

DARLINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

OFSTED INSPECTIONS OF THE CHILDREN'S HOMES AND SHORT BREAK CENTRE FOR DISABLED CHILDREN

DECEMBER 2009

Background

Darlington Borough Council provides residential care for nine young people in “smaller” homes at Dunrobin Close, Eldon Street and Gilling Crescent. The accommodation consists of four bedroomed homes which look the same as the other houses in the area. The aims and objectives of the homes are to provide an environment which is safe, child centred and where young people's individual circumstances, rights and opinions are respected. The staff work in partnership with young people, families and other professionals to ensure that young people have access to the opportunities, resources and support they need to achieve a positive future.

Short break care of disabled children is provided at Harewood Hill Lodge which is a purpose built detached bungalow offering a short break service for young people with a learning or physical disability in a comfortable and safe environment adapted to meet individual needs.

Two Ofsted inspections are carried out annually in each of the homes in accordance with the requirements of the Care Standards Act 2000, the National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes, the Children's Home Regulations 2002, the Children Act 1989 and the Children Act 2004. The inspections are based on the Every Child Matters outcomes considered essential to wellbeing:

- a) Being healthy
- b) Staying safe
- c) Enjoying and achieving
- d) Making a positive contribution
- e) Achieving economic wellbeing
- f) Organisation

Key inspections look at the Key National Minimum Standards and the actions and recommendations from the last inspection.

Random inspections look at the actions and recommendations from the last inspection and review outcomes in “Staying Safe”.

Harewood Hill Lodge

Inspection Date: 10/07/09

Type of Inspection: Random

Quality Rating: Good (a strong provision)

The report outlined the improvements since the last inspection which included:

- Minimum of 80% of staff hold the NVQ Level 3 in Caring for Children and Young People.
- Medication records contain appropriate signatures.
- The home responds to medical device alerts.
- The Statement of Purpose has been updated to include age range of children.

However, a recommendation to review fire procedures and test fire equipment was not met.

The strengths in the section “protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe” included:

- Privacy is promoted and children are treated with dignity and respect.
- Intimate care is carried out discreetly.
- Procedures are in place and staff know to take all complaints seriously.
- Children are safeguarded by staff who receive regular child protection training.
- There is no bullying in the home and staff use creative methods to communicate with children who cannot verbalise their thoughts.
- Behaviour is managed positively.
- There is careful vetting of visitors in the home.

The Ofsted inspection report outlined 1 requirement and 1 recommendation that must be taken to secure future improvements.

Required Action	Action Taken	Date
Make adequate arrangements for reviewing fire precautions and testing fire equipment. (Regulation 32(1)(c)(v))	Darlington Borough Council procedures have been reviewed to ensure that the homes adhere to health and safety requirements. Fire equipment has been tested.	August 2009
Recommended Action	Action Taken	Date
Ensure the siting of the telephone is convenient and private and accessible to disabled children. (NMS 9.5)	A portable telephone was purchased and sited in the lounge to enable young people to make calls in private.	October 2009

Eldon Street**Inspection Date: 31/07/09****Type of Inspection: Random****Quality Rating: Satisfactory (a sound provision)**

The report outlined the improvements since the last inspection, which included:

- Improved procedures and regular training in respect of child protection concerns.
- Complaints are managed effectively.

However, concerns were raised that there was no telephone where children can make private calls, that not all sanctions used are permissible and risk assessments do not indicate the likelihood and seriousness (ie high/medium/low).

The strengths in the section “protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe” included:

- Children's privacy is protected and there is guidance in place for room searches.
- Children are given good information about how to complain.
- Good protocols in place for reducing the risk of bullying and safeguarding young people who go missing.
- Procedures and regular child protection training is in place.
- Staff are trained in managing safe physical interventions.
- Good risk management strategies are in place.
- Visitors are vetted and identification requested.

Concerns included:

- No telephone for children to take and receive private calls.
- Although children are consulted about how behaviour is managed and permissible sanctions are used, on some occasions non-permissible sanctions are used.
- The rating in respect of recorded risks is unclear.

There were 0 requirements and 4 recommendations arising from the inspection.

Recommended Action	Action Taken	Date
Ensure the siting of a telephone and arrangements for payment are convenient, private, practical and accessible. (NMS 9.5)	Actioned	October 2009
Ensure a copy of the local Safeguarding Children Board procedures are kept in the home. (NMS 17.2)	Ofsted have been advised that the procedures are web-based and amended regularly so it would be inadvisable for a hard copy to be kept in the home.	July 2009

Recommended Action	Action Taken	Date
	Staff have access to the procedures on the Darlington Borough Council Intranet and additionally have a paper copy of a procedure containing guidance specific for residential workers.	
Ensure there is a clear policy that sets out the disciplinary measures permitted in the home. (NMS 22.2)	The procedure was in place. However, amendments have been made to add an additional appropriate sanction.	August 2009
Ensure the process of identifying hazards to safety or welfare of children estimates their seriousness and likelihood.	Risk assessments have been improved by adding the seriousness and likelihood of a hazard.	August 2009

Gilling Crescent

Inspection Date: 04/09/09

Type of Inspection: Key

Quality Rating: Satisfactory (overall provision is sound)

The report outlined improvements since the last inspection which included:

- Child protection procedures provide clear guidance to staff.
- Duty rotas include hours worked by staff.
- Staff training has improved.
- Placement and health care plans have improved.

However, concerns were raised that young people did not have access to a telephone to make and receive phone calls and there was some statutory training outstanding.

The inspection judged that the provision in "helping children to be healthy" was satisfactory.

Strengths included:

- Children provided with nutritious, tasty meals.
- Children help plan menus.
- Good health care plan in place.
- Children receive good support and advice about health promotion.
- There is a valid first aider on duty at any time.

No concerns recorded.

The inspection judged that the provision "protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them to stay safe" was satisfactory.

Strengths included:

- Staff are aware of confidentiality.
- Children know how to complain and have access to advisory services.
- The home provides a zero tolerance attitude to intimidation/bullying.
- Good procedure to safeguard children who go missing and good relationship with local police.
- Behaviour is managed positively.
- Risk assessments show that strategies are in place to reduce risk.

Concerns included:

- The home's log contains private and confidential information about children that should be recorded in their case file.
- There is no telephone that children can access in private.
- Where issues have been raised by children via complaints procedures that could be a child protection matter, they have not been subject to child protection procedures.

- Single cover means staff cannot always carry out local searches or pick up a child who may be missing from the home.

The inspection judged that the provision “helping children to make a positive contribution” was good.

Strengths included:

- Placement plans show children's assessed needs and are monitored.
- Written progress reports are in place that inform review outcomes.
- Family contact is facilitated and enabled.
- New admissions are made welcome and children are given good information about the home's expectations.
- Children feel they are consulted and listened to.
- Consultation with parents takes place.

No concerns recorded.

The inspection judged that the provision “achieving economic wellbeing” was satisfactory.

Strengths included:

- Children feel supported in learning independence skills.
- The Leaving Care Team work with staff and children to provide good outcomes.
- The home is generally decorated and furnished to a good standard.
- Lounge/dining area is homely.
- Children are happy with bedrooms.

Concerns included:

- Paintwork in the home is marked and some of the carpets are stained.

The inspection judged that the “organisation” is satisfactory.

Strengths included:

- The Statement of Purpose gives clear advice about the home's expectations.
- 80% of staff are qualified to NVQ Level 3 in 'Caring for Children and Young People'.
- Parents are consulted about the home's operation.
- Case files are stored securely.
- Equality and diversity is promoted.

Concerns:

- The home is not always adequately staffed. Single cover means some aspects of care are affected, ie staff cannot carry out a search when young people are missing and there have been occasions when single person restraints have taken place.

There were 4 requirements as a result of the inspection.

Required Action	Action Taken	Date
Ensure that children are provided at all reasonable times with a telephone on which to make and receive calls in private (Regulation 15(4)(a))	Actioned	October 2009
Promote the prompt referral to the local authority of any allegation of abuse or neglect affecting the children accommodated at the home and ensure written records are kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect and of the action taken in response. (Regulation 16(2)(b) and (d))	Improvements have been made to the Register of Safeguarding Issues to provide sufficient space to record in more detail/depth. Discuss concerns in team meeting	October 2009
Ensure any restriction other than one imposed by a court is not used as a disciplinary measure. (Regulation 16(2)(b) and (d))	Staff advised that restricted use of the telephone is not to be used as a disciplinary measure.	October 2009
Ensure there is at all times a sufficient number of suitably qualified persons working in the home. (Regulation 25(1))	Staffing levels have been increased, however there remains only one member of staff after 11pm. After 11 pm the police would be contacted and asked to search for young people missing from the home. Single restraint is only carried out as a last resort and if deemed necessary to protect the young people.	

Dunrobin Close**Inspection Date: 04/12/09****Type of Inspection: Key****Quality Rating: Satisfactory (a sound provision)**

The report outlined improvements since the last inspection including:

- A telephone has been installed so children can make and receive calls in private.
- Adequate staffing is in place to meet the needs of children.
- Complaints are managed appropriately.
- Countering bullying measures ensure children feel safe.

Concerns included:

- Not all staff receive regular supervision.

The inspection judged that the provision for "helping children to be healthy" was satisfactory.

Strengths included:

- Meals are social occasions.
- Children's health needs are met.
- Parental consent in place for administration of household medicines.
- All staff trained in first aid.

Concerns included:

- Health care plans do not always reflect all known needs.
- Consent form for administration of household medicines does not explain why medicines can be given to children.

The inspection judged that the provision for "protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe" was satisfactory.

Strengths included:

- Children's privacy is respected.
- Children have access to a telephone to make and receive private calls.
- Children know how to complain and access advisory service.
- Countering bullying measures are in place.
- Procedures are in place to safeguard children and regular training is provided.
- Staff have good relationships with local police.
- Children's behaviour is managed positively.
- Health and safety audits are undertaken.

Concerns included:

- Records of child protection referrals were incomplete.
- Young people not always seen by independent person when returning from unauthorised absence.

The inspection judged that the provision for helping children “achieve well and enjoy what they do” as good.

Strengths included:

- Children are given individual support. External specialist services are involved if additional support is necessary.
- Communication between home and schools is good and educational outcomes are promoted.

There were no concerns.

The inspection judged the provision helping children “make a positive contribution” as good.

Strengths included:

- Placement Plans in place and cross referenced with Pathway Plans for older children.
- Children happy with contact arrangements – feedback from visits is monitored by staff.
- Children are consulted about their care and key worker sessions are held regularly.
- Parents are consulted and encouraged to feedback their views.

Concerns included:

- Poor evaluation of each plan to show effectiveness of the plan..

The inspection judged the provision “achieving economic wellbeing” as good.

Strengths included:

- Pathway plans show assessed needs.
- Independent living programmes in place in the home.
- Children enjoy homely accommodation.

No concerns recorded.

The inspection judged the “organisation” of the home as satisfactory.

Strengths included:

- The Statement of Purpose includes the required information and the Children's Guide advises children how to access an advocate.
- 80% of staff have achieved NVQ Level 3 Caring for Children & Young people.
- Staffing levels are adequate.
- Systems are in place to monitor performance.
- Regulation 33 Visits take place every month.
- Records are stored securely.
- Promotion of quality and dress is provided.

No concerns recorded:

There were 4 requirements as a result of the inspection

Required Action	Action Taken	Date
Maintain in the children's home the records specified in Schedule 4 and ensure they are kept up to date (Regulation 29 (i))	These records are available via Human Resources Division in personnel files. However, the information is currently being collated and will be available in The Children's Homes	By February 2010
Ensure written records are kept of any allegation of abuse or neglect and of the action taken in response (Regulation 16(2) (d)).	The manager acknowledged that her error of judgement meant that although reported and managed appropriately an allegation was not recorded and reported to Ofsted in line with requirements.	
Notify what delay the persons indicated in Schedule 5 any event listed in the same schedule (Regulation 30 (i)).		
Ensure the person undertaking Regulation 33 Visits inspect the records for complaints (Regulation 33 (4) (b)).	All officers who undertake Regulation 33 Visits have received an update of the requirements.	January 2010

The main issues highlighted throughout 2009 were:

- Availability of a telephone so young people can make calls in private.
- Child Protection Procedures – ensuring allegations are reported and recorded correctly.

- Availability of staff records.
- Concerns relating to single cover staffing (eg searching for young people when they are absent and single cover restraint).

The Children's Residential Management Team are aware of their responsibilities in relation to Ofsted requirements, and continue to work towards improved ratings in all the homes.

Managers and staff are keen to comply with the inspection process, despite some recognised obstacles, including:

- Inconsistencies amongst Ofsted Inspectors in their interpretation of the Minimum Standards which has resulted in standards met but six months later not met.
- Some standards are outdated but homes continue to be inspected against these standards.
- Excessive paperwork/ recording/ evaluation to be completed.
- Inspectors becoming embroiled in care planning.

Conclusion:

Focused work has been carried out with managers and staff in the Children's Homes to address each of the identified concerns. Links are in place with other Local Authorities for sharing good practice around the inspection process.

Strategic work is currently taking place regarding the long-term future plans for each home.

Jean Langthorne
Team Manager
Children's Residential Services