

Newington Manor Family Support Service

Symbol Family Support Services Limited

Newington Manor, Callaways Lane, Newington, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 7LU

Inspected under the social care common inspection framework

Information about this residential family centre

This privately owned service is registered to conduct residential assessments for a maximum of ten families. Parents usually have a learning disability diagnosis; some have additional mental health needs. Community-based assessments are also undertaken, as well as outreach support when this is requested.

Inspection dates: 7 to 8 March 2018

Overall experiences and progress of children and parents, taking into account outstanding

How well children and parents are helped and protected good

The effectiveness of leaders and managers outstanding

The residential family centre provides highly effective services that consistently exceed the standards of good. The actions of the residential family centre contribute to significantly improved outcomes and positive experiences for children and parents.

Date of previous inspection: 19 March 2014

Overall judgement at last inspection: outstanding

Enforcement action since last inspection: none

Key findings from this inspection

This residential family centre is outstanding because:

- Families receive individually tailored support packages that increase their chances of success.
- Children's welfare and safety are always central to the assessment process.
- High-quality assessments are rich in evidence-based evaluation and are solution focused.
- Families are respected and treated with the utmost care and dignity.
- The team is forward-thinking and continually seeks to improve.
- Detailed succession planning keeps staff motivated and ambitious for themselves and the families.
- Families frequently receive ongoing support and guidance after their assessment, which maintains their success.
- The centre is focused and expertly retains its own sense of independence. Consequently, assessments are fair, transparent and led only by the needs of the child.

The residential family centre's areas for development:

- Some areas of the premises are in need of refurbishment.
- Current feedback mechanisms to parents' suggestions and ideas about the daily operation of the centre have become tired and dated.
- Staff meeting records are variable in terms of quality.

What does the residential family centre need to do to improve?

Recommendations

- Ensure that parents are encouraged to communicate their views, wishes and feelings on all aspects of their placement, assessment and support. Staff take account of these views, wishes and feelings in the day-to-day running and development of the centre. (National Minimum Standard 2.1)
In particular, improve on the methods to provide feedback to parents when they express their views, opinions and ideas on the daily operation of the centre.

- Ensure that the centre provides a comfortable and homely environment and is well maintained and decorated. Avoidable hazards are removed as is consistent with a domestic setting. Risk reduction does not lead to an institutional feel. (National Minimum Standard 11.2)
In particular, provide parents with regular progress updates on the premises improvement plan.

- Entries in records are legible, clearly expressed and non-stigmatising; and distinguish as far as possible between fact, opinion and third party information. (National Minimum Standard 20.5)
This is specific to the variable quality of staff meeting records.

Inspection judgements

Overall experiences and progress of children and parents: outstanding

Children benefit from a highly effective assessment process, which places their safety, welfare and development needs as the driving focus. Staff scrutinise initial referral information to ascertain quickly the individual and specific needs of the family. This information reliably informs staffing levels, accommodation decisions, specific resources and key-working allocation.

Upon their arrival, families receive a warm, sensitive welcome from staff. The staff team skilfully engages parents quickly and successfully. The centre specialises in working with parents who have diagnosed learning disabilities and/or mental health concerns. Consequently, a highly skilled staff team uses a variety of communication methods which aid the parents' understanding.

Staff recognise the pressures of the timescales involved against the overwhelming emotional impact of the assessment process upon the parents. Skilled staff listen, advise and reassure while explaining clear objectives and expectations, using methods that work for individuals. This is a particular strength of the staff team. A parent confirmed the positive impact of the relationships they make with the staff by stating, 'They explain things really well and I know what I need to do.'

Placement plans take full account of referral information and letters of instruction. Consequently, intermediate and final assessment reports reliably inform the final decisions made by the courts and local authorities.

Each family experiences an assessment process that follows a prescribed process, while incorporating specific factors that are unique to their needs. Examples include making individualised provision for a family's cultural and religious beliefs, language support and assisting with financial difficulties. One recent example included the very complex additional health needs of a baby. The centre's flexible approach and strong liaison with local health services enabled this placement to be made and resulted in a successful outcome for the family.

The experienced and resourceful assessment team demonstrates confidence and competence in responding to the unique and specific needs of families. For some families, this results in community-based assessments for the entire process. Other families have subsequently left the centre with their child to receive ongoing support packages.

Clear lines of accountability and responsibility enable the assessment team to conduct each aspect of the assessment in a coordinated and timely manner. This approach prioritises how and when specific elements are conducted, such as psychometric and cognitive testing, and functional skills assessments. Support staff are readily equipped to factor any additional emerging needs of the parents into their own daily interactions with them. A staff member said, 'This can be as basic as carefully choosing our language and communication methods to give parents every chance of understanding what is meant.'

Initial meetings with parents are carefully explained and conducted by two members of the assessment team; each with distinct core areas of responsibility. This method allows each staff member to focus on their own particular element while their colleague records the session. The inspector's observation of one such session found this style and approach to be highly valuing of the parents' contribution and mindful of the parents' need to question and challenge the assessment process. Both parents subsequently told the inspector that they felt very well informed and consulted.

Expectations of the families and the staff are highlighted early on and throughout the assessment process. Staff are keenly aware of how quickly the dynamics between the families staying at the centre can and do change. Staff encourage families to focus on their own assessment and to consider very carefully how much information they share with other families undergoing assessment. Staff are very well attuned to the relationships that form between the families. Staff recognise how the stronger personalities of one parent can have a negative impact upon a parent who is vulnerable by virtue of their learning disability or previous life experiences.

Key-work sessions and weekly house meetings are skilfully used to explore the dynamics of the whole group. Staff utilise conflict resolution processes early on. When necessary, staff are also conversant with, and able to use, the centre's adult protection procedures. Parents are encouraged to utilise the centre's complaints procedures and the responsible individual consults with parents during her monthly visits. Such forums and processes provide families with a range of methods to voice their views, opinions, worries and concerns about their time at the centre. One parent said, 'I can easily talk to the staff here if something is bothering me.' Some parents have voiced concerns about aspects of the accommodation. While improvement plans are in place, these have not been clearly communicated back to the parents. The manner in which the results of parents' suggestions and views are communicated back to the resident group currently lacks sufficient focus.

Feedback to the families about their assessment is regular, informative and evaluative. Staff take the time to show and tell parents how their assessment is progressing. Consequently, parents receive an honest appraisal at regular intervals. The wide variety of workshops and individual sessions, which range from task-orientated skills to counselling, provide parents with every opportunity to demonstrate their capacity to change and improve upon their parenting skills. One parent said, 'I've learned so much about how to put my baby's needs before my own. Loving your child isn't always enough.'

The assessment team skilfully translates the evidence-rich data, obtained by the support team, into strong analytical and evaluative conclusions and recommendations. Local authorities regularly commend the high quality of the centre's work; for example, 'May I thank you for your extremely thorough assessment and helpful reports, which have assisted the local authority in reaching its conclusion and there being a happy ending.'

Staff exude positivity in their daily interactions with parents. They demonstrate a positive, 'can do' attitude that develops parents' self-belief. This deep-rooted culture nurtures parents and subtly role models good parenting. One parent said, 'I've

learned so much from being here and I'm a better mum because of it.'

How well children and parents are helped and protected: good

Strong initial assessment processes ensure that the staff scrutinise referral information in order to mitigate potential risks. Professionally curious staff regularly request further information when they identify potential gaps. As the assessment progresses, the staff's practice of dynamic risk assessment makes necessary changes and amendments to risk management plans, which keeps the child's safety and welfare at the centre of everyone's practice.

The centre's standard practice routinely includes the first night of a baby's stay being in the dedicated nursery, with staff supporting the baby and the parents. Some parents said that they found this difficult but confirmed that they understood the reasons. This practice has also been challenged by external health professionals. Notwithstanding the potential emotional impact upon the parents and children, the rationale of risk management is clearly communicated to all relevant parties and babies quickly join their parents' rooms.

Staff are well trained and fully conversant with the centre's child and adult protection procedures. They are alert to the smallest of indicators that a child might be at risk, and report any concerns swiftly. This practice protects children, not only from high-risk situations but also, for example, from the negative effects of emotional neglect.

Staff routinely refer to safeguarding as 'everyone's business' and this culture is exemplified through a recent safeguarding referral. This involved a young person not placed at the centre, but the information described by a resident parent was swiftly communicated to the relevant local authority safeguarding teams.

Parents, relatives and other stakeholders are made aware of, and use, the centre's complaints procedures. Clear records demonstrate that these are taken seriously, thoroughly investigated and, when necessary, used to shape continuing improvements to the service. Transparent reporting procedures are used by the staff to inform local authorities and Ofsted of significant and serious events. Staff are well trained in conflict management and de-escalation techniques. They have drawn on these skills extremely well when managing difficult and challenging incidents, such as when an assessment outcome has been difficult for a parent to cope with.

The majority of parents say that they feel safe, but a small number have raised concerns about the premises. Examples include unreliable heating systems and specific maintenance/repair needs. The centre occupies a large, detached listed building that is subject to a detailed ongoing refurbishment and maintenance programme. All of the required health and safety checks are up to date, but the refurbishment and repair works have not been communicated effectively to the families.

New staff have been recruited since the last inspection. Of those sampled, the recruitment records demonstrate robust recruitment practice. A new social worker is currently conducting a review of core safeguarding policies, procedures and monitoring processes. She is also conducting a review of the changing trends and

patterns that underpin more recent safeguarding concerns, with an eye to radicalisation, female genital mutilation, child sexual exploitation and county lines. A major focus for this piece of work is to also identify potential training and skills deficits across the staff team. One staff member said, 'We can't sit still where safeguarding is concerned, we must always look to learn more.'

Parents confirm that staff remain mindful of the families' needs for privacy, against the backdrop of an intrusive process. All of the families know, and consent to, the clearly explained use of baby monitors. The centre relies on good, strategic use of staff deployment to avoid the use of other surveillance methods, such as CCTV. This practice is very much appreciated by the families.

The effectiveness of leaders and managers: outstanding

Superb leadership arrangements provide staff with the expert support and supervision they need in order to deliver high-quality services. Senior managers are as ambitious for the staff as they are for the families. This is demonstrated through considered and well-thought-out succession planning.

The responsible individual and registered manager are committed to delivering the next phase of the centre's development strategy. This is being meticulously driven by the provider's five-year plan. The centre is incorporated into the organisation's wider provision, which includes educational and vocational projects, supported living arrangements and outreach work. Every project associated with the organisation is rooted in a commitment to improving the circumstances of, and the life chances for, people with disabilities.

Leaders and managers invest in the staff team through regular, reflective supervision and training opportunities that enable their own professional development plans. Two staff members are undertaking management training, with another about to start this. Consequently, staff are fulfilled and dedicated to the work they perform. One staff member said, 'There is no obvious hierarchy. There is respect for managers but that is because they value everyone, no matter what your role is.' Another said, 'I started as a support worker and I keep progressing. This is an amazing place to work where you really do make a difference to families' lives.'

Leaders and managers are successful in maintaining a committed and competent workforce. Excellent career development opportunities and support help to retain a highly valued team. This does not detract, however, from leaders maintaining professional boundaries and holding everyone to account. Since the last inspection, managers have competently utilised the centre's disciplinary procedure and the probationary period to terminate a person's employment. Staff receive excellent support, in recognition of the emotional impact of their work. They are also expected to conduct themselves with the utmost professionalism.

Staff demonstrate that they know each family extremely well. This is enabled through very regular staff meetings and handovers. Leaders and managers hold frequent and well-timed meetings with key workers to ensure that daily assessment records are accurate, up to date and swiftly redirected in response to emerging needs. Strong communication across all team members catches issues quickly, but

there are occasions where records, such as team meetings, do not contain sufficient detail. This limits understanding of what happened in the meeting for team members who were absent.

The centre's location enables families to utilise local resources and facilities. Older children can readily access playgroups, nurseries and primary schools. Such provision is enhanced by in-house groups and sessions that focus upon the importance of play. The weekly singalong session is a particular favourite with the current group.

Managers passionately advocate on behalf of the parents. This sometimes involves professional challenge to other agencies. One example exemplifies the staff's commitment to support and guide parents to obtain the services to which they are entitled. This example resulted in the family being provided with acceptable accommodation upon the completion of their assessment.

Central to the centre's success are its robust and challenging internal monitoring procedures. Strong consultation with all stakeholders is incorporated effectively into immediate and longer-term development plans. Leaders maintain a watchful eye on relevant research across the industry and use their own expertise to benefit other providers; for example, by supporting two local charity provisions.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors have looked closely at the experiences and progress of children and parents. Inspectors considered the quality of work and the differences made to the lives of children and parents. They watched how professional staff work with children and parents and each other and discussed the effectiveness of help and care provided. Wherever possible, they talked to children and parents. In addition, the inspectors have tried to understand what the residential family centre knows about how well it is performing, how well it is doing and what difference it is making for the children and parents 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 Residential Family Centre Regulations 2002 and the national minimum standards.

Residential family centre details

Unique reference number: SC367715

Registered provider: Symbol Family Support Services Limited

Registered provider address: Newington Manor, Callaways Lane, Newington, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 7LU

Responsible individual: Linda Hall

Registered manager: Teresa Duffy

Telephone number: 01795 844 440

Email address: patti@symbol.co.uk

Inspector

Sophie Wood, social care inspector



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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
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M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
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