

Children's homes - interim inspection

Inspection date	02/03/2016
Unique reference number	SC069336
Type of inspection	Interim
Provision subtype	Residential special school
Registered person	Prior's Court Foundation
Responsible individual	Michael Robinson
Registered manager	Sarah Butcher
Inspector	Chris Peel

Inspection date	02/03/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Good
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
<p>The effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection</p> <p>This home was judged Good at the full inspection. At this interim inspection Ofsted judge that it has improved effectiveness.</p> <p>A striking feature of this home is the drive of leaders and managers to continually improve the service offered to children and young people. This is an ethos that permeates the organisation with staff wanting to develop the particular provision they are responsible for. Examples range from the introduction of epilepsy care plans, through the development of a new assessment tool, to the planning of new purpose-built accommodation.</p> <p>Development planning is exemplary: leaders and managers explore current thinking in the field and research models of practice, they exploit experience accrued within the organisation and implement new ways of working with careful planning and high levels of staff 'buy in'. The staged introduction of an electronic form of recording of physical interventions is a good example, with managers of the residential houses reporting it is a useful system. Once embedded it is planned that other features of the model will be introduced. The process still requires practitioners to be adept at recording instances well, but their supervisors can easily monitor this.</p> <p>With ten residential units as part of a wider school and different departments operating within it, this is a large establishment to run. However, there is considerable evidence of good collaboration across the organisation, exemplified by the medical team. Staff spoken to have excellent specialist knowledge about their work and have disseminated this through such guidance as the epilepsy care plans and flow charts that help workers deal confidently with common illnesses. The nurses speak to residential staff about the potential consequences arising from missed medication. Their work is thus integrated into the care of children and young people, who benefit from staff working with them on a daily basis who manage their conditions better whilst not having others they know less well unnecessarily involved.</p> <p>Occupational therapists have helped develop the tool designed to assess abilities across a range of activities together with the level of support required. Although not yet implemented, the intention is to identify areas to work on with young people and demonstrate progress over time. Currently there is evidence of improvement that children and young people are making in several areas, including</p>	

the reduction of physical attacks or damage of property and the gaining of new skills. One young person observed trying to dash through any open door during the last inspection was seen now to have no impulse to do so, resulting in him concentrating on tasks in hand and a calmer atmosphere for his peers.

Leaders and managers have responded well to significant incidents, investigating concerns and 'unpicking' what has led to occasions when welfare may have been compromised. Due process is followed and plans drawn up to improve practice; these are reviewed to ensure they are having the desired effect. Parents responding to Ofsted's survey indicate that where they have had complaints they believe their children's situations have much improved. Reports prepared by the independent person, appointed to visit and comment on the home's ability to safeguard children and promote their well-being, are used as opportunities to learn, with each house drawing up an action plan in response.

In contrast, reviews of the quality of care drawn up by the provider are less well embedded into the monitoring and development of practice. Obtaining the opinions of children and young people about the home is a challenge, given the levels of communication and comprehension, but no attempt is currently made to incorporate views gathered either formally or informally. In addition the report does not include actions arising out of its findings. Managers are aware of these flaws but as no plans are currently worked up to address them a recommendation is made to further improve practice.

Staff work tenaciously to improve the experience of care of children and young people, even under the most difficult of circumstances, including frequent injury. An extensively remodelled house has very recently been opened for single occupancy of the two wings so that young people who have extreme difficulty living with others can remain within the school. The accommodation has been designed to minimise the potential for damage and includes a room for education so that each young person can continue with their curriculum. In the few days of occupancy these residents have adapted well to their new environments, with one reported to have likened his new home to a hotel he went on holiday to. This illustrates improved experience of care and his views of the home. It was noted during the inspection that fire extinguishers were kept out of sight in the house but not all staff knew where they could be found. A sign to indicate this had not been put up but was rectified before the inspection ended.

The strategy to accommodate young people in single occupancy environments is accompanied by plans to re-integrate as far as possible in the life of the school and one young person was successfully helped to enter the dining room to have a meal for the first time in many months during the inspection.

The transitioning of children and young people into and out of the home is extremely well managed. There is a clear process of gathering information, decision making, introduction and welcome for new admissions. A high level of support is given to young people and their families, tailored to meet their specific needs which is then continued throughout their placement. It includes consideration of the impact a new arrival may have on young people already

resident, however, this is not currently recorded. Consents for medical treatment, participation in activities and inclusion in photographs are obtained at admission but not reviewed at any stage.

Transitions from the home are thoroughly prepared for. Decisions and their timing are in the hands of placing authorities and future providers but managers and staff give as much information and assistance as they can to make the process as smooth as possible. They will prompt, cajole or challenge as necessary when other agencies are not providing a similar service.

A few residential houses are either not meeting the exacting standards managers have of the physical environment for young people (due to age and limitations imposed by listed status) or their original function is not now meeting the needs of current residents (specifically the house in the community). Managers are addressing these issues and have committed a significant investment to eventually move young people to a specifically designed new build.

This home is operating at a high standard across the provision. To a great degree this is attributable to the ability of the Registered Manager to hold and utilise large amounts of detailed information about young people, staff and services to drive it forward. Other members of the leadership team respond with equal commitment to meet the needs of children and young people and motivate the wider staff group to do the same.

Information about this children's home

This school provides care and accommodation for up to 76 young people with autistic spectrum disorder and learning disabilities, providing accommodation for a number of young people receiving up to 52 weeks placements. It is therefore registered as a children's home. It operates as an independent co-educational residential special school with charitable status.

Young people are accommodated in nine on-site residential houses and one off-site house in a neighbouring village. The school is set around a restored country house, within acres of parkland.

The organisation also provides residential services for young adults for which it is registered with the Care Quality Commission.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
15/09/2015	CH - Full	Good
23/03/2015	CH - Interim	sustained effectiveness
28/10/2014	CH - Full	Good
13/03/2014	CH - Interim	Satisfactory Progress

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

Recommendations

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

- The registered person should only accept placements for children where they have fully considered the impact that the placement will have on the existing group of children. These assessments should be recorded. (Guide to Children's Homes Regulations 11.4 page 56)
- The review of the quality of care should include feedback of children about the home and enable the registered person to identify areas of strength and possible weakness in the home's care. The report should clearly identify any actions required for the next 6 months of delivery within the home and how those actions will be addressed. (Guide to Children's Homes Regulations 15.4 page 65)

What the inspection judgements mean

At the interim inspection we make a judgement on whether the home has improved in effectiveness, sustained effectiveness, or declined in effectiveness since the previous full inspection. This is in line with the *Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection*.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people living in the children's home. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the difference adults make to the lives of children and young people. They read case files, watched how professional staff work with children, young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care given to children and young people. Wherever possible, they talked to children, young people and their families. In addition the inspectors have tried to understand what the children's home knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and young people who it is trying to help, protect and look after.

This inspection focused on the effectiveness of the home and the progress and experiences of children and young people since the most recent full inspection.

This 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 Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 and the *Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards*.

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