

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Philip Cass
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home, which is also a school, provides care and education for up to 10 young people aged between 11 and 16 years who have significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The service also provides cognitive behavioural therapy and art therapy where required.

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**.

This home provides a stable and nurturing environment for young people. The staff team are experienced and engage with young people in a very positive and encouraging manner. This promotes positive behaviour and ensures that young people feel valued and respected. Damaging and risk taking behaviour is minimised. Young people are safe in the home and report that they feel safe. They rarely go missing from home. Established routines underpin excellent levels of school attendance.

The home has been asked to improve the way that it records the administration of medication in the home, and ensure that all staff receive an annual appraisal to promote their development. In addition, the manager has been asked to ensure that the children's guide contains additional information that young people may find useful.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that there is a clear written record of all medication given to children during their placement (NMS 6.15)

- ensure that the children's guide includes information about how children can find out about their rights, how a child can contact their Independent Reviewing Officer, the Children's Rights Director, Ofsted if they wish to raise a concern with inspectors, and how to secure access to an independent advocate (NMS 13.5)
- ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually and this appraisal takes into account any views of children the service is providing for. (NMS 19.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people make great progress at school. Although many have had very poor attendance prior to admission all young people attend school every day. Individual timetables are tailored to the needs and abilities of young people. Young people talk positively about their improved prospects for educational success. They value the opportunity given to them to gain good qualifications and be successful.

Young people are healthy and have significantly improved emotional health as a result of their placement at the home. Many young people benefit greatly from the therapeutic services available in the home. Therapy helps young people to understand and manage their emotions; they develop strategies to cope with the impact of early childhood trauma, they have improved emotional resilience.

Young people grow in confidence and self-esteem because staff are quick to praise and offer encouragement. Young people learn how to behave well. The improvement in their social skills means they have significantly improved life chances. Instances of anti-social or offending behaviour are greatly reduced. Young people can look forward to a brighter future because they are no longer at risk of a custodial sentence.

Self-confidence and self-esteem is further promoted because young people enjoy a wide range of activities that they find interesting and stimulating. They learn new skills such as horse riding and are encouraged to play a musical instrument. Young people are supported well to pursue their own interests and hobbies. They regularly take part in community based activities and are supported to join local clubs and teams.

Young people speak confidently about their future and are looking forward to independence. They feel that the home supports them well to prepare for adult life and provides them with useful guidance and information. Young people are able to maintain links in their own communities because the home is good at supporting family contact arrangements.

Quality of care

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

Staff interact in a warm and affectionate manner with young people. This promotes a positive and welcoming environment in which young people are confident to express their individuality. Young people report that the staff are 'brilliant' and feel that the home is a good place to live. Staff organise a broad range of activities each evening for young people. Because young people enjoy the company of staff they participate well in these activities. A key strength of the service are the small routines that young people look forward to. For example, the 'special' hot chocolate that forms part of the DVD night. These caring touches provide young people with a sense of stability and security.

Education support is of a very high standard. The staff work hard to maintain the established culture of educational attendance. Stable morning and bedtime routines mean that young people are able to attend school in a positive frame of mind. Staff make determined efforts to overcome barriers to education that stem from emotional and behavioural difficulties. There is excellent communication between care and education staff. This means that where young people require additional support to promote achievement this is quickly identified.

Placement plans are of a good quality and offer staff clear guidance, in a range of areas, to meet the needs of young people. All staff are aware of the background and particular needs of each young person. The home is good at promoting diversity because needs relating to cultural background and personal identity are positively addressed in placement plans. Equality and diversity issues are also addressed through keyworker sessions. Diversity is celebrated in the home through positive images displayed in the home such as wall displays and the celebration of cultural events.

Health plans are detailed and comprehensive. They promote good physical, mental and emotional health. Staff are well supported to understand and implement the home's model of therapeutic care. Staff report that monthly reflective sessions led by therapists give them 'thinking time' to develop strategies that improve the emotional well-being of young people. Young people are very well supported to attend health appointments and staff help young people to overcome any anxieties about medical appointments. Medication administration systems promote good health because all prescribed medication is given as directed by health professionals. However, medication administration records do not always clearly state the required dosage. This increases the risk of staff giving young people an incorrect quantity of medication.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people are safe and feel safe in the home. They rarely go missing. When young people do place themselves at risk by going missing from the home staff go to great lengths to find and return them. The home works closely with social workers to minimise the risk of exploitation or abuse when young people are absent without

permission. Young people know who to talk to if they feel that they are being mistreated. They are confident that the staff would take any concerns that they raise seriously and feel protected from abuse and bullying. Although the children's guide does not contain information about the Children's Rights Director, independent advocates, or the Independent Reviewing Officer, young people are confident that they have access to adults who they trust to advocate for them.

When young people with a history of risk taking behaviours are placed at the home these behaviours reduce in scale and frequency over time. When the home is concerned that young people may be placing themselves at risk it ensures that notifications are made and that professional discussions take place with safeguarding agencies. Improved multi-agency training with local police ensures that staff are able to identify the warning signs of exploitation and take appropriate action to minimise the risk of abuse.

The risk of abuse and exploitation is further reduced because the staff recruitment and application processes deter unsuitable adults from applying for positions of trust at the home. These checks include the telephone verification of references and enhanced Criminal Record Bureau disclosure checks. The risk of harm to young people is also reduced by careful monitoring of visitors and contractors working at the home.

Staff have high expectations of young people's behaviour. Positive behaviour is promoted because staff communicate well with young people and focus on recognising and rewarding good behaviour. Staff are confident in their behaviour management skills. They intervene pro-actively when they see signs that behaviour is beginning to deteriorate. Young people are actively involved in agreeing the rules of the house and the consequences of breaking these rules. Sanctions are used well to deter the repetition of inappropriate behaviours. Because behaviour management strategies are effective the use of restraint is minimal.

Good health and safety systems mean that potential hazards are identified and removed promptly. The home's fire risk assessment is clear and well understood by staff. Routine checks of fire safety systems, as well as regular fire evacuation drills, mean that the risk of injury as a result of fire is minimised. Periodic testing of gas and electrical installations further reduces the risk of fire. Local Authority Environmental Health Officers have recently graded the home's food safety systems as 'very good'.

Leadership and management

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

Monitoring and quality assurance systems are good at identifying areas for improvement. This means that managers have a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home. Because the home addresses identified shortfalls quickly the home continually improves. Improvement is also promoted because the home has addressed the requirement and recommendation made at the last inspection. Improved decoration means that the home is a more pleasant and

homely place for young people to live. Improved record keeping means that the manager can robustly monitor the use of sanctions and restraints in the home.

The home benefits from an experienced and competent management team. The home is part of an organisation that has an 'Investors in People' Gold Award. This demonstrates that managers prioritise the development and support of staff. Supervision is used well to improve staff performance and communicate high expectations. However, because annual appraisals have not taken place this year, not all staff have had their performance formally appraised. This shortfall means that the home has not taken every opportunity to improve practice.

The home provides staff with a good programme of training. Managers are proactive in ensuring that staff are enrolled on mandatory training and gain their qualification within reasonable timescales. Staff receive training in a range of areas such as safeguarding, first aid, food hygiene and the administration of medication. This ensures that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide the services set out in the home's Statement of Purpose.

The home is good at multi-agency working. As well as maintaining the strong and effective working relationship with social workers and teachers the home has improved the way it works with therapists. Staff are more familiar with the therapeutic models used and are better supported to apply these models in the day-to-day care arrangements. This means that young people now receive a more consistent response from staff. The home is making good progress towards its objective of becoming a therapeutic community.

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* and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.