

Crown House

Inspection report for residential family centre

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Inspector	Christy Wannop
Type of inspection	Full

Setting address	10 Abbey Road, MALVERN, Worcestershire, WR14 3HG
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Telephone number	01684 577 496
Email	louisebattersby@keyschildcare.co.uk
Registered person	Malvern Achievement Services Limited
Registered manager	Louise Ellen Battersby
Responsible individual	Heather Ann Laffin
Date of last inspection	15/03/2011

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Service information

Brief description of the service

A large national private company operates this residential family centre. It is registered to provide a service to eight families. The service can undertake community-based assessments if within travelling distance.

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 **good**.

This service delivers its primary function well and is supported by a confident, experienced and skilled staff team, made up of qualified social workers, a legal adviser and residential staff. Parents currently at the centre are positive about their experience. Assessments are of good quality and the process is respectful and inclusive of parents with a wide variety of needs. Parents and their children are safe and there is a prompt and robust response to any child protection concern.

Families enjoy the communal living aspects of the centre, but have an individually tailored programme. Risk assessment and placement planning are robust. Relationships are constructive and staff are positive and clear in their advice and guidance to families. Leadership and management of the service, both at the centre and within the larger organisation are strong. Management of the centre is changing and a new manager has been appointed. Succession planning has been smooth.

There are areas of national minimum standard shortfall (NMS) in relation to the better use of available space within the building. Arrangements for staff induction and training are not consistently of a high quality and some aspects of policy are incomplete. However, systems for monitoring and evaluation of the quality of the service are generally good and the new manager has already begun to make plans for further developments and improvements.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure a clear and effective policy on the use of surveillance in parenting assessments (NMS 10.1)
- provide a suitable physical environment. Specifically, ensure better play space for children, better working conditions for staff in all offices and an appropriate 'front door' to the service. Improve safety to car park with lighting and consider barriers to public access. (NMS 11)
- ensure the training, development and qualification of staff. Specifically: ensure induction and training for all staff, including bank staff; review the learning and development programme for effectiveness to ensure that staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the purpose of the centre: namely, to monitor and assess parents capacity and give advice, guidance and counselling about parenting capacity (NMS 16)

Quality of assessment

The quality of assessment is **good**.

The quality of assessment is good. The service provides an effective assessment service based on the Framework for Assessment of Children in Need and their Families. Children's safety and need for protection are prioritised in the initial risk assessment and within the subsequent family placement plan.

Families are clear about how and when staff observe their interactions with their children. Some families at greater risk use a particular bedroom which has a door alarm, and night staff routinely use baby monitors in corridors to alert them to prolonged crying or unusual noise. This use of surveillance is done sensitively and is no more intrusive than is necessary; however, there is no policy to support this. Parents described the strangeness of being watched on first arrival, but those who had completed more of their assessment reflected on the satisfaction they felt on proving they were growing in capability by the reduction in staff monitoring.

Staff identify any barriers in language, understanding or cultural differences and use a range of resources to ensure that parents are engaged and can contribute to the assessment as they wish. Some staff are trained specifically in considering the needs of children whose parents have learning difficulties and create specific pictorial prompts. There is good partnership working with placing authorities and with the court to ensure issues are properly addressed within the plan of work. Placing authorities are satisfied with the service they receive; one said: 'I have found Crown House responsive and helpful in requests I have forwarded.' There is a continuous cycle of assessing, reflecting, reporting and meetings with all professionals involved in the assessment. This process culminates in weekly written and verbal feedback sessions with parents. These are tailored so that parents hear, see and understand

key messages about their progress and the targets for the following day or week. Parents say they contribute and are heard in this process, but recognise the role of staff in making decisions about their capability.

Assessment reports are completed or finalised by the in-house solicitor and qualified social workers, working alongside core residential staff on the assessment process. The current approach to assessment has developed over time and the current manager has identified a need to strengthen the theoretical base for assessment and training in this. For example, she plans to secure better training in attachment theory and formal assessment models for all contributing keyworker staff. Social work assessors are clear in recommendations and rarely extend assessments, working effectively within timescales. When parents take their children home, they do so because of the centre's significant contribution of a robust evidence-based assessment. One parent moving home with her child felt a mixture of relief, excitement and sadness on leaving the centre. She described her experience as, 'life changing'.

Quality of care, support and guidance

The quality of the care, support and guidance is **good**.

Most parents move in with information about what to expect and some have the opportunity to visit first. The service has been operational for some years and has established good relationships with local child health services and local children's resources in the community. Staff encourage parents to develop their parenting initiative and make use of local resources similar to those they will have available in their home community. Parents say they feel well supported about their health and that of the children. They certainly get lots of encouragement from staff to get fresh air and eat healthily. Parents can walk with their children to the town centre and a local park to play, when their capability has been established.

The centre is an attractive, large, detached Victorian house with its own car park and a small hard children's play area at the rear. It is generally well maintained and decorated in a homely style. Families have their own large bedroom and bathroom, on one of three floors, but share a communal kitchen and dining room, a small playroom and a living room. The new manager is reviewing the use of rooms within the building to improve the office space for staff. Other aspects also require improvement. While there is sufficient available space overall, some rooms are too small for their purpose. For example, the much-used playroom is an area that quickly becomes cramped. The front door opens directly into the manager's office, and all visitors enter there. The three small staff offices are too narrow for their function and one lacks ventilation. The staff car park is unlit and a disused staircase leading from the residents' smoking area is unsightly. The organisation had already begun to make plans to improve these aspects.

Staff develop supportive, professional relationships with families. The organisation promotes respectful, clear communication and takes action about anti-discriminatory language or behaviour, either to staff or other residents. They take residents'

complaints seriously and ensure proper resolutions. Parents say they have keyworkers they can trust and feel confident in raising issues with the manager. There are regular residents' meetings, planned and chaired in turn by different residents. The service conducts 'exit interviews' seeking their contribution about improvements and there is a continual cycle of checking out parents' views about their assessment. Parents feel respected. One parent described staff as, 'upfront and honest'.

Family placement plans are up to date and non-stigmatising. They explain the level of care, support and guidance needed, but make clear parents' responsibility for change. Staff meticulously record observations of parents' interactions, and social workers provide evaluation and direction for staff interventions and the changing strategy for work. Parenting sessions start once the centre has established the parents' best learning style. Parents talked about the first and second stages of the assessment, essential parenting skills and then, 'the serious stuff'. Parents have 10 one-to-one sessions a week covering identified issues such as their own experience with their parents, drug and alcohol addiction, and relationship violence and protective strategies. Staff encourage self-reflection and this forms a basis to improve self-esteem.

The calibre, skills and experience of the keyworkers who monitor and evaluate parenting capacity are strong and this supports the current assessment system. Staff have an acute, hour-by-hour awareness of indicators that parents may not be prioritising children's needs over their own. They assess closely whether parents are able to remember guidance and deliver fundamental care to their children. If not, and a placement ends early, staff plan for a calm moving out that reduces any trauma for children, and staff work with police and placing authorities to ensure safety for all.

Safeguarding children and parents

The service is **good** at keeping children and parents safe and feeling safe.

The balance between monitoring and ensuring children's safety and protection during assessments is good. Staff are trained and operate within clear safeguarding procedures. Staff contribute to child protection plans, and the centre concludes placements where the decision is that a lack of parenting capacity jeopardises children's safety. Protection is extended to vulnerable adults who are parents, and parents who are children themselves. The manager has ensured that any allegations or suspicions of child abuse are promptly referred to the appropriate safeguarding agency and investigated using inter-agency procedures. The service has learnt lessons from previous incidents and has embedded improvements in protective strategies and responses within routine care practice.

Parents rarely go missing and the service has acted robustly in the past when there have been concerns about risks from non-resident parents or family members. The pre-admission risk assessment identifies whether parents are committed to the process. Parenting sessions have a strong focus on protection and safeguarding.

Staff use a range of resources, such as pictorial tools and interpreters to ensure that language, culture or comprehension do not become barriers to parents' understanding about their protective responsibilities.

Families share communal space, and standards of behaviour are generally good. Current residents say they like the company that comes with communal living and they are clear that they do not interfere in other families' assessments. Staff promote mutual respect and tolerance of others. Restraint has not been used, though some staff are trained in reducing conflict. Parents sign up to a code of behaviour and a breach of this results in a formal warning and can lead to the early ending of a placement.

There is a well-established system of health and safety management that includes risk assessment and regular checks. The organisation has recently introduced a new system of recording risk and is about to implement this at the home. Staff are highly conscious to risks to children, and parents' ability to keep their environment safe for children forms part of their assessment. Staff intervene to reduce hazards where parents have not spotted these, so children stay safe under the overarching protection of centre staff. Rigorous checks prior to employment ensure all adults working with children are safely recruited.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the residential family centre are **good**.

Information about the centre and what it offers is good and is made available for parents whose level of English or understanding is limited. Information for children is also informative. The centre has established a consistently good service since registration in 2007. It operates to ethical business principles. Senior managers are rigorous in deciding which families will benefit and whether there is a viable assessment to be done. If they do not feel there is the basis for constructive work, then they do not offer a service. The service has had a recent period when they did not accommodate any families. During this period staff were redeployed to other children's services operated locally by the organisation.

There has been a smooth transition of registration from the current Registered Manager, currently on maternity leave, to the new appointee. Both are qualified social workers with experience of working with parents and children and of management. The previous manager had established good systems under the active support of the resourceful area manager. A range of internal and external monitoring systems are in place and ensure proper responses when any shortfalls are identified. Managerial overview, old and new, at all levels is valued by staff, who report regular supervision and good professional support. The service sets high standards of professional accountability and the manager ensures any staff performance issues are rigorously followed up in effective supervision.

The organisation is successful at recruiting and training qualified managers and retaining staff. Several staff are related to each other, and a policy to ensure

professional standards is actively implemented. The core staff team are a well-established group, consistent, skilled and very experienced. They have a range of satisfactory basic training and there has clearly been work by the manager to enrich the range of training related to the purpose and function of the centre, in response to a previous recommendation. Some, but not all, permanent non-social work staff have had training in assessments techniques and attachment and other areas related to the quality of parenting. The organisation recruits relief staff to give flexibility of staff deployment. These relief workers do not share the same nationally recognised quality induction of permanent staff, or have access to a more service specific range of training. This means that not all staff who contribute to the assessment of parenting have formal training in that task. They do, however, all have support from qualified social workers who conclude all assessment reports. Residents say that, 'staff are lovely.'

The manager has taken action on the majority of previous shortfalls raised at the last full inspection in 2011. Training for non-social work staff is better, but requires further improvement. Other improvements are: service users' voice and views are now embedded in assessment processes and also in the running of the service; families now devolve their consent to staff to administer first aid and medication to their children; use of surveillance does not now intrude on parents' privacy; and fire drills are now held at night. This results in a service that takes better account of the needs of parents and children. The organisation has successfully developed the offer of assessments in the community. The new manager is already bringing her experienced social work view to the further development of the centre and the service.

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 inspection framework and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of residential family centres.