

Regulation 44 report for corporate parenting group summarising the last 3 months visits

The Children's Homes Regulations and Quality Standards April 2015 changed what was previously Regulation 33 to Regulation 44 stipulating that the external monitoring of children's homes should be undertaken by an 'independent person' whose role is to reach a rigorous and impartial assessment of the home's arrangements for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the children in the home's care.

Visits by the independent person must take place at least once a month and may be unannounced.

The independent person, when carrying out a visit, must interview children and young people accommodated in the home, parents or relatives, staff from the home and relevant professionals. They are also required to inspect the premises and records (including children's case records) of the children's home. The independent person must produce a report about each visit (referred to in this regulation as "the independent person's report" in which they may recommend actions that the registered person may take in relation to the children's home and timescales within which the registered person must consider whether or not to take those actions).

Blackburn with Darwen Arrangements for Regulation 44

When Regulation 44 first came into force the children's residential network of homes entered into a reciprocal arrangement with Bolton's network. The homes managers and two service leaders visited Bolton's homes and Bolton's homes managers became visitors for Blackburn with Darwen's homes.

Initially this worked well. A constructive relationship developed between the two networks and there was much to be learned from each other. At the time Bolton had four 'outstanding' homes including two for children with disabilities and it was useful for managers to look at their systems, processes and ideas about not only providing excellent care for looked after children but also how they recorded and evidenced what they were doing. The 'voice of the child' was particularly strong in case Bolton's records and we have now introduced some of their ideas into our case recording. Bolton managers also felt that there was some excellent learning as a result of the arrangement.

In November 2015 there was a North West event that included a presentation by OFSTED about Regulation 44. It was made very clear at this event that OFSTED had 'raised the bar' regarding the quality of Regulation 44 Reports and required a thorough evaluation of the home similar to a 'mini inspection' and did not want visitors to treat it as a tick box exercise as perhaps it once was for many homes. During our last two inspections the quality of the reports produced by Bolton for our homes was criticised. Despite numerous workshops to address the issues raised the quality improved slightly but not sufficiently to satisfy OFSTED.

The arrangement with Bolton consequently ended in April 2016 and a small pool of Regulation 44 Visitors appointed. Employing visitors is permitted as long as the sole purpose of their employment is to perform the Independent Visitor function. The people appointed all have experience of working in residential homes and have excellent credentials to carry out this important role. They have been allocated their own homes and will visit them monthly for at least 12 months when they will be rotated. The two mainstream homes have been allocated a visitor who has previously been employed at a senior level in Children's Services.

A new report template has been created to ensure that reports cover the quality standards in depth. The visitor consequently evaluates the quality of the leadership and management of the homes, whether the home provides a safe and protective environment, the quality of the care afforded to the children and young people living in the home and whether young people 's experience is positive and they make tangible progress.

A workshop was held in April to set out the expectations and discuss potential issues.

Visitors completed their first reports in May and a follow up workshop is scheduled to take place in August when each one will have completed three visits and three reports. The homes managers will also participate in the workshop to share perspectives, ideas and challenges. The quality of the reports has improved significantly and there has already been some good learning for the teams. The approach will inevitably drive and improve practice in our children's homes.

To date each report author has indicated their satisfaction that each of our four homes is able to safeguard and promote the well - being of the children who either live or receive short breaks in them.

Cherry Tree and Whalley New Rd have the same independent visitor who is very thorough in his approach spending between 5 and 7 hours on each visit. He has spent long periods talking to young people and staff, parents , social workers and other professionals. He has explored a number of issues in some depth and during the last visit in June he considered how well the statement of purpose is implemented in each of the two homes.

He found many positives at both homes including:

- That there is a high level of respect between young people and staff and that the staff are very supportive of each other.
- That a young man with complex needs presenting a high level of risk is managed well through multi agency involvement and cross agency cooperation which offers some reduction in the level of risk.
- He commented on the great lengths that staff at both homes go to in order to mitigate against the risk to safety in particular the management of missing from home.
- He observed some good practice in the management of bullying issues .
- He commented on the close and positive relationships between staff and young people and the good communication between them.
- He found staff to be knowledgeable about the educational performance of young people at Cherry Tree in particular.
- He comments on his observations of staff dealing with challenging behaviour at Whalley New Rd, working together in a firm, calm and reassuring way.

Issues of concern that he discusses include :

- The high risk problems of one young person are not diminishing and he continues to be on a 'self – destruct cycle'.

- The educational performance of children is mixed despite good attendance of the majority including the most challenging of the group.
- The issues relating to the extreme behaviours of one of the children resulting in assaults on staff and a number of restraints. He commented that therapeutic approaches take time and have to be delivered consistently rather than seen as a 'soft option' which is the 'dissent' referred to earlier by one or two staff.
- There have been a number of incidents relating to the administration of medication which have been investigated.
- Although staff manage missing from home episodes well he commented on the lack of return home interviews, later found to be a recording issue. Whalley New Rd in particular has experienced a turbulent period with 3 young people regularly missing from home and the visitor found that staff take effective action consistent with regulations and manage conflicting demands well.
- The visitor commented on the need to manage admissions more robustly taking greater account of matching considerations and made a recommendation about this issue.

The independent visitor made a number of recommendations relating to the issues outlined above in the May and June reports which are being followed up by managers of the homes. Both managers have indicated that they are pleased by the improved quality of the reports and feel that they will drive and improve practice in future.

The two short breaks units are visited independently by two different visitors. The reports for the Adolescent Support Unit are very positive and there are very few recommendations. Those that have been made are for minor recording issues which the manager responded to immediately. The visitor spoke to young people, staff, parents and social workers as part of the Reg 44 exercise and received universally positive feedback. Some of the young people consulted are part of a group of young people in foster placements who are being supported in order to stabilise their fragile placements. Their carers were also consulted., one indicated 'all the staff without exception have been really good with me and C, and everything they have promised has happened. Everything they have offered they have done'. C also commented positively but made a negative comment about ASU having no Wi Fi. This is in the process of being addressed.

The reports for Appletrees are also very positive. The independent visitor highlights the excellent participation work which is well documented and demonstrated with photographic evidence all around the building. She comments on the communication skills and methods used to ensure that young people who are non-verbal are able to express their views, wishes and feelings and participate in decision making about their care and in planning activities for their stays. Young people recently indicated that they wanted to see sharks and were taken to Sea World on the train, a day trip that they thoroughly enjoyed. Other trips that have been organised as a result of suggestions include one to Hothersall Lodge where young people in wheelchairs are able to rock climb and enjoy the zip wire like able bodied young people.

Staff are able to meet a very diverse range of needs relating to complex health difficulties and disability and also meet diverse cultural needs. Parents, young people, staff and professionals are consulted for the report and feedback is very positive. The report comments on the good partnership working between Appletrees and the Children with Disabilities Service and the rapport

between staff . She observed young people to be contented and happy during their stays and their needs well met.

‘ staff interact well with each other, they are motivated and child focussed’.

Recommendations are very few and minor and have been followed up by the manager.

Overall, the new arrangements are working well and are becoming embedded into the monthly routine of each home. The quality of feedback provided to the homes in the comprehensive reports produced is valued by the managers and acted upon to improve practice.

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Service Leader Placements

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