

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	7 July 2016
Unique reference number	SC069336
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Residential special school
Registered provider	Prior's Court Foundation
Responsible individual	Michael Robinson
Registered manager	Sarah Butcher
Inspector	Chris Peel

Inspection date	7 July 2016
Previous inspection judgement	Improved effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the home contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help, protection and care.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding

SC069336

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is outstanding because:

- Almost without exception, children and young people are making good progress against their starting points when admitted to the home. Some have made improvements that have far exceeded the expectations of parents. These are particularly in areas of communication, engagement in activities and participation in social events, such as meals out.
- Progress is often across a range of developmental areas. One parent listed her son's achievements as including no longer self-harming, being able to calm himself down, using the toilet, no longer needing medication he was previously on, using communication aids and words to express himself, reaching goals in education, accessing the community and trusting staff.
- Staff have an excellent understanding of children and young people's behaviour. They are aware of the signs that indicate children are becoming unsettled and are adept at interpreting the meaning behind particular behaviours.
- Staff know how to intervene and support children and young people, de-escalating situations so that instances of physical intervention are relatively low. The number of instances decline through children's and young people's careers in the home.
- Staff are very skilled and demonstrate enormous patience so that the quality of care provided to children and young people is of the highest standard. In the very rare instances that practice falls below expectations, managers act swiftly to address the issues.
- There is a high level of integration between the services the home offers to children and young people: education, therapy and medical support as well as residential care. This, together with the exceptional degree of consistency in approach between staff, provides a secure base that enables children and young people to make good progress.
- Leaders and managers use and participate in research to identify the most effective approaches and techniques to use with the children and young people the home caters for. These become embedded in practice and produce measurable results.
- Managers and staff continually improve practice, introducing new methods and processes to gather information to make better decisions. Very effective use is made of assessments of each child's and young person's abilities and of reports made following independent person visits under regulation 44.

- Managers and staff have high aspirations. This is reflected in the ambitious development plans the organisation has for future provision and in the plans made for each child and young person.

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 recommendations:

- Children's homes must comply with relevant health and safety legislation, specifically to ensure that fire drills are completed regularly and checking of all equipment occurs as per the home's fire assessment ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.9)
- Any decisions to limit a child's access to any area of the home, and any modifications to the environment of the home, must only be made where this is intended to safeguard the child's welfare. All decisions should be informed by a rigorous assessment of that individual child's needs, be properly recorded and be kept under regular review. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 15, paragraph 3.10)
- The policy on protection of children from abuse and neglect should include arrangements in relation to countering risks of self-harm and suicide. All policies should be reviewed regularly and revised where appropriate. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 44, paragraph 9.19)
- The registered person should be skilled in reviewing incidents, such as learning from disruptions and placement breakdowns. They are responsible for proactively implementing lessons learned and sustaining good practice. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 55, paragraph 10.24)

Full report

Information about this children's home

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

Children and 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
2 March 2016	Interim	Improved effectiveness
15 September 2015	Full	Good
23 March 2015	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
28 October 2014	Full	Good

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Outstanding
<p>Children and young people are making outstanding progress from their starting points. Many who had little communication are now interacting well, using meaningful forms of communication to engage with others. Some children and young people take responsibility for their communication aids, with staff actively encouraging and supporting them to use the aids in order to make their wishes and feelings known.</p> <p>Many children and young people have developed the ability to self-regulate emotions and manage their behaviour, to the extent of being able to cope in the community, interacting and socialising with others. This means that they are able to go shopping, to the cinema or to enjoy a meal with family and friends. Parents have commented on how this would not have been thought possible before admission.</p> <p>Pre-admission processes are robust, and allow for children and young people to be observed in previous placements, then spending time at the home before they move in. This process allows them to settle quickly with their needs understood. Many begin to make progress early in their placements.</p> <p>Staff support young people to learn and develop key skills, which promotes greater opportunities in terms of accommodation and continued learning into adulthood. Transitions into 18-plus provision are carefully prepared for. Managers and staff liaise with family, social workers and staff from new services, provide photographs and information and arrange visits to assist the young person to make a successful move. Where placing authorities delay making decisions to support transition the home will continue placements to ensure that young people are not unsettled. They also challenge decisions that do not appear to be in young people's best interests, from the strong position of knowing them extremely well.</p> <p>Staff have the ability to judge when to intervene in order to break negative cycles of behaviour or to end an activity when there is a likelihood of a child or young person becoming overexcited. This is balanced by patience to wait for children and young people to make decisions for themselves, when to move them on might create frustration. As one member of staff explained, 'I know "A" is capable of making the choice himself so I wait until he is ready to make it and then he will move on to something else.'</p>	

Choices are given to children and young people whenever possible, such as clothes to wear or activities. Sometimes these choices are thoughtfully interpreted from behaviour and knowledge of what has previously been enjoyed or disliked. Children and young people contribute extensively to the life of the home, for example, a young person requested to have a barbeque resulting in him purchasing one with a company credit card.

Observations were made of many interactions between children and young people and those looking after them. All were characterised by great care and tremendous patience on behalf of staff. If children and young people were 'in a good place' they responded positively with humour, enjoyment and even delight. If unsettled they appeared reassured by the response of staff. They have an evident trust in staff known to them. The quality of the relationships is exemplary.

The campus is a physically safe and secure environment and has several facilities that encourage physical exercise, such as a running track, swimming pool and play equipment. One young person has undertaken a 5K run at the suggestion of his parents.

A few houses have a 'tired' feel. To a large degree this is due to age and limitations imposed by listed status. In the long term, a specifically designed new building will replace those houses it is not possible to upgrade sufficiently. More immediately, a new method of categorising maintenance issues has been introduced, aimed at ensuring that worn decor, for example, does not have to wait until a planned date to be addressed.

Liaison with the majority of parents is strong, helping to ensure that contact is a good experience for all, and that medical conditions are managed as well as possible. Staff enhance children's and young people's experiences of family life too, for example taking one young person to a wedding which he would not have been able to attend unless he was cared for there by them.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
Staff are well versed in how to safeguard children and young people and it is a high priority across the organisation. In some houses, the wish to ensure safety has led to a practice of viewing panes in bedroom doors being open at all times. For some, regular observation is essential, (such as those prone to seizures) but for others it is an unnecessary intrusion.	

In other areas, managers are examining the need to continue practices that may be unnecessarily restrictive, such as having gates, and in some cases with locks on them, between outside facilities. Locks on bedroom doors in one house cannot be opened from the inside. Risk assessments indicate that these are never to be used and staff confirm that this is the case.

The home's safeguarding policy does not include procedures to follow in the event of cases that it has had little, if any, experience of, such as those of missing from care, self-harm (as opposed to self-injurious behaviour) and suicide, but it is otherwise thorough.

Staff have reported concerns to safeguarding leads and senior staff when they have observed poor practice or are concerned. All have been reported, investigated and appropriate action has been taken. On one occasion, unexplained injuries were considered to be self-inflicted and were not raised as a potential concern until the assumption was challenged. The investigation came to the conclusion that bruises probably resulted from self-injurious behaviour. Investigations are well documented and recommendations made as to actions to address the particular case. However, recommendations for wider learning for the organisation are not always included.

The high level of supervision and security leads to there being little risk of child sexual exploitation or absconding, but efforts are still made to ensure that children and young people are aware of potential dangers and what to do if they are worried. These include visual communications, such as social stories undertaken with those able to understand them, which explain who they can talk to in these circumstances.

The reporting and monitoring of physical intervention is thorough, with a new electronic system in place, which is promoting more thorough and timely reporting. Learning is undertaken from each intervention, regardless of severity, which then contributes to strategies to reduce the need for restraint to be used. Records indicate that the longer a young person remains in the home and makes progress the fewer incidents occur.

Many children and young people become distressed at the sound of fire alarms, but during the inspection staff were observed to assist children and young people with skill and sensitivity during an evacuation. As a result, all remained calm and reassured.

Fire drills have not always been held when new staff or young people have been introduced to a house. Concerns about the adverse impact on young people in the most recently opened house has resulted in no drill being conducted since it first admitted them in February this year.

Risk assessments, which include evacuation procedures for those who require a personal plan, are thorough and up to date.

Safer recruitment procedures are followed well.

There are a high number of medicines needing to be administered to children and young people, and an emphasis on ensuring that mistakes are avoided. The practice is exemplary, every dose given is observed and signed for by two staff. Storage of medication is secure in every house.

Staff who undertake specific medical procedures with children and young people are given specific training with each individual it applies to. An example of excellent staff practice is their proactive research into conditions and procedures they are unsure of prior to training, allowing them to ask appropriate questions.

Parents, nurses and staff all contribute to the health plans of the young people to ensure that a complete picture is captured. As a consequence, children and young people are kept extremely safe.

Pupil support plans and individual risk assessments are highly personalised documents, containing input from education, therapy, medical and residential staff and they are regularly reviewed. Strategies are therefore specific to each child or young person, but are closely followed by all staff. A consistent response is given that increases the sense of predictability and security for children and young people, enabling them to focus on engagement in activities and on learning at their own pace.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Outstanding
<p>Managers have continued to improve already high standards of practice and delivery of services. The electronic recording of significant behaviours has been implemented in all houses, increasing compliance with regulations and making available an impressive array of information used to identify patterns and trends. It has made possible very specific interventions for individual children and young people and for staff development.</p> <p>Comprehensive assessment tools have been designed, trialled and implemented. These provide a detailed analysis of every child's and young person's daily living skills. These give a baseline appraisal, allowing targets to be set and the measurement of small steps of progress. It is an excellent example of how the multi-discipline teams in the service are brought together to meet the needs of children and young people.</p> <p>Uses of technology and research to meet the needs of children and young people, and to manage the home effectively, are exceptionally well developed and effective.</p> <p>The home's development plan is ambitious in its goals for service delivery. It</p>	

includes a new purpose-built provision of four houses and additional facilities. Learning from the home's most recent development, a house consisting of two single occupancy apartments, is being used to ensure that specifications of the new-build are of the most exacting standards.

The experience of the young people in the single occupancy accommodation exemplifies the efforts to enhance the lives of all children and young people in the home, both by strategic decisions by managers (the redesign of the house for this specific purpose) and the personalised care offered by staff (responding with skill and understanding to individual needs).

Staff turnover is relatively high, although within the bounds of normal experience in the sector. In the short term, managers ensure that the potential for this to have a detrimental impact on children and young people is avoided through extensive induction and training of new recruits. Consultation with staff is under way to identify potential changes to shift patterns that could improve staff retention in the longer term.

So far, 60% of staff who should have achieved a level 3 diploma for residential childcare or equivalent have done so. Managers are addressing the need to ensure that all employees are compliant with the regulation by creating their own centre to undertake the training and assessments, rather than contracting an outside agency.

Managers have acted on the recommendations of the previous inspection. An impact risk assessment has been introduced that, in an example of excellent practice, identifies not just risks but potential benefits of a child or young person moving into a particular house, both for them and for existing residents.

Managers have developed a format for reviews of the quality of care under regulation 45 that closely follows the recommendations of the 'Guide to Children's Homes Regulations'. Given the abilities of children and young people at the home, it is hard to obtain their opinions to include in the review. However, a school council has been inaugurated to allow views and wishes to be sought. This is a challenging undertaking, but one staff want to rise to.

There have been no formal complaints raised that needed to be addressed by the management. Informal complaints receive a prompt, professional response that allows the concern to be settled without needing to be escalated further.

Leaders and managers inspire an ethos across the organisation that is exemplified in the words of a member of staff who said, 'This is the kind of job where you want to give everything every day you come in.'

Although formal supervision only takes place three-monthly, staff can request additional sessions, and informal discussions also take place. Staff spoken to say they feel supported, really enjoy their work and are happy. One commented, 'The good days outweigh the bad, the work is second to none'.

The registered manager has a detailed knowledge of each child and young person.

This is coupled with an in-depth understanding of the home's strengths and weaknesses, and clear strategies to build on and maximise the former and address the latter.

What the inspection judgements mean

The experiences and progress of children and young people are at the centre of the inspection. Inspectors will use their professional judgement to determine the weight and significance of their findings in this respect. The judgements included in the report are made against 'Inspection of children's homes: framework for inspection'.

An **outstanding** children's home provides highly effective services that contribute to significantly improved outcomes for children and young people who need help and protection and care. Their progress exceeds expectations and is sustained over time.

A **good** children's home provides effective services that help, protect and care for children and young people and have their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

In a children's home that **requires improvement**, there are no widespread or serious failures that create or leave children being harmed or at risk of harm. The welfare of children looked after is safeguarded and promoted. Minimum requirements are in place. However, the children's home is not yet delivering good protection, help and care for children and young people.

A children's home that is **inadequate** is providing services where there are widespread or serious failures that create or leave children and young people being harmed or at risk of harm or result in children looked after not having their welfare safeguarded and promoted.

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 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'.

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making complaints about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It inspects services for children looked after and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2016