

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC397112
Inspector	Marina Tully
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Alliance Care & Education Limited
Registered person address	Brow Top Farm Quernmore LANCASTER LA2 0QW
Responsible individual	Andrew Taylor
Registered manager	Jade Ann O'Connor
Date of last inspection	26/03/2014

Inspection date	12/08/2014
------------------------	------------

Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	There has been no enforcement action since the last inspection.

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

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	outstanding
-------------------	--------------------

The home continues to provide outstanding provision and excellent quality care to young people. Young people make measurable progress from the start of their placements in all aspects of their lives. Staff are highly trained, knowledgeable and committed to improving outcomes for young people. The home provides young people with a warm, nurturing and safe home environment where they are supported to realise their full potential.

Young people are happy, safe and content in the home. They benefit from secure attachments with staff and consistent support from the team. Young people have highly personalised care plans that staff are fully informed of and therefore empowered to provide the support and intervention required.

Risk-taking behaviour has significantly decreased since the start of young people's placements. Again, this is down to a competent, highly trained team; quality collaborative working and young people growing in confidence and self-esteem. As a result, young people are safe and protected. This is reflected in the feedback from social workers, schools and parents, who are extremely complimentary of the service. Of equal importance, young people report that the quality of care is 'outstanding'.

The manager demonstrates excellent leadership skills and a dedication to continual improvement in service development. Staff receive high quality supervision on a regular basis, as well as frequent consultation and guidance from the in-house therapist. This not only enhances their knowledge and understanding; it builds their own resilience and enables them to provide outstanding care to vulnerable young people.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This home is one of a number owned and managed by a private organisation. It provides care for up to four young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
26/03/2014	Interim	good progress
13/01/2014	Full	outstanding
05/03/2013	Interim	good progress
13/12/2012	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 staff are trained in appropriate safe-care practice. Specifically in relation to safeguarding children and young people accessing the internet. (NMS 4.6)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **outstanding**

Young people make significant progress from the start of their placements. A social worker commented 'the home is brilliant he has made such progress since moving in, I cannot fault them.'

All young people attend school and have excellent attendance due to their improved routines and self-esteem. For example, some young people who refused to attend school prior to placement now attend full time and have made positive achievements. Young people's attitude to learning and behaviour in school has vastly improved. A teacher stated 'he has made great progress not only with his learning but also with how he socialises with others; his confidence has grown.'

Young people have access to home tuition to further advance their education. Young people are aspirational about their future and take advantage of good opportunities to improve future outcomes. For example, young people attend community groups such as cadets, and others are seeking voluntary work in the local area. Some young people have won competitions for writing poetry and had their work published.

Young people develop essential skills to increase their independence. They grow vegetables in the garden which they sell back to the home to use for their meals. Not only does this give young people practical skills it encourages a healthy, nutritional diet. Young people are proud of their achievements and benefit from staff giving encouragement, praise and rewards. This increases their confidence and enhances their self-esteem giving them the motivation and self-belief to try new things.

Young people enjoy good health and with consistent staff support they make healthier life choices. For example, healthy eating is promoted, including growing their own vegetables and helping to cook meals. All health appointments are attended and young people are encouraged to make their own appointments when appropriate.

Young people follow medical advice and take pride in their health and appearance. Young people willingly engage in key work sessions where they learn about important health issues. For example, key work session records demonstrate effective engagement around sensitive issues such as sexual health.

Young people benefit from accessing the in-house therapy service, resulting in measurable progress in their emotional well-being. Self-harm incidents have significantly decreased as have concerns around child sexual exploitation. Young people no longer go missing. Young people are therefore making safer choices due to increased resilience and improved emotional health.

Young people are more confident from the start of their placements and therefore develop greater resilience and a higher self-esteem. This prepares and helps them deal with current and future life challenges.

Quality of care

outstanding

Young people report that the quality of care in the home is 'outstanding'.

There is a culture of mutual respect and tolerance in the home as well as a feeling of genuine warmth. Staff spend quality time with the young people, showing a sincere interest in their progress and welfare. Staff have fostered excellent relationships through listening, showing empathy and being consistent with their care. Consequently, young people are engaging fully with staff, who then support them to make more positive choices.

Staff are proactive at seeking the views of young people and ensuring they genuinely influence the running of the home. For example, young people regularly meet to discuss the home's developments and make decisions about improvements, activities or changes within the home. Young people help choose the décor of the home, plan menus and decide what activities they do.

Young people benefit from good routines and consistent boundaries. They are supported through encouragement and reward, and sanctions are rarely used. Staff successfully challenge young people's inappropriate actions in a calm and constructive way. This ensures that young people are supported to adhere to boundaries and good relationships between staff and each other are maintained.

Complaints are minimal however, when made they are robustly managed in a timely way. The home has a very clear and accessible complaints system that is widely promoted in the home. Young people are fully aware of how to make a complaint and know who can help them. The young person's guide is current and young person centred, including details of a range of advocacy support services. The highly effective complaints procedure further enhances young people's safety within the home.

Staff work extremely well with partners such as schools, social workers and parents. Quality partnership working ensures young people are at the centre of a strong team, with clear shared goals, where young people's needs are paramount. Social workers report 'amazing partnership working which makes my job so much easier, this is appreciated by the family as well as me'.

Young people benefit from updated high quality care plans and risk assessments. This has led to a significant improvement in their progress in all aspects of their life. A social worker said 'this placement has done her the world of good both in

safeguarding and her education; she has made fantastic progress in all areas’.

Staff are proactive and consistent in supporting the educational achievement of young people through excellent collaborative working with schools. They ensure achievement goes beyond school by getting young people to engage in educational and vocational activities at home. For example, young people are involved in voluntary work and enter writing competitions on their own volition.

Young people enjoy a variety of enrichment activities where they learn new skills and have different experiences. Young people know what they like and are eager to give new things a try. For example, they enjoy horse riding, kayaking, on-line training courses and in-house talent contests. Such opportunities provide them with confidence and self-assurance. As a result, young people are prepared to cope with inevitable life changes and are enabled to face new challenges head on.

Young people feel respected and therefore respect others. Young people’s culture and heritage is recognised and celebrated. They have a positive self-view of themselves and benefit from having all of their diverse needs met. They enjoy living in an environment that welcomes difference and diversity, where mutual respect and equality is evidently promoted. For example, staff research the local community to identify specific cultural interests and resources. Not only does this increase the staff’s knowledge and understanding of difference and diversity, it ensures young people’s individual identity and heritage is promoted.

Medication procedures are exceptionally well organised, ensuring that prescribed medication is given as directed. Staff follow clear guidance when administering medicines in the home. A regular audit of medication stock ensures that the potential for error is minimised. Staff receive relevant and effective training on safe medication administration. Consequently, young people benefit from a suitably trained staff team who are competent to care for the young people’s health needs.

The home is maintained to a high standard. Leaders and staff have undoubtedly created a warm, nurturing homely environment where young people feel secure and relaxed. The home is suitably located with easy access to towns and cities, as well as benefitting from the countryside. Young people enjoy the secure large garden. They have personalised their own bedrooms to reflect their tastes and personalities which makes them feel more settled and at home.

Keeping children and young people safe outstanding

Young people are protected by robust risk assessments and a highly trained, competent staff team. Young people’s risk-taking behaviour significantly reduces from the start of their placements. Young people are given a wide range of support to ensure they are fully protected. For example, in-house therapists work with young people which complements the rigorous work undertaken by staff. Additionally,

specialist resources, such as child sexual exploitation services, are commissioned to work with young people at risk of this abuse. The vast support provided to young people increases their resilience and empowers them to make safer choices.

Young people no longer go missing from care. Staff know the whereabouts of young people and keep in touch with them when they are out on free time. Staff are vigilant and take proactive measures to deter young people from going missing. For example, when they suspect a young person is going missing, staff follow them and stay with them until they agree to return. Not only does this prevent the danger it also shows the young people that staff genuinely care.

Self-harming incidents are rare. Staff know the individual young people's triggers and vulnerabilities and therefore predict when a young person is likely to self-harm. In such instances, staff take quick action to prevent it, for example, bedrooms are searched and items of danger removed and locked away. All safeguarding issues and incidents are sensitively followed up in therapy and key work sessions. This ensures young people reflect on their behaviour, link actions to consequences and develop safer coping strategies.

Restraint is only used as a last resort and to protect the welfare of young people. All physical intervention is recorded appropriately and statutory procedures followed. Positive behaviour is encouraged through effective reward and praise systems. Young people are supported to understand how their behaviour impacts on others and have developed effective skills to regulate their difficult emotions. The need to restrain young people for their own protection has considerably reduced due to positive behaviour management strategies. A social worker said 'prior to his placement he needed to be restrained frequently at school now doesn't get restrained at all.'

Bullying is taken seriously in the home and incidents, no matter how small, are challenged. Tensions and fall outs between young people are quickly resolved. Bullying records are thorough and incidents are followed up in key work sessions. Young people who bully are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour; focusing on the impact bullying has on others and more appropriate ways of resolving conflict. Young people trust staff and know they will protect and advocate for them if they are getting bullied. Not only does this make them feel safe, it demonstrates they are important and their rights are protected.

Staff are aware of the risks presented to young people through the internet and mobile technology. Some good practice is already in place to address these risks. For example, young people hand in their mobile phones at night, parental controls are installed on the home's computer and staff supervise young people when using the home's computer.

Staff however, do not get specific training on e-safety and responsibilities are not clearly defined like other safeguarding issues. This means e-safety is not given the same level of priority as other safeguarding matters and staff are not fully equipped

to protect. A recommendation has therefore been made, specifically in relation to e-safety and staff training.

The Registered manager has forged strong links with partner agencies such as the police, missing person coordinator, local safeguarding children's board and local authority designated officers. Successful collaborative working ensures all agencies are working together and maximising resources to keep young people safe.

The Registered Manager ensures safe recruitment procedures are robustly applied in the home. All required checks are made and recorded on individual staff files. There have not been any new staff join the team since the last inspection and staff turnover is low. Consequently, young people are safe to form positive attachments with a stable and appropriately vetted team, which further promotes the young people's safety and well-being.

The home provides a safe and secure environment to vulnerable young people. Effective health and safety procedures are integral to the daily running of the home. For example, staff and young people know what to do in the event of a fire. Regular fire drills are undertaken and followed up in both staff and young people's meetings to look at ways of improving this procedure. Health and safety checks are routinely undertaken and any recommendations from such checks are quickly actioned. The Registered Manager is meticulous at auditing and monitoring the health and safety of the home. All of which ensures the home is a safe place for young people to reside.

Leadership and management

outstanding

The manager registered with Ofsted in January 2012. She holds a level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management. She has over seven years of experience working in the children's home. She successfully worked her way up to Registered Manager through promotion from a residential support worker.

A suitably qualified and experienced manager ensures that the home is continuing to improve and maintain high standards. This was reflected in the last inspection where one recommendation was made and has since been sufficiently met. The Registered Manager is an enthusiastic and energetic leader. Her hard work and dedication is ensuring that the quality of care and young people's progress continues to exceed statutory expectations.

The statement of purpose is up-to-date, comprehensive and clearly defines the aims and objectives of the service. The home ensures this document is translated into other languages when necessary. The statement of purpose is reflected in the young people's guide which is given to all young people on admission. This guide is also readily available to young people in the communal areas of the home. The guide has been carefully designed to ensure it is informative, age appropriate and attractive to young people. Consequently, young people, parents and placing authorities are clear

from the onset of the aims and objectives of the service.

The manager is committed to providing excellent standards of care to the young people. This is reflected in the home's development plan where it is evident that young people, parents, social workers, schools and other partners are routinely consulted about the care and quality of the home.

The home is unquestionably well resourced with a high staff ratio to meet the needs of the young people. Staff are suitably qualified and trained to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and expertise to meet the young people's diverse needs. The manager ensures that staff are supported in their roles through regular, high quality supervision and structured team meetings. Staff also benefit from support and guidance from the in-house therapist. This enables staff to further develop their practice as well as their own emotional resilience; making them a stronger team to undertake their roles and responsibilities. There is a clear learning culture in place. Leaders and staff are motivated and committed to their ongoing learning and development.

The Registered Manager has ensured the home has strong links with the police, safeguarding agencies, schools, placing authorities and health services. This ensures all relevant partners are working collaboratively and effectively to protect and meet the holistic needs of young people. As a result the home greatly benefits from an up-to-date multi-agency location risk assessment. This ensures effective monitoring of any potential dangers within the local area, which in turn promotes the safety of young people both inside and outside of the home.

Exceptional leadership has ensured young people are benefiting from individualised, comprehensive risk assessments and placement plans. All statutory documents, such as care plans, medical consent and medical assessments have been obtained and are up-to-date. Statutory social work visits, placement planning meetings and reviews are undertaken within set timescales. These are clearly recorded on young people's files. This ensures young people's care plans are current and they receive the care and support they require.

The manager has devised thorough monitoring systems to ensure robust auditing and evaluation of the effectiveness of the service. For example, progress of the home is tracked through detailed and evaluative Regulation 33 and Regulation 34 reports.

The use of restraint, sanctions, complaints and administration of medication is stringently scrutinised by the Registered Manager on a frequent basis. This ensures that practice within the home is transparent and effective and reduces the chance of malpractice and error. This enhances the safety, stability and well-being of young people and ensures they receive only the highest standard of care.

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.