

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC032163
Inspector	Jennifer Reed
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Dorset County Council
Registered person address	County Hall Colliton Park DORCHESTER Dorset DT1 1XJ
Responsible individual	Stuart Riddle
Registered manager	James Patrick Collins
Date of last inspection	14/01/2014

Inspection date	25/11/2014
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Previous inspection	satisfactory progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	None.

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

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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This is a good children's home, with some outstanding features. Children and young people receive an excellent level of tailored help and support, delivered by the committed, knowledgeable and competent staff team. The high quality of care provided by the home, and good partnership working arrangements with parents and services, contribute to the good progress individual children and young people are making in various aspects of their personal and social development.

Children and young people feel secure living in this home and unsafe situations and behaviours are well managed by staff. Children and young people are kept safe and their welfare is promoted. Each individual is accepted and they know what is expected of them; they are respected and valued. Staff have high aspirations for the children and young people they look after. Individual daily routines and activities provide children and young people with stimulating and enjoyable experiences.

Day-to-day management practice within the home is robust. Effective action taken in the past year has led to significant improvements in the home's accommodation, management systems and care practices. The Registered Manager and his team work hard to support continual improvement in the progress and outcomes of the children and young people they look after. However, insufficient effective action has been taken by senior leaders to remedy the inadequate quality of the independent

monthly monitoring and reporting process identified at the previous inspection. The continuing lack of rigour in the external monitoring of the service weakens the safeguarding of children and young people and decreases opportunities for robust challenges to be made to further improve outcomes for children and young people.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This home is part of a range of services provided by a local authority. The home is currently registered to accommodate up to 9 children and young people who have complex learning difficulties and disabilities. The home provides long term placements, including shared care arrangements.

At the time of the inspection the home was providing care and accommodation for 6 children and young people. The four distinct units located within the home's premises operate to meet the differing needs of the accommodated children and young people.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/01/2014	Interim	satisfactory progress
22/05/2013	Full	adequate
31/01/2013	Interim	inadequate progress
07/11/2012	Full	adequate

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
33 (2001)	ensure the person carrying out the visit shall interview with their consent, children accommodated there and their parents, relatives and persons working at the children's home as appears necessary, in order to form an opinion as to whether the conduct of the children's home	30/01/2015

	promotes the wellbeing of the children accommodated there and they are effectively safeguarded (Regulation 33 (8) (a))	
33 (2001)	ensure that visits by the independent person shall take place at least once a month and may be unannounced (Regulation 33 (7))	30/01/2015

Recommendations

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

- demonstrate from written and/or electronic records that the home consistently follows good recruitment practice, and all applicable current statutory requirements and guidance, in staff recruitment and carers selection. (MNS 16.2)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **outstanding**

Children and young people, given their starting points on admission to this home, are making exceptional progress in their lives. One parent wrote, 'thanks for everything you have all done to give my child's life more meaning.'

Children and young people live in distinct units within the home, either on a solo basis, or within a small group of two or three persons. Decisions about the mix and number of children and young people living in each unit focus on the individual needs and safety of each child or young person. This careful consideration results in children and young people living within a physical environment which is purposely designed to meet their particular needs, and where they feel safe and gain a sense of belonging. Excellent transition planning helps children and young people to move into or move on from the home with minimum disruption to their wellbeing.

Children and young people like spending their leisure time in the home relaxing, watching the television or a film, or playing games with staff or with their favourite toys within the comfortable sitting rooms located in each unit. The home's environment helps children and young people to enjoy having a 'family life' within a residential setting. Some children and young people have lived within this home for a substantial number of years. This stability helps them to learn to form attachments with others and lessens any anxiety caused by any change.

Children and young people also enjoy taking part in activities and leisure pursuits outside of the home; they have fun! They join in local and school events, use local resources, and go on well planned holidays with staff, all of which they thoroughly enjoy. Their full inclusion within the community enriches their lives by providing stimulating new experiences that support their personal and social development and learning.

Children and young people's challenging behaviour is extremely well managed and quickly scaled down by staff, reducing the likelihood of possible harm or distress to individuals. Some children and young people love to spend time in the sensory or quiet rooms within their units. These areas provide them with specific resources and space that assists them in becoming calmer. Consequently, they are often better able to manage their anxiety or behavioural difficulties. Age appropriate responses to dealing with behavioural difficulties ensure that young people are not demeaned in any way. Effective communication strategies aid children and young people's differing levels of understanding about what constitutes acceptable behaviour.

Children and young people are accepted and valued for themselves and their rights to privacy and dignity are respected. Staff sensitively help individuals to develop their abilities and they are making exceptional progress in mastering new skills; for

example, eating with a knife and fork, using the toilet and managing aspects of their personal care.

Some of the older young people use the kitchen facilities to cook meals, do their washing-up and their laundry with staff oversight. They are successfully developing their practical skills and they are very proud of their achievements. Some young people are also taking part in college and work experience opportunities within the community. This helps to prepare them for future employment and increases their self-esteem. Young people are confidently talking with adults and sharing their achievements about their busy and fulfilling lives. Furthermore, where it is safe to do so, young people have opportunities to spend short periods of time within their units without close supervision, to enable them to experience 'being alone'. This excellent practice supports young people to develop their emotional resilience and helps to prepare them to move successfully into more independent living situations when they become young adults.

Quality of care

outstanding

Children and young people benefit from the exceptional standard of warm, nurturing and personalised care they receive from a committed and competent staff team who really understand their particular needs, preferences and personalities. The high standard of the home's professional practice results in many examples of sustained improvement to the lives of children and young people who have complex or challenging needs. The positive differences made for individual children and young people enhance their future chances in life.

Testimonies from local agencies, parents and professionals highly commend this home. For example, the Autism Wessex service awarded the home the 'Thumbs Up' award, 'for making a positive difference to lives of persons with autism and their families.' A parent wrote to staff to say, 'a really big thank you for everything you did to support my child with his move to their adult placement; without your support, commitment, care and compassion this move would certainly not have gone so well.' An independent reviewing officer commented, 'I have always been impressed with the quality of the care the young people receive; the staff group are skilled and are clearly able to meet the residents' needs.'

Excellent care plans, which reflect the aims of placing authority plans, provide clear guidance to staff on how to support and look after each child or young person. Moreover, all plans are effectively implemented and practice is closely monitored to make sure children and young people do receive the best possible care. Staff have high aspirations for the children and young people they look after. Staff advocate and challenge other services as required, to ensure children and young people receive the services that they need to support their physical, emotional and social development.

Staff's in-depth knowledge and understanding of the children and young people they

look, combined with a high level of vigilance and diligence, results in children and young peoples' welfare and safety being robustly assured. Staff demonstrate an excellent understanding of how children and young peoples' experiences and present emotions can be communicated through their behaviour. These factors are particular strengths of this home which have resulted in exceptional examples of children and young people's health being sustained.

Managers understand that by getting the right mix of children and young people in each unit, alongside sufficient staff on shift to support each child or young person, supports each individual to make good progress within a positive and stimulating living environment. The consistency provided by residing within small units, supported by their keyworkers and stable unit staff, help children and young people to make sense of their world, form relationships and to feel secure enough to try new things. A social worker summarised her observations of the care provided to a child by saying, 'there is good use of Picture Exchange Communication systems (PECS) and schedules to aid effective communication, together with routine and structure which is positive, to ensure that both the physical and the emotional needs of the children and young people are met.'

Staff use a range of communication strategies to enable children and young people to actively participate in day-to-day decisions about their lives. For example: making choices; sharing their views on the quality of meals; and using prompts to help them organise themselves in their personal care or development of practical skills.

Staff work collaboratively with a number of schools, local colleges and the virtual headteacher to make certain children and young people receive a good standard of educational provision that promotes their learning. These positive working arrangements also assist in promoting a consistency in approach between school and the home in relation to personal care and communication issues.

The standard of the accommodation has vastly improved since the previous inspection of the home. Significant refurbishment and redecoration of the home result in a bright, comfortable home for children and young people to live within. Children and young peoples' personal items, photos and preferred seating arrangements make this 'their home' and increases their sense of comfort, belonging and ownership. The home has achieved a five star environmental health award for its catering arrangements. Meals provide children and young people with a nutritious and healthy diet and take account of their particular tastes and individual dietary or religious needs. Portions are ample and food presentation is good; this encourage children and young people to eat well and to develop good social skills.

Keeping children and young people safe good

The rigorous implementation of children and young peoples' excellent care plans and the home's sound policies contribute to the provision of a safe environment. Clear and consistent boundaries, agreed expectations of behaviour and detailed practice guidance all underpin the security and welfare of children and young people living in this home.

The home's collaborative working with families, the local authority and specialist agencies provides a solid network of information that informs the home's care practices for each individual child or young person. This corporate view enables the robust identification of personal risk to each individual's safety and development. Well considered strategies are put in place to effectively manage known or likely risks of possible harm. Staff effectively manage children and young peoples' unsafe situations and challenging behaviour and debrief discussions take place for children and young people following each incident. This promotes reflection and learning from each event and helps to reduce the degree of future risk for individuals.

Close supervision and monitoring of care practices by staff and managers adds to the safeguarding of children and young people. All serious incidents are appropriately reported to key safeguarding agencies and Ofsted and this external oversight strengthens the promotion of welfare and the protection of children and young people. Staff and managers are clear about what to do if they have any concerns at all about the wellbeing or safety of individuals. Any child protection or safeguarding concern is appropriately shared with relevant persons and all issues are quickly followed up to ensure that action is taken in response to the concern, to protect children and young people from any future harm.

No children and young people go missing from this home; however, clear protocols are in place to minimise any such incident should it ever occur. Robust staffing levels provide the constant supervision of each child or young person; this minimises any risk of bullying or unacceptable behaviour happening between individuals.

The premises and grounds provide children and young people with a safe, secure and hygienic physical environment to live in. Regular fire safety checks and fire drills, utilities and health and safety checks promote the safeguarding of everyone in the home.

Recruitment and selection processes follow safer recruitment practice, and necessary vetting checks are undertaken to ensure only suitable persons are employed to look after children and young people. Although a senior manager telephones applicants' referees to verify their written references, as is required, the home's records do not note this to evidence that this safeguarding action has been completed.

Leadership and management

adequate

Leaders are ambitious for the lives of children and young people living in this home. They have driven recent improvements to develop the standard of the premises, partnership working arrangements and the staffing structure of the home to secure positive outcomes for children and young people. However, ineffective action has been taken to remedy the shortfall identified at the previous inspection regarding the frequency and quality of the independent monthly monitoring visits and the written reports of each visit. This continuing lack of rigour in the external monitoring of the service weakens the safeguarding of children and young people and decreases opportunities for robust challenges to be made to further improve outcomes for children and young people. Two further requirements are made at this inspection to address these issues.

Children and young peoples' experiences are central within the home's management and development plans. Learning from their experiences is the focus of the home's improvement strategies. The developmental work completed by the home's management is commendable in both quantity and quality, leading to considerable improvement in management systems, care practices and the progress and outcomes for children and young people. Leaders and managers have taken significant action since the previous inspection to improve the quality and operation of this home during its transition from a short breaks service to a longer term home.

The Registered Manager has been in post since November 1997; he is suitably qualified and very experienced in supporting and looking after children and young people with a diverse range of complex needs and challenging behaviours. The home is effectively and efficiently managed by the Registered Manager and the recently established senior management team who work cohesively together to meet the individual needs of children and young people and the challenges of group living. Their collaborative approach provides consistency and stability in the delivery of excellent, personalised care to each child or young person. Although there have been some difficulties in maintaining a fully staffed team, the deployment of regular local authority workers and agency staff ensure that staffing levels are always sufficient to safely meet individual care needs. The home recognises the impact of children and young peoples' experiences and disability on the progress they make and staff work well with partner agencies to meet children and young peoples' needs. A professional stated, 'I have been impressed with the leadership of the home; the management group show a high degree of flexibility to help meet the needs of the children and young people.'

The Registered Manager and the management team demonstrate a comprehensive awareness of the home's strengths and weaknesses and they enthusiastically strive to make improvements to benefit outcomes for children and young people. Staff are developing their expertise and skills, supported by: a structured induction programme; regular supervision which includes reflective practice; completing mandatory training modules and access to other relevant courses; and the measures now in place to support staff in the completion of the National Vocational Qualification or Workforce Diploma award.

The Registered Manager regularly monitors the quality of care provided to children and young people which includes consultation with them and their families. Any learning gained from monitoring and consultation processes informs the future development of the home.

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.