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Registered provider: Worcestershire County Council

Full inspection

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this children's home

This is a local authority operated home. It provides care and accommodation for up to three young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties.

Inspection dates: 15 to 16 January 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people, taking into account	outstanding
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How well children and young people are helped and protected	outstanding
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The effectiveness of leaders and managers	outstanding
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The children's home provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the children's home contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and young people who need help, protection and care.

Date of last inspection: 14 March 2017

Overall judgement at last inspection: sustained effectiveness

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This children's home is outstanding because:

- Staff help young people who have complex needs to make sustained improvement in their behaviour.
- Managers and staff use research to underpin their practice. This helps them to provide exceptionally high-quality care to young people.
- Young people say that they feel very safe as a result of living in this home.
- Young people's risk assessments are comprehensive and staff have an excellent knowledge of safeguarding.
- Staff help young people to develop their independence skills.
- Managers have strong, open relationships with partnership agencies and there is frequent communication. This helps young people to make significant progress.
- Staff support young people to share their wishes and feelings and to make decisions about their lives. Staff are strong advocates for young people.
- Managers provide young people with a wide range of activities and support their hobbies.
- Managers support young people to take positive risks. For example, one young person has a moped. This means that young people are afforded the same or better experiences as any other young person.
- Managers are inspirational and have an ambitious vision for what young people can achieve. Young people have excellent opportunities because of the care that they receive.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
14/03/2017	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
06/09/2016	Full	Outstanding
29/10/2015	Full	Outstanding

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and young people: outstanding

Since the last inspection, one young person has moved out of the home and one young person has moved in. Managers make sure that young people's transitions are exceptionally well planned, young people are supported emotionally and physically with all aspects of their move. Managers complete excellent, comprehensive risk assessments that consider the needs of all young people. This ensures that young people are exceedingly well matched. As a result, young people get along well.

Staff make sure that young people have extensive information about their new home. For example, one young person told the inspector, 'I knew about the home before I moved in. I had a booklet and a really good video.' Managers make sure that young people's bedrooms are furnished with new furniture and a new mattress before they arrive. Staff help young people to buy items of their choice to decorate their bedrooms. As a consequence, young people receive a warm welcome and are made to feel special. This helps alleviate some anxiety and promotes their emotional well-being.

Managers work hard to ensure that the home is not institutional and that it feels homely. For example, young people can access all areas of their home. All doors, including the office, are always open and there are no alarms on young people's bedroom doors. Consequently, young people feel safe and respond well to the 'house rules'.

The home is decorated to an exceptionally high standard. It is a detached house, accessed by a private driveway and it has a large garden. The garden is very well cared-for and some new outdoor furniture has recently been purchased. Managers listen to the wishes of young people. For example, there are now two kittens living at the home! The registered manager takes pride in the home. For example, she recently requested that the stair banister was repainted as she felt it looked 'grubby'. She is also planning to fit a new bathroom floor at the request of one young person. Staff make sure that the home is kept exceptionally clean and tidy. Consequently, young people respect and value their home. Young people have access to a games room with a television and games console. Staff have also stocked the room with an extremely large and well cared-for range of board games that young people enjoy playing with staff.

Managers and staff make sure that young people's files are remarkably organised and kept up to date. Internal care plans are 'live' documents that are updated daily. Staff make sure that young people understand their care plans and talk openly with them about their future. Young people attend their reviews and share their opinions and wishes. As a result, young people feel confident in the care that they receive from staff. Placement plans are centred on young people's progress; they are thoroughly reviewed and mirror the aims and objectives set by the local authority.

Young people have close, trusting relationships with staff and make substantial progress from their starting points. For example, one young person, who has displayed highly aggressive behaviour and struggles to form relationships, has made vast improvements

in her behaviour because of the persistent and committed care, warmth and affection that she receives from staff.

Managers are committed to ensuring that young people attend and make progress in their education. For example, one young person has been enabled to remain in school because of the extensive partnership working between the registered manager and the headteacher. As a result, the young person now has access to a teaching assistant and attends school daily. The registered manager is resourceful and forward-thinking, accessing support from the head of the virtual school whenever this is required. She is unquestionably effective in making sure that young people receive the help and resources that they need to meet their educational needs.

Another young person who has inconsistently accessed education, and was excluded from college due to challenging and threatening behaviour, has been provided with a range of opportunities to enable him to return to education. The registered manager has been successful in helping the young person to visit an alternative education provision and has secured a place for him.

A third young person has excellent education attendance and is studying for his GCSEs. Staff make sure that revision is a top priority and are imaginative in their encouragement of the young person.

Young people make inspiring and continued progress, from their starting points, in all areas. An independent reviewing officer told the inspector:

I have been impressed that staff have managed to persuade the young person to invest in his health and there is clear evidence that he has attended routine appointments and engaged well with the paediatrician and dermatologist. The home has been proactive in exploring education options for him and recognising his potential and staff are strong advocates for him.

Staff have exceptionally strong relationships with young people and provide nurturing and affectionate responses to them. This approach is underpinned by research and a good understanding of attachment theory. Staff work cohesively with therapists to provide the highest possible care to young people. For example, a therapist told the inspector about the registered manager, explaining:

One of the things I admire about her is her absolute determination to get the right placement. She wanted the right match and was brave, she challenges the senior managers, and she is one of the few managers I have met who does this. She understands the impact that other young people's behaviour can have on the development of their peers. She uses the argument about attachment and not traumatising children.

Staff are innovative in obtaining young people's wishes and feelings. For example, house meetings are a regular opportunity for young people to share their views. Managers make sure that these are sought in an informal way over dinner or during an activity. Young people have access to independent advocates and have daily conversations with staff about how they feel. Key-working sessions happen several times a week. The

sessions are very comprehensive and clearly record the views of young people. Issues that affect young people, such as mental health, are discussed. Staff professionally challenge young people about misconceptions or any prejudicial attitudes that they may have. Consequently, young people make improvements in their understanding and knowledge of social issues. A social worker told the inspector about the young person she works with, stating:

The manager and her team should be commended for the level of care they afford him; he is treated as part of the family and not just a resident. They do all they can to better his life, whether this is by trying to engage him in activities, advocating for his therapy to continue or taking him shopping and encouraging him to be more independent.

Staff work hard to make sure that young people flourish and that they develop their independence skills. Staff work tirelessly to make sure that young people acquire these skills in a fun way. Staff enable young people to open bank accounts and start saving. Staff put immense effort into helping young people keep their bedrooms tidy and supporting them to do household chores. Staff are highly skilled in making sure that young people develop their skills in social situations, such as dining out, using public transport and cycling. For example, one young person has sustained a part-time job and another young person has been bought a mountain bike to cycle to see his friends. This means that young people are learning independence skills appropriate to their age. One young person told the inspector, 'I am doing well. I think I am doing a lot better and I now realise what idiots those people look taking those drugs.'

Managers and staff are imaginative and make sure that young people access a wide range of activities, hobbies and interests. The registered manager is clear that young people should not spend long periods of time at the computer. Instead, young people are provided with opportunities to do outdoor pursuits, learn how to cook, go walking and cycling, play board games with staff and do arts and crafts. Managers make sure that young people are afforded substantial opportunities to travel and young people have a say about where they go on holiday. For example, one young person went to Rome on holiday last year and is planning a trip to Portugal this year. Staff use these trips to help young people to learn about history, art and other cultures. One young person told the inspector, 'Honestly everything is good. It is all good here, really great actually, the same as last time. My holiday was amazing and I enjoyed it, it was really hot.'

How well children and young people are helped and protected: outstanding

The registered manager has extensive knowledge of safeguarding processes and procedures. All staff have received safeguarding training. Staff demonstrated that they are highly competent in their knowledge of safeguarding during this inspection. Additional training is also provided, covering areas such as the 'Prevent' duty, child sexual exploitation and internet safety. Managers make sure that team meetings provide purposeful opportunities to talk about themes and issues relating to safeguarding.

Staff actively educate young people about the risks of online grooming and sexual

exploitation. Staff make sure that young people are not exposing themselves to risk; they do this by regularly checking their mobile phones and talking with young people about what is worrying them. As a result, young people are safe and feel safe. Moreover, young people learn about risks that could affect them and make positive choices.

Managers ensure that staff recruitment processes are exceptionally robust. Managers are meticulous in verifying references, identity and qualifications. They make sure that all necessary disclosure and barring checks are in place. This means that young people are protected from unsafe adults.

Staff respond well if young people go missing and follow clear procedures. Staff make sure that they stay in contact with young people, they look for them and encourage them to return home. Records are extensive and risk assessments are thorough. Managers rigorously ensure that missing from home interviews are undertaken.

Managers make sure that allegations are robustly investigated. For example, one young person has a history of making allegations against professionals. She has made a number of allegations against staff since living in the home. Nonetheless, the manager is consistent in her response to the allegations. Management of risk meetings are regularly held and ensure an effective response to the young person. The safety of young people is of paramount importance while maintaining the highest level of care. For example, the young person recently made an allegation in front of her independent reviewing officer. The registered manager advocated relentlessly to make sure that the matter was properly investigated. The young person later retracted her allegation but felt that she was listened to and supported by staff.

Physical restraint is only used as a last resort. Staff are committed to providing a nurturing and caring response to young people's behaviours, based on talking and understanding. Staff use a range of highly effective distraction techniques prior to using any form of restraint. The registered manager has a wealth of knowledge about restraint. When restraint is used, incidents are recorded in considerable detail. Staff always provide young people with an opportunity to talk about their experience. Staff receive significant support in reflecting on incidents. Managers review all incidents accurately and within timescales.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

The registered manager has the necessary qualifications and skills for the role. She has wide-ranging experience and a distinctive passion. The registered manager is inspirational and has an ambitious vision for the young people that she cares for. She is influential in changing the lives of those in her care. The registered manager is supported by a dynamic deputy manager. The staff team is a consistent and cohesive group. This makes a considerable difference to the lives of the young people whom they support.

Managers and staff receive highly effective, comprehensive and regular supervision. Managers make sure that supervision notes are thoroughly written and focus on young

people's progress and achievements. Managers feel well supported by senior managers, including the responsible individual who encourages effective challenge and is always approachable. The registered manager's supervisor is also supportive and assists the registered manager when required. A member of staff told the inspector about the registered manager, explaining:

She is a very supportive manager, she does always have the young people at the forefront of decision-making, she is very, very hard working and she supports us all and trusts you a lot in making decisions. I really like having her as a manager.

Newly employed staff receive intensive support and follow a clear induction programme. In addition, new staff complete their diploma in residential childcare as a matter of urgency. This means that young people receive an outstanding level of care from well-qualified and skilled staff.

Case records are completed to a very high standard. They reflect young people's everyday lives, noting their achievements and progress. Staff are open with young people about their records and young people are able to access their files appropriately if they wish. This helps young people to talk about past issues and experiences and gives them the feeling that they have some control over their lives.

The registered manager has undertaken an exceptionally well evaluated and professional assessment of the location of the home. This means that potential risks within the area are scrutinised, including local hazards and crime data. As a result of detailed actions to minimise risks to young people, such issues are avoided. The registered manager makes sure that there is optimum scrutiny and oversight of the service. This means that the highest level of care is afforded to young people. The statement of purpose accurately reflects the aims and objectives of the home and the registered manager has an exceptional understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. She has written an excellent evaluation of the quality of care provided, which includes very positive feedback from young people and professionals. The registered manager is constantly thinking of innovative ways to develop the service.

The managers and staff have excellent professional relationships with social workers, teachers, headteachers, the head of the virtual school and therapists. This means that young people receive the highest level of specialist support across all areas of their development. The head of the virtual school told the inspector:

I have nothing but praise for this residential home. The manager is extremely diligent and will go over and beyond for these children, both educationally and socially. We have worked closely together and in partnership to achieve good outcomes for our children. The manager and her team champion our children and do everything they can to get the best outcome, through persistence, energy and high expectations.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and young people. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and young people. They watched how professional staff work with children and young people and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and 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 whom it is trying to help, protect and look after.

Using the 'Social care common inspection framework', this inspection was carried out under the Care Standards Act 2000 to assess the effectiveness of the service, how it meets the core functions of the service as set out in legislation, 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'.

Children's home details

Unique reference number: 1155768

Provision sub-type: Children's home

Registered provider address: Worcestershire County Council, County Hall, Worcester
WR5 2NP

Responsible individual: Jake Shaw

Registered manager: Barbara Layton

Inspector

Anna Gravelle, social care inspector

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