

Inspection report for Children's Home

Unique reference number	SC020133
Inspection date	04/11/2010
Inspector	David Morgan
Type of inspection	Key

Date of last inspection	02/03/2010
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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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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 home is registered to accommodate up to eight children and young people aged between 12 and 18 years of age. It is an adapted, Victorian property operated by a private company. It provides care for up to twelve months to children or young people with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Care packages include on site classroom education and outdoor education; psychology and therapeutic services are also available. There are seven young people resident at present, five contributed directly to this inspection and others contributed indirectly. Because of the regular trips attended by all children and young people no more than six are usually at home at any one time.

The home is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty, but is also close to leisure facilities and shops. There are good bus and train routes to local towns and cities. The building is set in its own grounds with gardens and established trees at the front and back and car parking. The office and lounge are on the ground floor as well as the dining room, kitchen and games room. Children and young people have individual bedrooms.

Summary

The overall quality rating is good.

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

This was a key announced inspection and all key standards in each of the outcome areas were reviewed. At the same time the first education inspection of the school also occurred. The service is outstanding in several ways, including the attention to health, safety and achieving economic wellbeing. Behaviour management is particularly effective with outstanding individual support and as a result young people are able to benefit from the wide range of opportunities that are available. Staff relationships with young people are excellent and form the basis of the effective care practice. Young people are helped to reflect on their circumstances and to take personal responsibility.

The following areas were identified for improvement including staff training, shortfalls in staff qualification levels and the establishment of a development plan. Attention is also necessary to ensure that issues of social diversity are addressed consistently.

Improvements since the last inspection

At the last inspection one action was made which has been addressed. Different scenarios are now used during fire drills to improve the skills of staff. A

recommendation was also made regarding shortfalls in the number of staff who have a child care qualification. This has not been met and so the recommendation is repeated.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is outstanding.

The organisation of the service means that healthy living is emphasised every day through the use of outdoor education and individual support with a strong emphasis on healthy and active lifestyles. Routine conversations between all staff and young people cover all aspects of healthy living. These discussions are a key part of the care provision and are based on strong relationships between staff and young people. The organisation provides training for some staff who can then directly provide advice to young people on important subjects such as sexual health. This outstanding provision means that accurate and immediate support is provided to young people. Expert advice is also available from external agencies on issues such as weight management and sexual health. Where the service identifies that areas of care could be improved, action is taken, for example regarding certain sorts of therapy. Close attention is paid to gender-specific topics and any issues arising from young people's cultural backgrounds. All staff are appropriately trained in issues such as drug awareness and as a result young people feel well supported.

Young people enjoy excellent, high quality meals, usually prepared by a professional cook using fresh ingredients. They are also actively involved in meal preparation as part of their training for independence, particularly during camps, and learn about healthy eating in lessons. During their regular trips away from the home, young people are included in all aspects of meal preparation and this gives them an excellent understanding of budgeting and nutrition. Such trips go to the lengths of linking certain foods with certain types of physical activity, which provides a high level of training for young people. Any medication is handled well whether it is on or off site.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is outstanding.

The welfare and safety of young people is promoted extensively and in great detail. Young people feel they are protected particularly well compared to other establishments in which they have lived. This is achieved through clear systems such as high staffing ratios, particularly high levels of staff training in areas such as safeguarding, and by the speed with which staff educate young people to protect themselves. A strong and effective behaviour management system helps young people to understand reasonable boundaries and to feel safe; bullying for example is minimal. A member of staff stated that, 'The service manages crises in young people's lives very well; it provides structure, routine and definable boundaries.' Young people learn to assess risks for themselves and devise strategies to avoid them. In the event that they have a concern, there is a prompt and effective

complaints system. This helps young people to use acceptable ways of airing their grievances. As a result young people learn to trust the adults around them and to take advantage of the many opportunities available.

The home also provides young people with high levels of physical safety and security. Fire safety training now includes the use of different scenarios so that staff and young people learn to deal with unexpected situations. However, this information is not recorded, which lessens the training benefits and prevents monitoring. Safety is also assured by stringent recruitment processes being followed. Young people are involved in expressing their views about potential members of staff too, which is an important contribution to the home and lesson for them.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

A highlight of the service is the outstanding individual support provided to young people. In particular, this is aimed at resolving complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is noticeable that within a short space of time young people feel sufficiently confident to reflect on their own circumstances and behaviour and start to take responsibility. This is achieved through effective role-modelling by staff and exposure to many and varied opportunities. Young people's horizons are extended and they are helped to take up opportunities in new places and new subjects, whether these are recreational, educational or social. This substantially improves their quality of life and their future opportunities.

Young people have access to a wide range of sources of support that help them make progress quickly. These services are effectively integrated with excellent formal education provision on site, usually through flexible one-to-one tuition. Education provides a critical part of the service in which all young people in the home are engaged. Packages of education are created for each young person and successfully re-engage them in classes so they can pursue their learning and obtain certificated courses. There are also strong links with local colleges where vocational courses such as plastering may be taken.

The wide range of opportunities provided by the organisation through its education, residential or outdoor education teams means that young people expand their particular interests and develop new ones. At the same time this helps them develop their social skills and self-confidence. Young people have full individual timetables that are compiled according to the risks, their age and level of independence. Activities include horse riding, dance classes, football clubs, growing vegetables and rock climbing. The home has enough vehicles to allow each young person to pursue their own separate activities.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Young people are able to move into the home in a well organised and sensitive way. This and their subsequent discharges are carefully monitored to ensure they are as thorough as possible. Young people receive substantial information on admission and staff ensure that all issues are covered and recorded. This includes gaining as much clarity as possible about the needs of each young person, which is condensed into thorough assessment and planning documents.

Placement planning is excellent and significantly better than previously with some innovative ways used to show progress. There is now close attention to individual care targets both on site and during outdoor education trips and the progress young people make is much more clearly recorded. This means that work with young people is more effectively managed. Young people themselves are fully involved in setting targets and making decisions either informally or via statutory reviews. Their high level of engagement is a positive reflection of the skills that staff apply in forging working relationships. Staff ensure that they take into account individual needs during decision making events so that excellent levels of effective contribution are maintained. The same applies to contact with families. Staff receive specific training in this area. Attainable contact arrangements are possible for young people because staff ensure they have a good understanding of young people's families.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is outstanding.

Much of the excellent day-to-day training that young people receive plays an important part in preparing them for adulthood. Records are accurate enough to show young people's skills developing as they experience new challenges. However, even before formal pathway plans are devised by social workers, the service identifies with young people the steps needed to become competent in relevant skills. Through each part of the support package (outdoor education, care and education), young people learn about each part of the programme. Budgeting is brought to life, for instance, by comparing the costs of similar items in different shops and by testing young people's skills during camps. Young people can then achieve a certificated standard of competence in money management. Individual circumstances arising from race or religion are taken into account too.

Young people benefit and learn from an excellent standard of presentation of the home. The property provides opportunities to learn domestic skills and also interpersonal ones. Staff make sure they consider with young people effective strategies for dealing with 'tough times', which may be social or practical. This too is excellent practice and realistically anticipates the circumstances young people are likely to experience in later life. Young people confirm that such lessons are repeatedly regularly.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. There is effective attention to ensuring that young people's individual needs to achieve equality of opportunity are thoroughly addressed. This means, for example, that issues arising from sexuality or cultural background are assessed with young people and sources of support are obtained, sometimes from the range of services available in a nearby city. This is clearly represented in clear files for young people. Staff receive relevant training in equality and diversity and make use of day-to-day opportunities to discuss social issues with young people. However, the policy and practice regarding social diversity is under-developed. For instance there is no guidance about how this will be either addressed or monitored by staff.

Equality and diversity issues are encompassed by the home's Statement of Purpose. This document is particularly clear and well presented. Young people are guided through related documents. The Statement of Purpose also describes the staffing arrangements. Young people are looked after by a high ratio of well-trained and competent staff. There is a strong team spirit throughout the three main parts of the service with an emphasis on humour as well as effective childcare. Young people appreciate this and note that the home is 'different' to others they have lived in. This is a positive reflection on the consistent support and guidance provided to staff through advice, training and supervision. There is a training coordinator who also presents certain courses, which is very beneficial. However, regular staff turnover at more junior grades in particular means that qualification levels are lower than necessary. This creates a potential shortfall in staff competencies. There is also insufficient procedural clarity about the training required of staff at different stages in their careers, which has a similar impact.

There is reasonable monitoring of the service by the manager and a representative of the organisation, which takes into account the views of young people. Important survey work with young people is also carried out. Sound leadership is represented by the changes that are instigated when shortfalls are identified, for example to the system of behaviour management and the additional training of outdoor staff. However, the monthly reports are not submitted to Ofsted as promptly as necessary although this has minimal impact on young people. Of more significance is the lack of a development plan for the service that reviews any operational issues and plans ahead.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Recommendations

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

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- ensure staff are provided with written guidance on the home's procedures and practice with regard to considering social diversity with young people (NMS 28.8)
 - ensure that that staff receive foundation training within six months of joining the home and this is included in the staff training policy and ensure that a minimum ratio of 80% of all care staff have completed the National Vocational Qualification at level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People (NMS 31.3) and (NMS 29.5)
 - ensure there is a written development plan for the future of the home (NMS 33.5)
 - ensure copies of Regulation 33 reports are sent to Ofsted at the required intervals (NMS 32.1)
 - ensure that all fire drills are recorded in sufficient detail. (NMS 26.8)