time and attention to children and young people, and exert a positive influence on them, through shared activity and warm relationships. In this way they communicate clear expectations for children to behave appropriately according to their age and understanding.

The organisation uses a rigorous selection and vetting process, that ensures all staff are suitable to work with young people. The human resources department for the home provides essential recruitment records to the Registered Manager, for bank staff, temporarily transferred staff and permanent staff. When staff are moved into the home due to issues at their main place of work, managers conduct relevant risk assessments to ensure they are suitable to work with the young people. This enables the manager to maintain consistent and effective oversight of all staff who work in the home.

Staff use risk management strategies, which provide guidance to help reduce minimise the incidence of unsafe situations for children and young people. Key workers have one to one sessions with young people to help them to understand the importance of making positive and safe choices. However, risk assessments are

lengthy and complicated, and do not always identify immediate or escalating risks to children. To date, due to the efforts of staff and the good verbal handover of information between them, this has not impacted negatively on the welfare of young people.

Managers promote clear and effective communication with external protection professionals, and promptly refer any allegations children and young people make about staff. Staff know and understand the importance of procedures that are followed when children raise concerns about them. Following the independent investigation of such concerns, managers implement any actions identified to improve the safety of young people, and work to restore relationships when investigations are completed. This enables children and young people to communicate with confidence any complaints or worries they may have about the home or those who work in it, without fear of reprisal. This further enhances their safety and wellbeing.

Leadership and management

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

The newly appointed manager is experienced and suitably qualified. They have prior knowledge of the home, its staff and children, and this has enabled them to settle into leadership of the home relatively quickly. Together with the deputy, they oversee the development of the home, and have begun to make positive changes to aspects of service delivery, such as: the organisation of structured activities for children; and the development of young people's meetings to improve their focus and make their content more child led.

Registered provider visitors regularly monitor the service, and provide clear reports that contain actions to enable the home to improve. Although managers have a development plan for the home, progress has been slow at times due to the many changes of personnel in the home. Additionally, the plan does not include the views and wishes of children, parents or the professionals who support them. Some placing authorities conduct quality assurance visits, and managers respond promptly to address any shortfalls they identify.

Staff and external professionals recognise improvements to the operation of home and the subsequent benefit to young people. One professional said, 'The home has stabilised under the effective leadership of the new manager, and children have settled down again.' Staff confirm they receive regular and developmental supervision that helps them to improve. Managers have recognised the importance of a consistent staff team to work with young people, and rotas reflect a more stable staff team.

Social workers value the efforts of staff to focus on the needs of young people, and say that staff work very hard to provide a very good quality service. They recognise that staff value children, and want them to be successful. As a result, staff are open to their suggestions about the way they work with children and their families.

Most staff access developmental training in addition to the statutory minimum. Training in attachment and loss means staff are equipped to work effectively with those who have been bereaved. The deputy manager is undertaking a suitable management qualification, to improve their knowledge and understanding of how best to support the development of the home

Managers are overseeing improvements to the recording of information about children and young people, including revised care plans, to make them more succinct and accessible to all staff. Key workers engage children and young people to reflect on and record the progress they make, or the difficulties they encounter, between each of their review meetings. Staff help them to identify realistic solutions to problems and difficulties as they arise, and work with all appropriate professionals, such as teachers, social workers and the police, to support improvements in their outlook and prospects.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.