

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC000820
Inspection date	17/07/2012
Inspector	Nicholas Murphy
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	15/12/2011
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home accommodates up to four young people who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is operated by a private company.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service of exceptional quality that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service of high quality that exceeds minimum requirements

Adequate: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

The home specialises in meeting the needs of young people who are particularly vulnerable or who may pose risks to others. Consequently, the home's routines are tightly structured and some young people are subject to high levels of supervision, depending on their individual circumstances. However, this does not detract from the quality of care which the staff provide. One young person said, 'It's good here. Staff treat you like family'.

Young people have made very good progress since coming to the home. A social worker said, 'I have seen a dramatic improvement in X's behaviour and attention span.' This has been as a direct result of the consistent support and encouragement given by staff, in line with each young person's individually tailored care plan. Boundaries and expectations within the home are set by the manager and staff, and young people abide by these. This not only promotes an atmosphere which is calm and constructive but also is very effective in keeping young people safe. There is no bullying and the considerable potential for some young people to cause harm to others is very effectively controlled.

Management arrangements within the home are good and ensure that the support and training provided to staff is of a high quality. This in turn means that young people receive the best possible service to ensure that they develop and mature successfully into adulthood.

There are some shortfalls in the provision. The recording of restraints is inadequate. The arrangements for young people to use a telephone are unsatisfactory. The home does not keep its own record of staff recruitment checks. Some written information

relating to young people going missing does not meet requirements. However, the impact of these shortcomings does not significantly diminish the overall quality of the service provided to young people.

Areas for improvement

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 Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The registered person(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Reg.	Requirement	Due date
17B (2001)	ensure that within 24 hours of the use of any measure of restraint in a children's home, a written record is made in a volume kept for the purpose, specifically that the nature of the restraint is described in plain language and that there is confirmation that both the young person and the person using the measure have been spoken to about the use of the measure (Regulation 17B(3)(c))	17/08/2012
15 (2001)	provide access for young people at all reasonable times with the use of a telephone on which to make and receive telephone calls in private without reference to staff (Regulation 15(4)(a))	31/08/2012
26 (2001)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available on all staff, specifically that the home keeps a summary of the vetting and recruitment checks for staff. (Regulation 26(3)(d)(Schedule 2))	17/08/2012

Recommendations

To improve the quality and standards of care further the service should take account of the following recommendation(s):

- ensure that written records kept by the home when a child goes missing detail all the necessary information, specifically the action taken by staff, any reasons given by the child for running away, and any action taken in the light of those reasons (NMS 5.10)
- ensure that the care and support provided to children minimises the risk that they will go missing, specifically that risk assessments and other information in relation each child going missing describe warning signs, triggers, possible places the child might run to, and at what point to report to police. (NMS 5.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

Young people have made steady progress in their ability to make and sustain constructive social relationships, in some cases significantly so. Young people are able to understand their family history and circumstances, and the impact this has had on how they currently feel. This developing insight has enabled young people to have better control over their emotions and how these affect their behaviour. One young person observed, 'I'm definitely making progress, I'm definitely more mature than I was before.' Another commented, 'I used to be a pain, but I'm not so much now.' Some young people have been involved in offending behaviour. However, the intervention of other agencies, in collaboration with staff, has succeeded in reducing this. For example, a specific treatment programme has helped one young person to learn better ways of coping with anger.

Young people are in very good health. Some young people come to the home with a smoking habit, but the support given by staff and the routines of the home are effective in helping them to cease. None of the young people use alcohol or substances.

Young people have excellent attendance at school. They follow educational programmes which are closely tailored to their aptitudes and ensure that they are able to make the most of their abilities. Some young people have taken GCSEs, they are predicted to do well, and others are progressing to college. One young person, as part of their education in citizenship, has been able to go on a sea voyage with the Tall Ships Trust. This provided an experience of a lifetime which they will never forget.

Young people take pride in the home, not only in their own individual space but also the communal areas. They contribute to household tasks and this forms an important part of their preparation for independence. In this way they acquire competence in life skills which the staff assess and help to improve if necessary. Older young people receive formal accreditation in this area, which provides tangible evidence of their progress and a lasting record of their achievements. Young people also have an awareness of the needs of others in society less fortunate than themselves. For example, one young person recently took part in the Sport Relief Mile, not only enjoying the event itself but also gaining an understanding of what it represented.

Young people have contact with their families at the level set by the care plan. This ensures that they are able to keep in touch with those who are important to them and maintain their sense of identity. Where appropriate, staff supervise these arrangements in order to keep young people safe. One social worker said, 'Staff now supervise contact and because of the relationship they have with parents this enhances its quality.' In addition, young people are encouraged and supported in forming and maintaining appropriate relationships with other young people outside the home. This helps young people to learn the value of social interaction and understand that relationships with others can be fulfilling while not exposing them to risk.

Quality of care

The quality of the care is **good**.

Staff treat young people with affection and an evident concern for their welfare, happiness and safety. In turn, young people like and respect the staff, despite the odd disagreement. Young people get on well with each other, and behaviour within the home is generally extremely good.

Care plans address the assessed needs of young people. They are updated regularly according to events happening in young people's lives. Each young person has a key worker who discusses the plan in regular individual sessions. This keeps each young person involved with their plan and ensures that they understand the overall objective of their placement. For example, young people who are working towards the goal of having more personal freedom know what they need to do to achieve this and the timescales involved. Staff also enable young people to voice their opinions about other aspects of life in the home, for example the menu, or what activities they would like to do.

The home is assiduous in ensuring that the basic health needs of young people are met. Health appointments are effectively tracked to ensure that none are missed. Staff work closely with partners such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services to make sure that any emotional and psychological issues that young people have are addressed.

The home promotes the importance of education through its daily routines and structure. This ensures that young people know that missing school is simply not an option, and results in 100% school attendance. There is very effective communication between the home and schools, so that any issues within either setting can be addressed proactively and thus not develop into more serious problems.

The home has a particular strength in the range and quality of activities it is able to offer young people. This is evidenced by photographs around the home and in young people's bedrooms. The emphasis is on outdoor activities which are not only enjoyable but also provide healthy exercise and opportunities to learn skills such as navigation or horse riding. In addition, young people can access activities in the local area. These include army cadets, ice skating, Zumba, fencing, badminton, and use of a climbing wall. These are important in helping young people to remain integrated in the community and develop friendships outside the home. The home has access to a caravan and a cottage in different rural locations, and also takes young people on holiday in Europe. These opportunities widen the horizons of young people and provide an appreciation of other cultures.

The home is extremely well equipped, furnished and decorated. This quality of the physical environment complements the nurturing ethos of the home and conveys a sense of self-worth to young people. The layout of the home provides ample opportunities for young people to join in group activities or have time to themselves. However, young people do not have access to a telephone which they can use in

private without having to ask staff. This restricts the ability of young people to contact people outside the home to seek advice or help.

Safeguarding children and young people

The service is **good** at keeping children and young people safe and feeling safe.

Staff have a very good understanding of how to keep young people safe. They exercise appropriate levels of supervision to ensure that young people cannot harm each other or come to harm themselves. The degree of freedom which each young person has is carefully assessed and based on their individual needs and competences. In this way staff recognise the diversity of the group and promote the rights of each individual young person. As a result, young people feel extremely safe here. A social worker commented, 'I can't think of anything they could have done better to look after X and keep them safe from harm. The home is strict but X needs that kind of structure.'

Young people do not see bullying as a problem within the home. The odd argument between young people is effectively handled by staff and nipped in the bud. This ensures that such tiffs do not develop into more serious incidents of verbal or physical intimidation.

Staff have a good understanding of child sexual exploitation and undertake formal assessments of risk in this area for individual young people. There are few incidents of young people going missing. The home has a protocol with the local police which staff follow in the reporting and management of such incidents. This ensures that the period of time that any young person is missing is reduced to a minimum. However, the recording of missing episodes does not routinely include all the information required. For example, the young person is not always asked the reasons why they ran away. This means that staff may not become aware of issues in the home which have led to the incident. Staff have a good understanding of when young people are agitated and might be about to leave the home without permission. However, written risk assessments do not always include such information. There is also no reference to likely triggers or where the young person might go when they run away. Therefore, staff who are not familiar with the young people do not have this information and so cannot be proactive in managing such incidents.

Behaviour within the home is extremely good. Staff set boundaries which are clear, consistent and well understood by young people. This helps to ensure that young people respond well to staff and to each other. One young person said, 'You've got to keep to the rules, but it's good for me, because before I came here I had no rules.' Staff use praise to acknowledge good behaviour, both in daily living (with affectionate words and caring gestures) and written records of key worker sessions. The home also provides other incentives for particular achievements. For example, a young person who has shown particular trustworthiness may be able to buy a CD or makeup. The emphasis on positive behaviour management, and the skill of the staff in defusing potentially difficult situations, results in the use of physical restraint being rare. However, the record of restraints is not sufficiently detailed in plain language,

nor does it confirm that the young person and staff involved have been spoken to after the event. This makes it difficult for people outside the home who may need to look at the record to understand what happened, or to be confident that those involved have been properly debriefed.

The process of staff recruitment is robust. However, the manager does not keep a summary of the recruitment and vetting checks in the home. The manager therefore cannot be fully assured that only suitable people are appointed to work in the home.

Leadership and management

The leadership and management of the children's home are **good**.

The manager is highly effective in organising staff and systems within the home. This ensures that all staff work efficiently and consistently and promote the welfare of young people according to their care plans. The few complaints that young people have made relate to the behaviour of other young people. The manager has responded to each complaint thoroughly, and been clear with the young person about the action which has been taken. This has resulted in young people being satisfied with the outcome of their complaint and having confidence in the system as a whole.

Social workers and parents are clear about the ethos of the home and its particular way of working with vulnerable young people. In this way, everyone who is concerned with a young person knows the objectives of the placement and how they will be achieved. The home also ensures that information provided to young people who may be coming to live here describes the rules and routines accurately. This information is supplemented by a very thorough referral process. The manager meets with the young person being considered for admission and, with the social worker, makes an assessment of how well the home can meet their needs. This approach increases the chances of the placement being ultimately successful as well as minimising any adverse impact upon the young people already resident.

The manager has a good awareness of how the practice of the home impacts on the progress made by young people. He is developing more robust and informative ways of measuring outcomes and monitoring the quality of care. This will further improve the effectiveness of the home and make it more responsive to young people's needs.

The home has sufficient staff to meet the needs of young people and keep them safe at all times of the day and night. Staff have good access to managers should they require advice or guidance or if they need to report a concern. The manager and other senior staff provide regular, good quality supervision to staff members. This ensures that staff perform to task and are able to reflect upon, and improve, their practice. There is a training programme in place which ensures that staff gain, and maintain, the skills they need to provide effective support to young people.

The home makes sure that young people are able to make effective contribution to their looked after reviews through a variety of means. This gives young people a real

say in their care plans and enables them to reflect positively on the progress they make at the home. A photo montage of the young person in various situations is attached to the manager's report for each review. This is an innovative way of presenting information about the young person's development and progress and is a source of real pride for the young person themselves.

About this inspection

The purpose of this inspection is to assure children and young people, parents, the public, local authorities and government of the quality and standard of the service provided. The 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 relevant regulations and meets the national minimum standards.

The report details the main strengths, any areas for improvement, including any breaches of regulation, and any failure to meet national minimum standards. The judgements included in the report are made against the *Inspections of children's homes – framework for inspection* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.