

Aspire - Croekwood School Care Accommodation Service

Carlung Estate
West Kilbride
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Unannounced

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Aspire Scotland Ltd

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About the service

This service was registered with the Care Inspectorate in January 2019.

Croekwood is provided by Aspire Scotland who are part of the Priory's specialist Education Service. Croekwood School Care Accommodation Service is a registered home for up to five young people aged 8 to 18 who have complex needs.

The service is situated in a rural location in North Ayrshire; not far from one of the region's small towns.

The house is spacious with five bedrooms, two large lounges and a kitchen/dining room. The service sits within its own grounds and has outbuildings containing chickens which the young people care for.

The service website further states that the '... staff team at Croekwood place a strong emphasis on engaging with children and young people and having them identify their living situation as no ordinary care setting'. The service claims to '...focus on possibilities rather than limitations in order to foster empowerment for our children and young people'.

It should be noted that this inspection took place during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions and therefore followed a revised procedure for conducting inspections in these circumstances.

What people told us

At the time of the inspection the service was providing support to three young people. Two of the young people declined to speak with us and one spoke with us on several occasions.

We were able to observe staff interacting with two of the young people and heard of the support offered to the third young person.

The young person who agreed to speak with us expressed many positives about the staff and the service. The one area they said they would change would be the colour of the wooden floor.

They described liking their room, although stating they would prefer to be upstairs. They understood the reason they were downstairs at this time. The young person felt that they were listened to and shown respect by staff. They also acknowledged that staff kept them safe and were 'there for them'.

During the inspection we were also able to speak with social workers to the young people, who also gave positive views of the service, the staff and the manager. They described good, timely and informative communications from staff. They also commented on the environment describing it as homely and quiet with the rural setting having a calming effect.

How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?

5 - Very Good

We found that overall the service was performing at a very good level for this key question. We were able to identify major strengths demonstrated by the service in supporting positive outcomes for people.

There were very few areas for improvement. Those that did exist we considered to have minimal adverse impact on people's experiences and outcomes.

Whilst not all young people chose to speak with us, our observation of staff's interaction with young people throughout the inspection indicated that staff had worked well at building positive nurturing relationships with the young people. Young people that spoke with us gave very positive views of the staff group and stated how they trusted staff and knew they could turn to them for advice, guidance and support.

We noted that young people relatively new to the service were seeking out staff to engage in activities and to spend time with them in the garden or joining in activities in the kitchen. We saw that these interactions involved care and support but also fun and laughter. Staff were seen to be motivating young people to participate in daily activities and encouraging further life enhancing opportunities where the opportunity arose.

Young people were also confident in approaching staff and making suggestions for how they would like to spend some time with them. Staff showed respect for young people in responding positively to their wishes, where appropriate, and in taking time to explain and look to agree alternatives where these were needed.

We were aware of a situation some months previously, where the staff and manager had taken prompt action when it was recognised that one member of staff had not met the standards of care expected.

We further noted staff had modelled empathy and respect for others in their approach to memories of former residents.

Young people's opinions and preferences were sought through a variety of means; such as in private direct discussion with staff, in meetings with staff and young people as a group and through the services complaints processes. In gathering these views, staff also aimed to ensure young people's rights were respected. Where young people's personal decisions had the potential to impact directly upon their own wellbeing, staff offered acceptance and guidance whilst informing young people of where they thought others would be less tolerant.

Furthermore, staff were taking direct action in advocating for the young people, for example, where young people were experiencing barriers to their education.

Young people were exercising choice in all aspects of daily life. In meal planners, room décor, participating in activities and hobbies of interest, in education and health; we saw young people were exercising their preferences in the significant areas of their lives. We saw evidence of young people learning about camping with tents in neighbouring fields, visiting local go-kart tracks, baking and activities such as arts, crafts and food planning and experiencing new activities. Short breaks were also planned, such as visits to Blackpool.

Similarly, staff ensured young people remained in contact with family, friends and those people important to them, where appropriate.

Young people's educational needs were addressed through staff proactively supporting attendance at education establishments. Where there were barriers to education, the staff acted in support of young people continuing to access learning materials. Some young people had positive records of attendance and were achieving good outcomes from school. Where young people had decided not to pursue particular further education options, staff continued to promote further education through considering alternative options.

Young people were being kept safe and given appropriate guidance and advice in relation to internet use and social media. Where particular risks had been identified, staff took appropriate action to safeguard young people. This was done both through advice and through technological safeguards. Staff were also alert to any child protection considerations and demonstrated good knowledge of the service child protection procedures.

Some young people's outcomes were not so clear to identify. However, on closer inspection, and in discussion with social workers and other professionals, it was clear that this was due to the current approach of the young person to their care plan. The staff had appropriate strategies in place to attempt to have the young person engage and also reviewed these arrangements regularly. Some of the strategies the staff were employing were beginning to prove effective.

In discussions with young people, we learned that the staff's response to challenging behaviour had been appropriate and correctly implemented. Furthermore, through discussions with young people the incidence of challenging behaviour was decreasing.

Young people's health needs were addressed through primary health care and specialist health services where required. Staff supported young people to attend appointments to address their health needs. Where there was any resistance to these appointments, the staff ensured young people were fully informed of the benefits of attendance and any continuing appropriate advice.

The service had provided chickens for the young people to care for and this was proving to be an area of interest for the majority of the young people. The service had taken this further by successfully hatching ducks also. Young people were taking an active interest in the wellbeing of these animals and this promoted nurturing and empathetic approaches from young people.

The service staff promoted a healthy and balanced diet, with young people playing an active role in menu planning, budgeting and preparing meals for themselves and others. This was further promoted through shared meal times and arrangements for those young people comfortable with participating in these.

We inspected the records for both a complaint and for a medication error and found that the service manager had responded appropriately to both, with proportionate and effective actions taken.

How good is our leadership?

5 - Very Good

We found that overall, the service was performing at a very good level for this key question. We were able to identify major strengths demonstrated by the service in supporting positive outcomes for people. There were very few areas for improvement. Those that did exist, we considered to have minimal adverse impact on people's experiences and outcomes.

The service manager had implemented robust evaluation processes to look at young people's outcomes and experiences. Various methods for gathering the views of staff, young people and stakeholders were regularly employed to evaluate the quality of the care and support the young people were receiving. These processes had successfully identified some areas for improvement and the manager and external management had responded to these effectively.

Through young people's meetings, some elements of the environment were addressed - such as decor. Similarly, through staff observations, team meetings and supervision discussions, staff practice was scrutinised and any improvement required addressed.

Through these processes and responses, we could see that young people's views and their wellbeing were central to the ethos of the service.

The service improvement plan was developed following regular quality assurance visits and suggestions by external managers, in addition to staff's evaluations and suggestions. Staff were also given responsibility for particular areas of the service to audit and this was done on a rotational basis to promote broad awareness of the service.

Events such as a service development day and a service open day had also included feedback gathering from stakeholders and actions from this feedback incorporated in to the service development plan. This had led to positive actions for young people in respect of keeping pets. for example.

These audits and evaluations were benchmarked against the Health and Social Care Standards and the Care Inspectorate quality framework for service improvement.

Young people confirmed that the external managers were regular visitors to the service and spoke with them to gather their views on these occasions. We acknowledge that the frequency of these visits in person had been affected by the lockdown considerations, however we also heard how support for the manager continued through online contact.

How good is our staff team?

5 - Very Good

We found that overall the service was performing at a very good level for this key question. We were able to identify major strengths demonstrated by the service in supporting positive outcomes for people. There were very few areas for improvement. Those that did exist we considered to have minimal adverse impact on people's experiences and outcomes.

The service staffing levels were assessed with consideration to the staff rota system and matching of the staff skills and experience to the young people's needs. This process assured that young people had a good understanding of which staff were going to be supporting them and at which times. Furthermore, consistency was achieved for the young people and staff in enabling the building of positive relationships. Through this process, additional staffing level needs were identified, thereby ensuring all young people had the support required for their individual needs and activities.

A staff group with various backgrounds and transferrable skills had been recruited. Staff had background experience in areas such as teaching and experience of working with autism.

The manager acknowledged that at times, achieving a balanced skills mix could be difficult; however they did review the staff groups to adjust for this.

In discussions with staff they reported very good morale within a positive and supportive team.

Communication between shifts and staff teams was said to be very good, with all staff contributing to appropriate and safe information sharing. Similar to the young people's comments, staff reported that the service felt much more like a home than a residential care house.

The service's staff recruitment process followed Safer Recruitment principles. To ensure the safety of young people, background checks were completed and skills and experience checked through competency based interview and employer references. Young people were offered the opportunity to be involved in the staff recruitment process. However whilst they contributed interview questions, they were not further involved.

The staff were provided with an induction to the service which included familiarity with the service model of care and with the services methods of recording. Training was also provided in essential areas such as child protection procedures, the behaviour management system and theories of children and young people's development; attachment and trauma. Further training was available to staff. This had understandably been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, however staff were maintaining training through online courses and participatory courses were scheduled to resume when possible.

Through staff attendance at team meetings, reflective discussions were enabled which allowed for the further development of effective strategies in nurturing positive relationships and addressing risks to young people.

Supervision of staff was conducted regularly and involved reflective discussions on young people's care, discussions regarding training and professional development, staff/service issues and other service development areas. Less experienced staff received supervision on a more frequent basis to ensure they were supported in their practice.

One area we identified as less strong, was that of training in trauma informed practice. Some of the staff group did not have as clear an understanding of this topic as we would expect.

However, this gap in training for some had been identified by the manager prior to the inspection and training had been accessed for staff to attend in the near future.

How good is our setting?

5 - Very Good

We found that overall the service was performing at a very good level for this key question. We were able to identify major strengths demonstrated by the service in supporting positive outcomes for people. There were very few areas for improvement. Those that did exist we considered to have minimal adverse impact on people's experiences and outcomes.

Whilst the service is located in a rural site, the staff group ensured that young people had full support to meet with family, friends and those people important to them, where appropriate.

The layout of the building allowed for any such family visits to the house to be conducted in private spaces.

The house provided space for combined activities, such as board games, in addition to offering private quiet space for solitary pursuits such as studying. Exterior space was very good also, with plans for outhouses being developed into various facilities of the young people's choosing.

The house grounds also offered external space to relax or to participate in outdoor games.

The young people had access to television, social media and WiFi for online resources and these were safely monitored with young people also being given appropriate advice and guidance on their use. This also allowed young people to safely communicate with friends and family in addition to providing on line resources for leisure and education.

The young people in the service benefited from visits to local resources. Examples of these were visits to equestrian centres and resources to develop young people's interests; local facilities with historic interest; and leisure activities such as go-karting.

The young people had also made positive contact with nearby neighbours who were helpful, respectful and nurturing to the young people encouraging an awareness of local agriculture and market farming activities.

How well is our care and support planned?

5 - Very Good

We found that overall the service was performing at a very good level for this key question. We were able to identify major strengths demonstrated by the service in supporting positive outcomes for people. There were very few areas for improvement. Those that did exist we considered to have minimal adverse impact on people's experiences and outcomes.

Most young people were seeing positive outcomes from the implementation of high quality, SMART, care planning strategies. They were attending their education establishments and reports indicated they were achieving well. Young people enjoyed various activities of their choosing and some at the staff's suggestions and were therefore experiencing new activities and gathering new interests.

Their health needs were being fully met, both physically and emotionally and contact with those people of significance and importance to them was being maintained. These plans were being reviewed regularly - either in line with or exceeding statutory timelines - through multi agency assessment and discussion of the progress of the plan.

Where this was not the case we were able to confirm that this was due to the young persons reluctance to engage with the social work plan and their wish to look at their own alternatives.

Staff worked hard to continue to engage with young people for whom this was the case and to continue to promote their views. Staff were having success in continuing to maintain positive relationships and to engage young people in activities beneficial to their well being whilst looking to take opportunities to further develop the young people's care plan.

Complaints

There have been no complaints upheld since the last inspection. Details of any older upheld complaints are published at www.careinspectorate.com.

Detailed evaluations

How well do we support children and young people's wellbeing?

5 - Very Good

1.1 Children and young people experience compassion, dignity and respect	5 - Very Good
1.2 Children and young people get the most out of life	5 - Very Good
1.3 Children and young people's health benefits from their care and support they experience	5 - Very Good

How good is our leadership?	5 - Very Good
2.2 Quality assurance and improvement are led well	5 - Very Good

How good is our staff team?	5 - Very Good
3.3 Staffing levels are right and meet children and young people's needs, with staff working well together	5 - Very Good

How good is our setting?	5 - Very Good
4.3 Children and young people can be connected with and involved in the wider community	5 - Very Good

How well is our care planned?	5 - Very Good
5.1 Assessment and care planning reflects children and young people's needs and wishes	5 - Very Good

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