

Statement from Owlswick School and Home

Our response to the Ofsted Inspection Report - 3/4th October 2018

Owlswick School and Home request that this statement is read in conjunction with the Ofsted Report made on our children's home following the inspection visit in October 2018.

It is important for us to state that Owlswick has always welcomed and will continue to welcome external inspection and monitoring of our home. We embrace the Ofsted process as an opportunity to receive feedback on our care provision and highlight areas for continual improvement. We are aware that the Ofsted inspection and monthly Regulation 44 monitoring is a critical part of ensuring we are meeting the Children's Home regulations. We are committed to the safeguarding of the young people in our care and keeping them safe and nurtured.

It is our opinion that the recent Inspection and subsequent Report does not truly represent our children's home. We believe therefore, that it is vitally important to provide any current or prospective referring Agency, parent or carer with a balanced perspective of our home. Whilst we agree with some of the areas noted for improvement, we continue to refute others in the strongest terms and it is these we comment on below.

The contents and judgements of the Report have been challenged through the Ofsted complaints process. Disappointingly our complaint was not upheld. After much discussion and soul searching, our senior management team have chosen not to pursue this very lengthy and time consuming complaints process, but instead compose this accompanying statement and continue to focus our time and energy on providing the high quality of care that our young people deserve and receive.

Response to inspection report:

- Statement regarding the existence of a 'bullying culture in the home'

The Inspection Report states that 'there is a culture of bullying in the home' which has not been fully eradicated.

We strongly refute this. Owlswick does not have a culture of bullying and we assess this judgement to be inflammatory and damaging to our reputation. It is not representative of the environment of our home, neither does it reflect the experience of our young people.

Since receiving this judgement, we have appropriately discussed the issue of bullying with our young people to obtain their views. They are perplexed and confused and do not understand why this judgement has been made. They have been very clear that they do not believe this to be true.

The Regulation 44, Independent Monitoring visit, has documented consistently any instances of low level bullying (to be expected in a large environment where a group of children live together). Their reports evidence how staff have always acted swiftly and appropriately to ensure these occurrences are dealt with and resolved.

Apart from one complaint (which was dealt with to the satisfaction of all involved) we have not received complaints or concerns about bullying from external professionals or parents/carers.

Senior Managers and staff are at a loss to understand how this judgement has been formulated in these damaging and harmful terms.

We therefore wish to reassure any parents/carers or commissioning Agency that bullying at Owlswick is not an issue. Our staff are proactive and skilled in creating and maintaining a safe environment where young people feel safe and protected.

Further, we would suggest these judgements are based on a short period of disruption when a new referral's needs proved beyond Owlswick's ability to support. This placement was terminated with the agreement of the young person's placing authority and they moved to a provision that was able to offer 2:1 staff ratio. It is also important to state that although our young people found this period of 12 weeks challenging, they were at all times kept safe from any bullying that did occur.

- Statements regarding 'Children being kept safe in the home' and 'not being effectively protected from harm by reducing risks' and 'Despite shortfalls no children have come to serious risk'

Owlswick strongly contests these judgements. Children are consistently kept safe from risk of harm and effective action is immediately taken if there is concern about a child's welfare. We also refute assumptions that suggest any child could be at serious risk in our provision.

The safeguarding of young people in our care is our most important priority. All of our staff are trained in safeguarding and child protection and work hard to develop positive relationships with the young people. (we know our young people extremely well.) Our young people are guided and taught the importance of keeping safe, specifically to lessen the potential of them placing themselves in risk situations, particularly those not known to Owlswick.

We continually seek to reduce and mitigate against any risks to a young person and do so by active risk assessments and safety plans. Timely and effective action is taken whenever there is a serious concern regarding a child's welfare and all involved with their care are informed and consulted with.

We therefore do not agree with the Inspectors' judgements of our working practices in this area and believe these to be related to isolated incidents rather than our practice as a whole.

A recent local news programme posited that one child per week goes missing from a care home in West Sussex alone. We are proud to say that it is very rare for a young person on placement at Owlswick to go missing. This is in part due to the positive and trusting relationships built up between our care staff and young people, and also because staff are fully briefed and acutely aware of issues in a young person's world that may influence their decision to go missing.

We are proud to say that young people remain in their placements for long periods of time (often years) and are sad to leave. This can be directly attributed to Owlswick providing a home where they feel safe, know they are listened to, nurtured and understood.

We regularly receive positive feedback from external Agencies about Owlswick achieving very good outcomes for young people. Recently a visiting IRO stated 'I cannot praise Owlswick enough for the care and support given to this young man during very difficult and challenging times'. We are therefore confident in the safe place we create for young people who have experienced significant trauma in their lives. All of our staff are trained to support each young person understand the impact past traumas have on their present behaviours.

Further, we also enable young people to take risks in a safe and planned manner in order to facilitate personal growth and development into young adulthood.

- Statement declaring 'the quality of provision has declined in recent months as acknowledged by the senior managers'

Owlswick strongly refutes that the quality of provision at the home has declined in recent months and that this was acknowledged by senior managers.

As stated previously, there was a short period of time when the home experienced disruption. We reiterate this was due to the issues caused by one young person whose referral notes did not include a full description of past traumas and resulting behaviours. As a team, despite many strategies, we struggled to engage with this young person and it became clear that his complex needs would be best met by another provision. This situation was discussed with the Inspectors and the impact on the home acknowledged. However this period did not result in the quality of our provision declining.

We consider that if this judgement is read out of context or without prior knowledge of Owlswick, an assumption could be made that the home has not been fit for purpose to provide a care service to vulnerable young people. We assert in the strongest possible terms that this is not the case.

We wish to assure anyone who is considering Owlswick as placement for a young person or has placed young people here in the past that this judgement is not a true reflection of our provision. We emphasise that this aspect of the Report does not accurately reflect the quality of care received by our young people both now and throughout any period of disruption.

We are not a declining provision and again assert that this judgement is damaging to the reputation and status of Owlswick as a home.

Text to accompany the report:

Sue we need a couple off lines for the website, for emails etc when we have the report and statement side by side.

Owlswick School and Home has written a statement in response to the Ofsted Report dated 3-4th October. We do not agree with the interpretation of the Ofsted inspectors view of our children's home and have asserted our right to respond to the judgements in a public manner.

We respectfully request that any person who is reading the current Report also reads the statement from the home regarding and our response to the statements and judgements made within.

We actively welcome visits in order for any external person/s to make their own judgements on our home. We are very proud of Owlswick and the achievements made by our young people and our experienced staff team and want these to be shared with visitors.

Please do not hesitate to contact us to discuss any queries or concerns you may have.