

Children's homes inspection – Full

Inspection date	09/12/2016
Unique reference number	SC476944
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home
Registered provider	Blackford Education (schools) Ltd
Registered provider address	Blackford House, Blackford, Minehead, TA24 8SY

Responsible individual	Joan Wilkes
Registered manager	Post vacant
Inspector	Heather Chaplin

Inspection date	09/12/2016
Previous inspection judgement	Sustained effectiveness
Enforcement action since last inspection	None
This inspection	
The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are	Good
The children's home provides effective services that meet the requirements for good.	
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good

SC476944

Summary of findings

The children's home provision is good because:

- Children and young people receive exceptionally good educational provision at a school that has been rated outstanding by Ofsted. This promotes their educational attainment and helps them to achieve their potential.
- Communication between the home and the school is extremely proficient, which helps to ensure consistency of care.
- Staff at the home have made a great difference to the children and young people's lives. This includes helping and supporting positive contact with close family members to help to prepare children for overnight stays.
- The children and young people have access to weekly creative art therapy, which has helped some to respond to adults in a more positive way. This has positively enhanced their life chances.
- The children and young people have exceptionally good activities on offer, both through the school and during their time at the home. These opportunities have raised the children's aspirations and have given them a taste of the world outside their immediate environment.
- The home provides a cosy, nurturing sanctuary for children and young people who may need some respite from the structure within school. The cottages are nicely presented and represent a 'normal' home environment.
- The company provides very high quality management and effective support for each individual children's home. The new children's home manager is well supported and receives mentoring to guide them in their role.
- Social workers are full of praise for the home and say that they look forward to their visits there. They value the home's ability to produce evidence of good practice to the local authority, which helps to enhance the quality of the children and young people's lives..

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

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 (England) Regulations 2015 and the 'Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards'. The registered person(s) must comply within the given timescales.

Requirement	Due date
<p>40 - (4) The registered person must notify HMCI and each other relevant person without delay if—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) a child is involved in or subject to, or is suspected of being involved in or subject to, sexual exploitation; (b) an incident requiring police involvement occurs in relation to a child which the registered person considers to be serious; (c) there is an allegation of abuse against the home or a person working there; (d) a child protection enquiry involving a child — <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) is instigated; or (ii) concludes (in which case, the notification must include the outcome of the child protection enquiry); or (e) there is any other incident relating to a child which the registered person considers to be serious. <p>In particular, notify Ofsted of any serious matters that have the potential to affect children's safety, for example allegations against members of staff. (Regulation 40 (4) (c))</p>	<p>28/02/2017</p>

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further, the service should take account of the following recommendations:

Ensure that all staff consistently follow the home's policies and procedures for the benefit of the children in the home's care. In particular, ensure that fire safety checks are carried out and recorded at the intervals recommended by the local fire and rescue service. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 52, paragraph 10.20)

Ensure that all children's case records (detailed in Regulation 36) are kept up to date and signed and dated by the author of each entry. In particular, ensure that for a child accommodated under S.20 of the Children Act 1989, up-to-date medical

consent forms are signed by a person with parental responsibility. Copies of these consent forms should be kept in the home as well as in the school, in case needed for urgent medical treatment. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 62, paragraph 14.3)

Ensure that the home's record of the event includes a description of the action taken and the outcome of any resulting investigation. In particular, ensure that there is an effective summary of any complaint recorded within the home, including any discussion with the local authority designated officer. ('Guide to the children's homes regulations including the quality standards', page 63, paragraph 14.14)

Full report

Information about this children's home

The provider operates an independent day school, registered for 22 pupils who may attend on a daily or residential basis. Residential pupils receive care and accommodation in a number of small children's homes in the locality. These services are all situated in a rural area in the south-west of England.

This service comprises two conjoined cottages in a quiet village. Each cottage can accommodate one young person irrespective of gender, making two in total. The children and young people may have emotional and behavioural difficulties and/or learning disabilities. The cottages are operated as one home and consequently share a staff team and a registered manager.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
01/02/2016	Interim	Sustained effectiveness
09/12/2015	Full	Outstanding
02/03/2015	Interim	Improved effectiveness
18/09/2014	Full	Adequate

Inspection judgements

	Judgement grade
<p>The overall experiences and progress of children and young people living in the home are</p>	<p>Good</p>
<p>The home comprises two terraced period cottages in a quiet village in a national park. The cottages are in keeping with other homes nearby, and both have compact but nicely maintained gardens, with raised beds and plenty of space for vegetable growing. Both cottages provide homely and very attractive accommodation which replicates a family home. They have log-burning stoves, which are unusual in children's homes, but these show that the company is not risk-averse and that homeliness is a high priority.</p> <p>One child said that he loves the cottage in which he lives. He is happy and settled there. He really likes his bedroom and welcomes the opportunity to return to this cosy, homely environment after school.</p> <p>Social workers are extremely positive about the care provided. One social worker said, 'I have always been impressed with (the company), they are extremely nurturing and holistic and (my child) has thrived from that.'</p> <p>The manager and staff in the home have worked extremely well to help the children to develop positive family relationships. Consequently, some children's contact with their parents has steadily increased. One child is having overnight stays and plans to spend Christmas with his family. The child said that re-establishing regular family contact is 'the best thing that has happened' to him.</p> <p>Children and young people who come to live in this home attend the company's own day school for children and young people with special needs, which is situated one hour's drive away. Some children are still adjusting to the expectations of an educational environment, but have made good progress since they first arrived. For example, initially, one child was able to manage only half days in school, but has now done really well to progress to full days in the classroom. Although there are still incidents in school, linked with the need to follow rules and relate to peers, there have been no difficulties in the home environment.</p> <p>The school received a rating of outstanding from Ofsted in January 2016. The school excels at helping children and young people to participate in learning so that they start to make progress, often for the first time in their lives. Children and young people have benefited considerably from the school's ethos, therapeutic provision and specialist education. Although some children say that they do not like education, they are now sufficiently well engaged with this to be able to undertake homework when back at their cottage. The staff were helping with this during the inspection.</p>	

The school and the staff work together to help children to manage their own behaviour. The care staff from the home support children and young people in school, which helps to ensure an effective handover and consistency of care. This holistic approach means that the children's learning in terms of how to regulate their behaviour takes place seamlessly throughout the day and evening.

The company provides exceptional activity-based educational holidays for the children and young people, including skiing, snow-boarding and trips to Canada and Portugal. In January of this year, some of the children and young people went to Tenerife to experience the volcanic landscape. In addition to these major activities, children and young people can go horse riding, swimming and going to the beach.

One child has progressed in swimming and in rock climbing, achieving the next level in both sports. He is learning to play the piano and the guitar, which adds an important dimension to his skills. A keen horse rider, this child was also taken to see the Shergar Cup at Ascot racecourse, experience the thrill of a race day and meet the champion apprentice jockey.

Children and young people are encouraged to take part in events to support the wider community. This year, one child has taken part in a local 'mud run' and helped to raise £200 for the air ambulance service. He attended a local music festival, which included camping, and was able to make friends with some of the other children at the event. He has also attended a military air show and took part in a 5 km fun run during the summer. These exceptional opportunities help children and young people to increase their self-confidence and develop skills and interests that will support them as they approach maturity.

The children benefit from a healthy diet and plenty of physical activity. Weekly creative art therapy supports them well in relation to specific emotional and behavioural difficulties. A social worker commented that the therapeutic work is highly beneficial to their child. He has made very good progress and is learning to take himself to his room to help to regulate his own behaviour. The children also receive support whenever they need it from the staff team within the home.

The children currently living in the home are too young for a formal independence programme, but the home and school provide experience in cookery and other skills which will help them to make the difficult transition to the next stage of their lives. One child has responded really well to his 'cookbook challenge'. This includes making a list of ingredients and buying the items himself, before preparing the meal.

	Judgement grade
How well children and young people are helped and protected	Good
<p>The children are very well protected in the home. Consequently, they feel safe and secure. Effective risk assessments evaluate any potential hazards and all activities are well managed, with qualified instructors and plenty of staff.</p> <p>Children do not go missing from the home, which means that they are safe from all the risks associated with this behaviour. The home has robust procedures for every aspect of safeguarding practice, including responding to children who go missing.</p> <p>There have been very few physical interventions since the previous inspection. There have been restraints on a total of 28 days, involving one child. These incidents all took place at school and follow a similar pattern in that they are all linked to staff challenging inappropriate behaviour, which then escalates. These interventions have all been justified and the incidents are well recorded.</p> <p>The home has an effective system of rewards and consequences. Children understand this system and have responded well to incentives.</p> <p>There has been one complaint by a young person. This was discussed informally at the time with the local authority designated officer for child protection. The investigation process was extremely thorough and child-centred, making use of role play to clarify what had happened. There was appropriate feedback to the child, who said that he was satisfied with how the matter had been resolved.</p> <p>This complaint was retracted during the investigation process and no further action was taken in terms of safeguarding. However, when first received, it was an allegation and hence met the regulatory criteria for notification to Ofsted. This was not done, so a requirement has been made. The home has made other notifications appropriately.</p> <p>The company operates a safe and robust staff recruitment process. The staff files are kept at the school, with some key information also in the children’s home. Staff interviewed confirmed that they had to obtain police information from overseas to ensure as far as possible that they are safe to work with children and young people. The company’s human resources professional interviews referees in detail and then asks them to read and sign what has been recorded. Any scanty or inadequate references are discounted and an additional reference sought. This shows that prospective employees are thoroughly vetted before any appointment is made.</p> <p>The manager has ensured that all the home’s health and safety checks have been carried out to provide a safe environment for the children. Although the fire alarm</p>	

is usually tested weekly, as recommended by the local fire and rescue service, two fire alarm tests have been missed. This was an unusual oversight, so a recommendation rather than a requirement has been made.

	Judgement grade
The impact and effectiveness of leaders and managers	Good
<p>The home's registered manager has moved to another service within the company. The deputy manager has been appointed to the management role, and is in the process of applying to Ofsted for registration. The interim manager has worked with children for two years, and is new to a social care supervisory role, but she is managing well.</p> <p>Professionals' comments include that the interim manager provides an important attachment figure for their children, who look to her for reassurance. She also has the valuable ability to lighten situations with appropriate humour.</p> <p>Recognising that registered manager roles require considerable experience, the company has responded by assigning a more experienced manager as a mentor. This shows that the senior managers are fully aware of their obligations in terms of effective monitoring of the home. They have also undertaken to maintain this home with a single placement for a period, to support the new manager through her induction and registration. The recording and notification issues identified in this report predate the interim manager's appointment.</p> <p>The interim manager leads her team well, and has provided regular and well-recorded supervision. Staff say that they enjoy working at the home and feel valued and supported. There are also robust independent visiting arrangements in place. The independent visitor was present during the inspection and spent many hours reviewing documents and contacting parents.</p> <p>The manager has fostered good relationships with other professionals. A social worker commented that the communication between the home and the school is exceptionally effective. There are very positive relationships between the manager and the placing authority, as well as other agencies.</p> <p>Some elements of the home's recording require further improvement. The complaint investigation process is very well recorded and for reasons of confidentiality, this information is held at the school. The outcome of the complaint has not been recorded in sufficient detail in the home's complaint log. This meant that it was not possible to see that the matter had been discussed with the LADO, or how it had been resolved, without going to the school to read the records there.</p>	

A recommendation has been made.

The home has not ensured that up-to-date medical consent forms are signed by a person with parental responsibility, or that they are available both within the home and the school. The pupil medical record and emergency contact form was signed by a social worker who does not have parental responsibility for this particular accommodated child. On further investigation, it transpired that a parent had signed a copy of this form on 21 April 2016, but this more recent document was retained on the school premises with no copy in the home.

Similarly, the medication consent form in the home had not been completed at the time of the placement, but the child's parent had signed a copy lodged in the school on 26 February 2016. Up-to-date signed copies of these important documents should be kept in both locations, as they may be needed to show to medical professionals if the child requires urgent treatment. A recommendation has been made.

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 that 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 that 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'.

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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