

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC471581
Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Albrighton Care Ltd
Registered person address	Newmarket Suite 16, Centrix Keys Business Village Keys Park Road Hednesford Staffordshire WS12 2HA
Responsible individual	Darren John Smallman
Registered manager	Cheryl Kingston
Date of last inspection	N/A

Inspection date	01/07/2014
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Previous inspection	N/A
Enforcement action since last inspection	None.

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

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	adequate
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This newly established home provides personalised and well planned care for the single child placed. The committed team, some of whom are experienced in residential work with children, work closely with health, education and social work professionals to promote positive outcomes for children. Staff are caring, supportive, active, inclusive and creative in their work. As a result, children like living here and participate enthusiastically in the routines and activities of the day. Stakeholders also express confidence in the standard of care.

Children feel safe here and respond well when adult attention is unconditionally given and extra rewards are earned. Safe and hygienic practices are well understood by all staff and recruitment systems are safe despite one shortfall in meeting the national minimum standard. As a result, children's health and personal independence skills are improving within the context of their learning disabilities. However, children's complex emotional and behavioural difficulties hold back their learning and social/emotional progress. In addition, staff responses to negative behaviours work less well on occasions.

Leaders and managers have established robust systems to ensure that the home runs safely and efficiently. They network well with all those involved in children's care plans and they are successful in securing good professional team-work around

each child. Managers have ensured that staff are provided with good training and support to develop their skills in safe care of children with learning disabilities. However, despite some reflective practice and specialist advice, areas of weaknesses in behaviour management practices are identified during this inspection. Nevertheless, children's welfare and safety are adequately promoted in the home.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home is operated by a small limited company and can accommodate and provide care for up to two children and young people with learning disabilities.

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

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
17B (2001)	ensure that within 24 hours of the use of any measure of control, restraint or discipline, that the records include the effectiveness and consequences of the use of the measure (Regulation 17b (3)(f))	02/08/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the views of Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) are sought regularly on the child's care. This includes both consultation with the IRO and assistance for children to make contact with their IRO when they wish (NMS 18.1)
- extend the learning and development programme to ensure that staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children and keeps them up to date with professional, legal and practice developments. This is with particular respect to managing challenging behaviour (NMS 18.1)
- ensure that the home's development plan is an effective tool for identifying how the home operates and any priorities, changes or targets for the year (NMS 18.1)
- ensure that recruitment systems effectively demonstrate how decisions are

reached about appointments in the light of any criminal convictions or other concerns about suitability that are declared or discovered through the recruitment process. (NMS 16.5)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **adequate**

Children make adequate progress to develop emotional resilience and self-awareness within the context of their learning and attachment-based difficulties. Children know that they are a 'looked after child' but trust staff and turn to them for a cuddle. They like to sit with staff on the garden wall talking. Children read facial expressions and use eye contact quite well and can show some appropriate sense of humour. They enjoy earning an extension to bedtime through good behaviour and are able to conform to daily hygiene and meal routines when they are positively engaged with staff. They are aware that they can choose a conforming or negative response in many daily situations and are able to appreciate the effect of their behaviour upon others. For example, one child wrote a message saying 'to all staff - let's have a good evening and good choices.'

Children enjoy a very active lifestyle. They frequently go swimming, to a local gym and walking at local beauty spots. They also enjoy going out locally learning to ride their scooter. Children enjoy active treats, such as a trip to Alton Towers with staff and trips to places of interest with the county 'looked after children project'. This physical exercise ensures their good physical health; keeps them busy; and serves to distract them from various preoccupations associated with their disabilities and difficulties. For example, children's pre-occupations with health matters are managed well in the home through good medication routines, continuous reassurance and positive re-direction. As a result, children's health is generally good.

Children's educational achievement is satisfactory, taking into account their learning disabilities and behavioural difficulties. However, the special school say that 'behaviour is hindering educational progress' and a number of recent exclusions have taken place because children have not been able to manage their behaviour in school. Nevertheless, children receive good support from staff to attend school, maintain their behaviour and complete homework tasks within the home. Staff have offered to stay with children in the school and are currently mirroring the rewards given by school in the hope that this will assist children and enable their educational place to continue.

Children make a positive contribution to the home and have acquired a number of practical and life skills. They really enjoy cooking and sometimes lay the table, help prepare a meal, bake cakes or make drinks for everyone. They have invited the head teacher to the home for tea. Children make their bed, manage their personal hygiene and have learnt how to use the washing machine. A child said, 'I love this house and I'm very happy - the best thing here is the washing machine.'

Quality of care

adequate

Staff include children well overall and take their views, wishes and feelings into account in the running of the home. For example, there are flexible menu choices and numerous food based rewards, such as an ice cream cone or a meal out. Children like to post suggestions into the ideas box and enjoy seeing their suggestions acted on. For example, children wanted goldfish, a fan, and a scooter, all of which have been provided.

Children enjoy sound relationships and interact positively with staff. Staff communicate clearly and warmly to children and utilise systems like star charts, meetings, one to one sessions and feedback questionnaires to add to this communication. For example, one member of staff wrote, 'I am very proud of your behaviour to me - we don't want you losing stars and want you to get your treats.' Equally, children write on records following rewards, saying 'thank you' and 'I'm pleased' when they have earned a bedtime extension or movie night for appropriate behaviour. Children give positive feedback about their life in the home. For example, one child wrote, 'I like the washing machine, choices of meals, choosing activities, my bedroom, the staff, dishwasher and tumble dryer.'

Overall, staff set clear, consistent and appropriate boundaries for children and respond calmly to challenging and inappropriate behaviour. A relative said, 'they are all on the ball - they respond well'. A social worker said, 'they respond really well to ever-changing behaviours'. Activities are now planned each day in the light of children's current emotional state, behaviours and choices. This is found to be better than planning activities a week in advance because staff found they sometimes needed to cancel activities in the light of children's heightened state. Children's disappointment then led to some significant incidents of uncontrolled behaviour. On occasions, staff impose boundaries which work less well. For example, staff sometimes withdraw their attention from children because they judge them to be behaving in an unnecessarily 'attention seeking' manner. In addition, staff are occasionally inflexible about children's choices and wishes because they confuse this with maintaining consistency and adult control. Children's behaviour on these occasions has deteriorated, threatening their otherwise purposeful relationships with staff.

Staff work very positively with families to promote good relationships and continuity for children. Staff are also successful in working with school and health services to ensure that children are cared for in line with their placement plan. This maximises children's opportunities for stability and progress. Staff ensure that the home and garden are clean, safe and well maintained. They also include children in their records and help them collect memorabilia of their time in the home. As a result, children feel settled.

Keeping children and young people safe adequate

Children feel safe in the home and feel confident to disclose concerns to staff. One social worker said, 'The unusual behaviours and small disclosures are about my child feeling safe.' Children say that they would go to the manager or other staff if they were unhappy about anything, including about another member of staff. They also say they like to talk to their social worker. However, although children also know their independent reviewing officer (IRO), they have not got a contact telephone number and are not encouraged to phone the IRO with any questions or concerns.

There is minimum use of restraint in the home and it has only been used to prevent injury to people or serious damage to property. Incidents are appropriately followed up in discussion and reflection with children. Staff are properly trained in physical intervention and records of both physical interventions and other sanctions are accurately and clearly recorded. This keeps children safe. However, there is insufficient insight afterwards by managers and staff when incidents are reviewed. For instance one child said, 'I am angry and upset and scared of consequences' but lessons about the effectiveness, or otherwise, of physical interventions and other sanctions are not always learnt. As a result, staff do not realise that their use of sanctions might have, on occasions, escalated children's unwanted behaviour and that some clearly ineffective sanctions have been used again with little thought.

The environment is physically safe and appropriately secure. There is a buzzer which alerts staff if the front door is opened. This enables staff to quickly follow if children run off from the home. As a result, children have not gone missing and staff have succeeded in encouraging them to return. Similarly, children very frequently open the fridge, food cupboards and electrical domestic appliances. However, staff do not make these things inaccessible. They use their own skills to manage these behaviours without resorting to institutional practices. As a result, children gain more independence, take only appropriate risks, and are kept safe in a homely environment.

Staff are safely recruited in the home because thorough vetting checks are undertaken and followed up with referees and in interview. Concerns about suitability which arise through the recruitment process are carefully considered before any staff are taken on. However, there is no clear recording of how recruitment decisions are actually reached and how any concerns are evaluated. While this has no direct impact on children's safety, it compromises the robustness of staff recruitment records.

Leadership and management adequate

Children have benefitted from well organised care and good multi-agency working since the home opened in December 2013. The Registered Manager of the home has been registered from the outset and is experienced in the care of children with learning disabilities. She is undertaking the level five diploma in management of the care of children and young people. She works closely with the registered individual of the home who is social work trained and has some strong working links within children's services in the area. There is now also a deputy manager working as part of the management team. A social worker said, 'there are no pitfalls from the home's newness - they have been so consistent.' However, the home's annual development plan states in detail how the home should be run, but does not identify any key aims or objectives for the year. In addition, no planning or monitoring tools prompt managers to regularly consult with children's IROs.

Leaders and managers recruit, train and support staff well overall. Supervision is regular. Training in safe care; aspects of learning disability; and in health and safety is sound. Similarly, child protection, self-harm and attachment disorder training has taken place. Staff who are unqualified in child care are working hard towards their diploma and receive regular group support in the home to assist them. Team meetings are regular and consultation with other professionals to share practice ideas works well overall. For example, staff and managers benefit from advice from a psychologist and have been able to secure a reassessment of the child currently in placement, in order to better guide care planning and provision. However, staff and managers' skills in positive behaviour management remain under-developed.

Managers undertake regular monitoring of the home's running and look for patterns and trends. For example, they have identified that children tend to favour one member of staff on shift over another and that good days in school are often followed by difficult days in the home. Managers also identify that some staff can be rigid in their practice. Managers aim for better analysis of behaviour management practice and have adapted some of the recording tools to facilitate this. For example, physical intervention records are now fuller and prompt for better review afterwards. However, manager insights are somewhat underdeveloped and are held back because they do not carefully review recordings of care practice. As a result, instances of unhelpful behaviour management practice sometimes go unchallenged and there is some uncertainty about how best to promote improvement in children's behaviour at school.

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.