

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC407787
Inspection date	21/05/2013
Inspector	David Coulter
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	09/01/2013
--------------------------------	------------

© 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 home is an independent residential home that cares for up to six young people who may have behavioural, emotional and social 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**.

The home is emerging from an unsettled and disruptive period which saw the departure of the Registered Manager and a number of experienced staff. The composition of the group of young people has also significantly changed, with the admission of younger residents. Although the new manager has only been in post for a short period of time, she has made a significant impact by providing staff support and effective leadership. The new residents are settling in and are forming meaningful relationships with staff. In spite of the many recent changes that have occurred within the home, staff have managed to remain focused on providing good quality care to a group of extremely vulnerable young people. Young people are beginning to respond positively to the changes, which include clear behavioural expectations and boundaries. The actions and recommendations arising from the last inspection have been effectively addressed.

While it is evident that the physical, social and emotional needs of young people have been appropriately identified, the new placement planning process is still developing and has yet to integrate monitoring systems to ensure that short and long-term goals are being met. The manager and staff are aware that this is an area for further development. Young people are supported by a group of staff who advocate effectively on their behalf and ensure that they have opportunities to lead full and active lives during their placements. Young people participate in a range of social and recreational activities within the home and local community.

Even though many of the young people admitted to the home have experienced disruption and exclusions during their school lives, they generally respond positively to the encouragement and support provided by staff. School attendance is good.

Staff reinforce positive behaviour and success is recognised and celebrated. While staff liaise effectively with school staff there is currently no system to provide evidence how activities within the home contribute to already identified educational goals. Although staff encourage young people to develop a range of independent living skills, the current system is inconsistent. It does not include a monitoring process that could register young people's progress and help identify further needs.

Although the home has embarked on an ambitious development programme and is already making progress, there is currently insufficient evidence to demonstrate the longer term impact of recent changes. There is, however, substantial evidence that the service is currently providing adequate care to a group of extremely vulnerable young people with complex care needs. The well-motivated staff are aspirational for the young people in their care and are intent on creating a safe, nurturing environment that will enable each individual to grow and develop their educational and social potential. There is one recommendation arising from the inspection.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- introduce a system to monitor the progress each young person makes in the acquisition of independent living skills (NMS 12.1).

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

The current resident group has not been together long and young people are still in the process of settling in. All are responding positively to the safety and stability offered by the home and this is reflected in greater engagement with staff, more interaction with each other and a significant decrease in self-destructive and challenging behaviours. Young people are now more willing to discuss all aspects of their lives. Each young person is treated as an individual and receives care that is tailored to meet their specific physical, social and emotional needs. Staff are currently working alongside each young person in order to identify their personal interests and identify a number of achievable goals related to their education, health and behaviour. Young people spoke in positive terms about their lives within the home.

Young people generally adhere to the home's behavioural boundaries and the expectations which staff place upon them. However, due to their learning difficulties, young people often find it hard to manage their emotions when confronted with stressful situations. By developing effective strategies young people are helped to channel their anxieties and frustrations into non-destructive behaviours. Young people are now better able to link their behaviour with likely consequences. A

significant decrease in incidents of challenging behaviour indicates that young people are successful in managing negative and self-destructive behaviours.

Young people's views are being appropriately sought on all aspects of life within the home, formally through regular residents meetings and informally through daily discussions with staff. Young people can register any concerns about daily living in a 'grumbles' book. All grumbles are examined and suggestions considered by staff. Young people confirmed they were aware of how to register a complaint. Young people are encouraged to assert their independence by making decisions over the contents and decoration of their rooms, the food they eat and the activities in which they wish to participate.

Staff have aspirations for the young people in their care and all are made aware of the importance of education and the contribution it can make to their future prospects. Staff expect each young person to be up and ready to travel to school on time each morning. All manage to meet these demands and attendance levels are extremely good. Effective communication between school and residential staff ensure the achievements of young people are recognised and celebrated. Such recognition contributes to an increase in their self-confidence. Young people are provided opportunities to increase their knowledge and develop their social and life-skills by participating in a range of activities in both the home and local community. While such participation clearly extends each young person's social horizons its contribution to their development is hard to determine as current monitoring systems are ineffective.

Young people can access a phone to maintain contact with members of their family. Most young people return home at regular intervals throughout the school term. Any restrictions relating to contact are appropriately shared amongst staff. Such contact is important in maintaining the social networks that will support young people on completion of their school careers.

Quality of care

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

Although each young person is treated as an individual with their own specific care needs, there is a recognition on the part of staff that the home is a communal setting and as such all young people have to live together regardless of any differences. By promoting the concept of mutual respect, staff have created a safe and nurturing environment in which young people can grow, develop and co-exist peacefully. Due to their complex needs, some young people struggle in group settings and will, on occasions, require more individual support. Staffing levels are closely monitored and adjusted in line with changing needs and circumstances.

Staff have a zero tolerance of any form of discriminatory behaviour. Staff supervise effectively and are pro-active in intervening if they believe any form of physical play is becoming too vigorous. Staff are increasingly successful in using diversionary techniques to de-escalate challenging situations. The number of recorded physical

interventions has significantly decreased since the last inspection. As staff become more familiar with each young person's behaviour, the triggers that create negative behavioural responses are identified. The antecedents of all significant incidents are discussed within the staff team.

Young people are encouraged to contribute to the development of their placement plans and ensure their views on all aspects of their lives within the home are acknowledged. While there was initially reluctance on the part of some young people to contribute to the planning process, this is changing. For example, young people are now attending and making significant contributions to their reviews. This development has been acknowledged and greatly welcomed by placing social workers. On admission, all young people are made aware of how to raise concerns and make a complaint. The one complaint that has arisen since the last inspection has been appropriately managed and is subject to an on-going investigation. Young people indicated they were happy with life within the home and the care they receive. As one young person remarked, 'it's good here, I like it.'

Young people benefit from good health. They are provided with good quality food and regular opportunities to participate in physical activities. The culinary preferences and special dietary needs of each young person are incorporated into menu plans. Young people spoke in positive terms about both the quantity and quality of food provided. The health of each young person is carefully assessed prior to admission and arrangements made to address specific areas of concern such as mental health. Young people's health and well-being is carefully monitored by staff and there is an expectation that all receive regular medical, dental and eye sight tests. Personal care issues dealt with sensitively. Young people are provided with advice and guidance relating to healthy living and the home operates a non-smoking policy.

During the inspection, it was possible to observe young people in the company of a range of staff. All the staff spoken with were conversant with the care needs of each young person and were able to illustrate areas in which each had progressed. Young people were relaxed and at ease in their surroundings. Interaction between young people and staff was spontaneous and conversations were laced with humour and playful banter. Young people were clearly enjoying and responding positively to the care and attention they were receiving. Staff are aware of the difficulties some young people can experience in processing information and ensure that they communicate in terms that are applicable to each individual.

The home, an older property, provides a warm homely environment that is full of character. A tour of the building indicated it is structurally sound and in extremely good decorative order. Each young person is provided with their own bedroom that they can decorate and furnish to meet their particular needs. As part of their independence training, young people are expected to keep their rooms clean and tidy. Young people spoke positively about their accommodation and appreciated having their own 'personal space'.

Young people are encouraged to develop their own interests and hobbies and staff are currently introducing them to a range of activities both in the home and local

community. The home has its own transport that can be used to access activities in surrounding areas. All off-site activities are risk assessed, appropriately staffed and organised around the needs of each young person.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The home operates with a well-motivated group of staff, all of whom have been subject to the company's comprehensive recruitment process and deemed suitable to work with vulnerable young people. All new staff complete safeguarding training as part of their induction. Staff spoken with are aware of their individual responsibilities with regard to reporting any safeguarding worries or concerns. All were conversant with the specific risks associated with each young person's behaviour. Currently young people only leave the home in the company of staff. However, plans are being developed to help each individual develop appropriate safe caring practices so they can move independently in the local community. There are appropriate procedures in place to report any young person if they should go missing. The manager has been pro-active in initiating contact with the local police and made them aware of the particular vulnerabilities of the young people in the home's care.

The home has a zero tolerance of bullying behaviour and staff are clearly aware of the propensity of some individuals to take advantage of the more vulnerable members of the group. Staff closely monitor the social interaction between young people and intervene if they believe an individual is being teased or scapegoated. The introduction of hand-over meetings between staff on different shifts now provides opportunities to discuss the behaviours of each young person and the dynamics that exist within the group. This has enabled staff to develop greater consistency in the delivery of care and the application of agreed behavioural boundaries.

Group meetings and individual key-worker sessions are being successfully used to discuss all issues of life within the home including the relationships each young person has with each other. If a young person is unhappy with any aspect of their care they can convey their concerns to any of the staff or their social worker. Although staff reinforce positive behaviour through the rewards system, sanctions are also used to highlight negative and inappropriate behaviours. Sanctions normally consist of a withdrawal of a privilege. A reparation system provides opportunities for individuals to redeem themselves by opting to complete a domestic task such as washing the home's car. Young people feel that staff are fair in the way that they manage behaviour.

The home operates within an established health and safety framework which ensures that young people and staff remain safe. The building, its equipment and power supplies are subject to regular health and safety checks. Fire fighting equipment is routinely serviced and tested and young people and staff complete regular fire evacuation exercises. Risk assessments form part of the planning process of all activities in the local community.

Leadership and management

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

The home is experiencing much needed stability following an uncertain period during which the registered manager and a number of permanent staff departed. A new, experienced manager has been appointed and although she has only been in post for a period of months, she has already made a positive impact by providing effective leadership. She is extremely child focused and has already significantly increased opportunities for young people to contribute their views to the home's development. The manager is acutely aware of the strengths of the service and the key areas that need improving. Staff morale is good and those spoken with were extremely appreciative of the support they are receiving and the proposals for future development. Young people are clearly benefiting from this more consistent approach to care. Staff indicated that anxiety levels amongst young people have significantly decreased.

Staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities and have access to a comprehensive range of policies and procedures. There is a culture of training and professional development within the staff team and individuals are pro-active in keeping abreast of developments within the child care field. Staff can access a comprehensive range of computer-based e-learning courses to update their knowledge and skills. More extensive courses are available during school holidays when the majority of young people have returned home. The manager has introduced a monthly supervision system that ensures all staff have the opportunity to discuss events within the home and reflect on their practice.

The home's Statement of Purpose has been recently updated and accurately reflects the nature of the care currently being offered. The home is subject to monthly monitoring visits and senior managers from within the company are frequent visitors. In order to improve standards of care further, the home has addressed the actions and recommendations arising from the last inspection appropriately. In relation to the actions, a weekly activity programme is now in operation; a missing persons' protocol has been developed following consultation with the local police, a new simplified system has been introduced to record all significant incidents and a new placement planning process now ensures greater involvement with young people.

In response to the recommendations, staffing rotas have now been changed to ensure there is always time for a handover meeting between staff on different shifts. The home has also been subject to some redecoration and refurbishment which has further increased the quality of the environment. Although staff provide young people with regular opportunities to develop their independent living skills, there is currently no systematic recording system to monitor their progress.

The home is appropriately resourced and is operating in the best interests of the young people currently accommodated. Confidential information is held securely and only shared with those deemed appropriate. Records and documents contain recent

and relevant information and are stored in locked facilities.

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.