

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC040500
Inspection date	8 June 2010
Inspector	Malcolm Stannard / Graham Robinson
Type of Inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	16 March 2010
--------------------------------	---------------

© Crown copyright 2010

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.

You can obtain copies of The Children Act 2004, Every Child Matters and The National Minimum Standards for Children's Services from: The Stationery Office (TSO) PO Box 29, St Cripins, Duke Street, Norwich, NR3 1GN. Tel: 0870 600 5522. Online ordering: www.tso.co.uk/bookshop

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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The secure children's home is owned and managed by a local authority community and social services department. It is registered to provide full-time secure care and education for up to 20 young males between the ages of 10 and 17 years. All the young people placed at the centre are referred by the Youth Justice Board.

The centre consists of three living units, a school unit, a gymnasium and administrative offices. Additional lounge areas, a music room and exterior workshops have recently increased the facilities available. Each of the units is purpose built.

High walls and fencing prevent the young people from leaving the site without authorisation. All of the units have at least two communal spaces, a kitchen area and single lockable bedrooms for each of the young people. There were 19 young people resident at the time of the visit and all had the opportunity to participate in the inspection.

Summary

This was an announced, full inspection to evaluate the quality of care and security at the secure children's unit. The purpose was to advise the Secretary of State regarding approval of the centre's fitness to continue to offer secure accommodation to children and young people. All the national minimum standards and the additional licensing standards under each of the Every Child Matters outcomes were inspected. The formal education provision at the unit was also inspected on this visit. Two architectural advisors also visited the centre to conduct an inspection of the premises.

Embedded strengths at the centre continue to be the appropriate professional relationships between staff and young people, staff skills at diffusing difficult situations, an outstanding activities programme ensuring that young people are able to undertake a wide range of experiences, and the preparation of young people for when they leave the centre. The management and staff at the centre work hard to reflect on their practice and identify any areas for further development.

As a result of the inspection a recommendation will be made to the Secretary of State for a three year approval to be given for the centre to operate as a secure unit.

The overall quality rating is outstanding.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection in March 2010, management at the centre was asked to consider two recommendations. Both have been fully addressed.

It was recommended that fire records contain details of all staff who participate in practice drills. Comprehensive details of staff who are present and take part in drills are now recorded. This ensures that any staff who have not been involved in a drill can be identified and action taken. Opportunities for staff to take part in regular refresher training in health, safety and security were recommended. All staff are now able to access ongoing training. This helps to ensure the safety of all at the centre.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

There are excellent arrangements in place to provide good quality meals at the centre. Young people have a choice of varied, nutritious and healthy food which meets their dietary needs. Specialist diets are catered for and young people are able to cook their own meals with access to healthy eating guidance provided by kitchen staff. Healthy snacks are provided at break times, and a healthy option brunch is provided on a Sunday. A chef meets regularly with the young people to discuss their views and suggestions on the meals provided. Young people are encouraged to take part in activities in the fresh air to promote their health.

Health needs of young people are identified and met thoroughly. Excellent arrangements are in place for access to a doctor, dentist, optician and other health professionals. Young people are given the opportunity to visit these providers in the community wherever possible. A dental surgery is available within the centre. A healthcare plan is in place for each young person and medical records are obtained from their previous primary care trust. A discharge summary which contains comprehensive details of a young person's health plan is produced when a young person leaves the unit. A nurse is available at the centre each weekday to see that the health needs of young people are met. A programme of health education, which includes external sessions such as drug awareness is promoted strongly. Mental health support for young people is accessible and supportive. Overall, a package of healthcare is in place which enables young people's health needs to be met in a proactive and holistic manner. Housekeeping staff in the units also take an excellent guiding role with young people, advising them on matters including healthy eating and hygiene.

Systems for the storage and administration of medication are robust. All staff receive training in the correct procedures to be followed and there is a strong auditing system for all records. Policies and procedures are in place which are reviewed regularly and include a self-medication policy.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

Young people have their privacy and dignity respected by all at the centre. Bedrooms are not entered unannounced and observation hatches in the doors are covered with privacy curtains at appropriate times during the day. All information which is personal and of a confidential nature is stored securely with access restricted.

The complaints structure in operation at the centre is effective and simple. Young people know how to access it and can do so without having to approach staff. On many occasions young people have been able to raise a concern with staff who then have negotiated a satisfactory outcome without the need for the young person to use the complaints process. All complaints which are made formally are viewed by a local authority complaints officer who oversees any investigation in conjunction with managers at the centre. An advocate visits the centre twice weekly and young people are able to raise any concerns they may have with them. This extra layer of representation ensures that all issues are able to be addressed transparently.

Child protection and safeguarding procedures at the centre remain transparent and robust. Any concerns or allegations are dealt with appropriately and referred to local child protection services. Advice is also sought from the Local Safeguarding Children Board members if required.

There is a positive relationship in place with the Local Authority Designated Officer who offers support to the centre on any safeguarding issues. There are detailed records held and all staff members undertake safeguarding practice and procedural training.

Young people are protected from bullying by use of a comprehensive anti-bullying policy. This includes individual and group-work sessions. Young people are made aware of a zero-tolerance approach to bullying. All young people are assessed as to their vulnerability and need when arriving at the centre. Appropriate procedures are in place to recognise and support young people who may self-harm or who are anxious.

There are effective behaviour management strategies in operation. Negative behaviour is challenged and an incentive scheme is used which rewards displays of positive behaviour by young people. The use of formal sanctions is minimal. Any sanctions that are used are appropriate and a record is made and monitored. There is positive implementation of negotiation with young people and often alternative methods of dealing with poor behaviour are used without recourse to a formal sanction.

The number of restraints occurring at the centre is extremely low. Staff members have excellent professional relationships with young people and are adept at using diversion techniques. Young people are able to be routinely seen by a nurse following the occurrence of a restraint.

All staff members receive training in young people's emotional health and well-being and diversion tactics, including the techniques of physical restraint. As a result the numbers of occurrences of sanctions and single separations has continued to fall since the last inspection. When used there is effective monitoring of the time young people spend in their rooms. The practice of engaging and motivating young people to display appropriate and positive behaviour is outstanding.

Appropriate records are held of all behaviour management. These are kept in well-maintained record books. An opportunity is available for young people to comment on the recordings made relating to them. A good overview of all areas of behaviour management is taken by the senior management team, which includes formally auditing every incident record which has been completed.

There are good security and health and safety procedures in place to ensure young people are protected from harm, including the completion of regular building risk assessments. Fire procedures are well established, including evacuation drills. Night care staff are provided with regular opportunities to practice the procedures during night-time periods. All tests of the fire alarm system and drills are recorded and a record kept of the staff on duty when the drills take place. This ensures that it is possible to confirm that all staff have had opportunities to receive practical training in evacuation drills.

All new staff receive training on health, safety, and security procedures and practices during their induction period. Regular updating of the training is now undertaken by the use of short focused sessions during staff meetings. Records are held of this training and worksheets are used to reinforce learning.

At the last inspection the recruitment and vetting procedures were found to be effective and efficient. There have been no new appointments since the last inspection, therefore on this occasion no recruitment records were viewed.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

There are excellent working practices in place in relation to young people's development. This work is supported by effective input from external agencies. There are some examples of strong support from the care staff for young people's formal education, including assisting in the classroom and structured homework periods on the living units.

There is an outstanding formal programme of activities and enrichment. This is strengthened by opportunities to experience vocational activities. This area of provision has been improved with the building of a new workshop area and protected outside work areas. The work carried out here is enhanced by young people being able to experience working as a team and by being reliant on each other's work throughout the day.

A comprehensive range of activities is available including a gym, a football club and a climbing wall, all of which enable young people to learn about working as a team and self-discipline. A timetable is produced on a weekly basis from which young people are able to choose which sessions they would like to attend.

The activity and enrichment sessions are run by staff who are enthusiastic about subjects and many of whom hold appropriate governing body qualifications. Qualified external facilitators are also used where special skills or qualifications are required.

All activities, enrichment and full and purposeful hour sessions are linked into the Building Better Futures programme. This facilitates the learning and development of all young people helping them to be prepared for future learning and employment. All targets are set individually as part of the programme. The overall provision of activities and enrichment opportunities is outstanding. As well as motivating and engaging the young people it also assists greatly in promoting positive and acceptable behaviour.

In formal education, overall achievements and standards are good. Given the very short length of stay and that some 30% of young people are at the centre for less than one month, the amount of accreditation achieved is satisfactory. Qualifications gained consist mainly of substantial awards including a high number of GCSE successes, especially in the key subjects of mathematics and English. Mathematics results are slightly better than those achieved in English. Human physiology and health is also studied up to GCSE level, as is art and ICT, although there were no achievements last year in these subjects due mainly to staff shortages. Many young people achieve GCSEs in the equivalent of school years 8 and 9.

Young people gain less substantial qualifications in other areas of the curriculum such as cookery, humanities and preparation for working life. Most young people gain qualifications in literacy and numeracy, but not in the information and communications technology (ICT).

Young people's behaviour in lessons is good and often very good. Relationships between young people and staff are professional and mutually respectful. During the inspection, inspectors heard no instances of swearing or the use of inappropriate language. Young people support and care for each other in lessons and work well individually and in groups. Young people are justifiably proud of their achievements and were keen to show their work to the inspection team and were able to talk about it articulately and enthusiastically. Young people's work is

displayed in corridors and classrooms which helps make the school a bright and exciting environment in which to learn.

Standards of work are generally good. For example, young people produce good quality healthy food in cookery lessons, where good attention is paid to hygiene and health and safety and young people are very keen to do their best. Young people work hard in art lessons and produce some innovative and attractive work, although too little of this work is currently accredited. In science lessons, young people use technical language confidently and they enjoy taking part in discussions in English lessons. Physical education (PE) lessons help young people enjoy maintaining healthy lifestyles and they develop their skills and fitness well.

Attendance in education is good at 94% and punctuality to lessons is very good with nearly all lessons beginning on time, enabling a crisp and meaningful start to learning. The changeover between lessons is calm and is managed well with teachers welcoming young people to their lessons.

Teaching and learning are good. In most lessons, young people work well and make good and sometimes very good progress. They participate in lively discussions which are managed well by teachers. While young people are streamed, there is still a wide range of ability in lessons. This is managed well by teachers enabling all young people to access the curriculum and engage well in lessons.

Teachers' expectations in lessons are high both in terms of behaviour and what young people will achieve. Young people understand what is acceptable and what is not in terms of effort and behaviour. As a result young people work hard, remain largely on task and enjoy achieving largely to the best of their ability in most lessons.

Most lessons have pace and challenge which helps to keep young people on task and allows them to make progress. Most lessons begin with a clear statement of what is going to be covered and what this will involve. Most lessons end with a helpful summary although on occasions these summaries are rushed, reducing their effectiveness.

Behaviour management demonstrated by teachers and some support staff in lessons is highly effective. Teachers and some support staff use a range of behaviour management techniques very skilfully to ensure standards of behaviour meet their high expectations. Few young people are returned to the residential units due to poor behaviour.

Young people with additional support needs and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported and achieve well in lessons, making as much progress as their peers.

On a few occasions, teaching could be less directive and more adventurous by allowing young people to explore and investigate ideas and solutions more for themselves. Although interactive whiteboards are installed in some classrooms, these were not used routinely during the inspection.

The curriculum currently meets the needs of young people adequately. The curriculum contains the core subjects of mathematics, English and science. Although young people use ICT confidently in subjects such as humanities, at the time of inspection there was no discrete provision for ICT meaning that young people do not gain sufficient qualifications in this key subject. Young people enjoy the practical subjects of PE, cookery and art where they gain

valuable skills. The timetable is planned well, despite some significant staff shortages in some areas. Flexibility to address issues such as this has been built in to the planning of the timetable. The timetable enables young people to experience a good variety of subjects on a daily basis and the 45 minute lessons work well. A good innovation is the spelling and times table sessions at the end of the day.

The curriculum is enhanced by the inclusion of some external agencies, for example by occasional visits of drama and dance groups. The GEARS + project provides young people with good opportunities to develop their skills in teamworking and problem solving. However, vocational provision as part of formal education is currently very limited and there is no in-house provision of subjects such as dance and drama.

The quality of support provided to young people is good. They benefit from a thorough and purposeful induction that helps them settle quickly into education. At the time of the inspection there were a significant number of young people who had arrived very recently. Every effort was made to ensure these young people settled quickly into a productive and enjoyable educational experience, which they did.

Initial assessment is thorough and effective. A relatively recent innovation is the good support provided in partnership with the local authority for those young people identified with dyslexia, autism or speech and language difficulties, regardless of home authority.

Support provided in lessons by learning support assistants and residential staff although variable is good overall. Inspectors observed some outstanding practice, enabling young people to remain on task and make good progress with their work. However, this was not apparent in a minority of lessons.

The personal education plans written for all young people are of good quality and contain appropriate longer term targets, such as gaining a place on a college course on release. Behaviour targets are also included. The personal education plans provide valuable information for discussion at final Detention and Training Order review meetings. The personal education plans inform the individual learning and education plans well and are an appropriately adapted version of the Youth Justice Board T3 forms. These are used in tutorial sessions to review progress against existing targets and to record new targets. In some instances, more could be done to ensure targets are re-enforced with young people in some lessons and a summary of the documents would also be valuable for young people to take to their next educational placement.

The rewards and sanctions system is applied consistently in education and is understood well by young people. The system complements well the positive ethos of the promotion of good behaviour in education as it successfully recognises and rewards good behaviour and achievement.

Support from Connexions is good. The fortnightly visit from the Connexions advisor meets the centre's needs adequately. The service is integrated well into the education department, for example by carrying out mock interviews. Almost all young people benefit from a Connexions action plan which again is used at the Detention and Training Order meeting and is forwarded to the young person's home authority upon release. The proportion of young people initially placed into education, training or employment upon their release is good, although the quality of longer term monitoring and support is uncertain.

The use and amount of release on temporary licence and mobility for education purposes is extremely impressive.

At the time of the inspection, leadership and management in education were satisfactory. The acting headteacher has been in post for only a short time and the local authority are currently carrying out a full review of education at the centre. Despite significant staffing changes and uncertainties, the acting headteacher has ensured very effectively that outcomes for young people have remained good. The department runs smoothly on a day-to-day basis and communications within the department are effective. Data and information are available but are not used routinely to identify areas for development within formal education. The management team at the centre is providing excellent support for the education provision.

Strategic developments, such as those required to increase levels of accreditation and to further develop the curriculum have, understandably been slow and some initiatives are very new.

The support from the local authority's School Improvement Partner is valued by managers and staff.

Lesson observations are in place and records are largely, though not totally, written well. In some instances the judgement of 'outstanding' for a lesson is not supported by the text in the records where some standard practice is recorded as strengths. A successful and fascinating project was the pupil tracking project where staff joined young people in lessons for a day and reported on the experience.

The department's self-evaluation was detailed and highlighted some, though not all of the main strengths and areas for development. Grades awarded were over-generous in some instances. There was also a need for a more detailed evaluation of the impact of certain aspects of provision.

Resources are adequate and classrooms are clean and tidy with no evidence of graffiti.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

All young people accommodated are placed by the Youth Justice Board. Information about them, including their identified needs and the plans to meet those needs are reflected on the E-asset system and in paper form held on file. The assessments and planning procedures implemented by the centre are outstanding.

The combined electronic and paper-based information provide excellent insight into the individual needs of young people and the plans and strategies in place to address them.

This translates into some excellent examples of individual work being undertaken with young people. For example, one young person with very specific needs has, with the agreement of all concerned, been enabled to stay at the centre for the foreseeable future, despite reaching an age where he would be expected to move elsewhere. This decision was based on the current needs of that young person.

Young people's plans are monitored regularly, with case managers and key workers being tasked to ensure that plans are reviewed and updated regularly, linked to the reviewing frequency.

They ensure that plans are being implemented and that the care and welfare of young people are being promoted positively.

Reviews take place within the required timescales. The reviewing system is well organised and integrated into the centre's working practices. Comprehensive reports are produced by staff plotting the progress and areas of need. Young people feel well supported by staff and are encouraged to attend their own review and state their wishes.

Suitable contact arrangements are identified and put into place quickly following admission. The centre works diligently and flexibly to promote and maintain suitable contact for young people. Feedback received from parents and young people on this matter is extremely positive.

Admission and discharge procedures are well practiced and embedded into the working procedures of the centre. Staff are sensitive to the needs and feelings of young people at these times and young people report they feel well supported and informed during the admission procedures. Plans for resettlement commence immediately and are discussed during a young person's initial case review. Excellent links with external agencies help to facilitate this.

Young people feel they have wide-ranging opportunities for genuine consultation regarding certain aspects of their unit's operation. They state young people's meetings as well as key worker and case manager sessions are examples of where consultation takes place. Parents of young people at the centre report excellent consultation with staff taking place. All work is underpinned by outstanding appropriate professional relationships between staff and young people.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are extremely well prepared for discharge, resettlement or transfer through a comprehensive discharge plan during their stay at this secure children's centre. They are very well supported to gain life and vocational skills. Excellent support is available to help them reintegrate successfully once they are discharged and to support them into adulthood. This is facilitated by a commendable commitment to enable young people to reintegrate into the community through planned involvement in community activities using gradual and planned release on temporary licence (ROTL). Young people are actively supported to use carefully planned and risk assessed ROTL positively as part of their discharge plan. This was confirmed by parents and youth offending team workers for young people placed at the centre.

Young people receive an excellent extensive and varied range of support throughout their stay at the centre to help them prepare for discharge and future education, training or employment. This is focused through individual portfolios called 'Building Brighter Futures' which the young people hold, and which allows them to identify and address individual life skills and vocational preferences and needs.

Access to vocational activities is not dependent upon the young person's status on the incentive scheme, but based solely upon assessed need, preference and risk assessment. The range of activities included in the portfolio confirms that the centre offers a comprehensive range of life-skills opportunities for the young people throughout their stay. Some are provided as part of the education curriculum, others through individual work and some as part of recreational or vocational activities.

There is a very strong focus on practical and vocational skills built into the routines which offers an excellent foundation for young people to gain future employment. This is managed by making available a comprehensive range of vocational activities and opportunities. Young people are able to experience useful practical skills including roofing, plastering, woodwork, block paving, horticulture and gardening. Plans are in place to offer further skills learning with the completion of a new workshop in the near future.

Discharge planning is thorough and detailed and begins at the initial review. There is also excellent ongoing support for the young person once in the community, sometimes beyond the first community review. This support is sponsored by the centre and not a routine expectation of the placement.

The centre has very effective arrangements in place to ensure that all young people have appropriate clothes to wear and are suitably dressed. Although the centre's dress code for education is standard, young people may choose their own clothes with staff through catalogues or through being able to shop for them themselves when released on temporary licence. Culturally appropriate personal requisites are purchased as required.

There continue to be excellent ongoing initiatives in place to make the centre as welcoming, homely and comfortable as possible without compromising the health and safety and security of staff and young people. The premises are currently undergoing a substantial renovation to improve the indoor recreation and activity facilities to the units, and there are well developed plans in place for major improvements to living accommodation and training facilities for young people and working conditions for staff.

Organisation

The organisation is outstanding.

The Statement of Purpose, last revised and updated in November 2009, provides an accurate and detailed insight into the centre's function, along with the adopted principles and ethos which underpin its operation. A range of user-friendly information is available for young people, parents and other professionals. Young people confirm they received a comprehensive pack of information when first admitted. The pack provides information about what they can expect during their stay and includes a statement about how their individual and diverse needs will be addressed.

The promotion of equality and diversity is outstanding. It has continued to develop and move forward in the short time since the previous inspection. For example, nominated staff with specific responsibilities for equalities and diversity have been instrumental in creating resource files for each unit. These are a welcome development, providing improved evidence that shows some of the work being undertaken to address identified individual, religious and cultural needs.

Equality and diversity are enshrined into the working practices of staff. Examples of this can be viewed in each of the units. This includes displays created by young people reflecting the culture of their home areas. Outstanding examples of young people's individual religious, identity, cultural and dietary needs being addressed positively were noted throughout the centre. Relevant subjects according to the time of the year or month are celebrated in hand-created display boards. These are changed regularly by staff with the assistance of young people.

The centre has a highly motivated, well-established, experienced and qualified staff group in place. There is a team-centred approach, which provides stability and consistency. Excellent levels of retention exist with little staff turnover. All current staff have gained an appropriate professional qualification. There is an ongoing, active training programme that caters for core training needs that require updating regularly, as well as individual training needs.

Staff are extremely well supported by senior staff, with supervision and appraisal taking place consistently, within the recommended timescale. Systems are in place to monitor the frequency and quality of supervision. Currently the centre is completing 95% of supervisions each month. The level of support and guidance given to staff is outstanding.

The centre is managed by an experienced and committed management team. They demand high standards from their staff, encouraging and constantly monitoring their professional development. The levels of management and individual responsibilities are clearly understood throughout the staffing structure. Managers are ambitious and committed to developing creative approaches for all aspects of the service. This is underpinned by a sound, professional business base which provides a foundation for the centre's operation.

The manager has recently taken over responsibility for education at the centre. The revised arrangements have had no negative impact on the educational outcomes for young people. A review of the formal education structure is taking place and previously identified developments are being implemented.

Quality assurance is built into all aspects of operation and both the external and internal monitoring of the centre takes place consistently within the required timescale. Recent improvements have been made around the collation and analysis of performance management information which is gathered regularly. This provides managers with clear statistical information, giving insight and direction for further improvement.

The recording systems used by the centre are in the main, electronic. The primary system for recording information related to young people is on the Youth Justice Board E-Asset system.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Childrens Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
----------	--------	----------

Recommendations

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

- increase the volume of accreditation throughout the centre, particularly ensuring young people are able to access ICT and gain accreditation for their work (education NMS 14)
- improve the curriculum by the provision of additional subjects and vocational provision, raising the standards of all classroom support to that of the best (education NMS 14)