

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Morgan
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Date of last inspection	26 August 2008
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is part of a small private organisation providing crisis placements to girls and boys between nine and 17 years of age. Placements do not normally last longer than six months.

It is located in a rural area, a car drive from the nearest town. It is an adapted building that used to be a farm. The service is for young people who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. They may have poor self-esteem and self-confidence and have experienced abuse or rejection.

A substantial amount of time is spent in one-to-one activities off-site, often for several days at a time. Programmes are designed to meet individual needs, provide training and educational opportunities, and to avoid exclusion. These programmes may include use of the home's cottage in Wales for short periods.

Two young people contributed directly to this inspection and others indirectly via surveys.

Summary

At this full, unannounced inspection, the home is found to be operating at a satisfactory level. However, there is evidence of significant improvements and several areas are operating particularly well. The management team have addressed several major issues that are gradually improving outcomes for young people. Staff training and the individual support of young people are good, as are the activities and the organisation of placement plans. Attention is necessary though, to certain aspects of behaviour management and the recording of actions taken to resolve complaints. Issues of equality and diversity are addressed reasonably well with some imaginative practices developing.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Since the last inspection, improvements have been made to the actions and recommendations that were raised, including the completion of a major review of all the policies and procedures. This represents a substantial piece of work that is of benefit to staff and management. Staff also now benefit from details of training courses being kept in the office for reference and allowing cross-reference with the policies. Staff qualifications, on the other hand, remain at too low a level, in part because of the recruitment of more staff, and this is being addressed systematically.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people enjoy healthy, nutritious meals that they are involved in preparing, especially when they are away on camps. They also have opportunities to plan and shop for meals, which helps to prepare them for independence. Similarly, opportunities are taken to teach young people how to safely self-medicate. Wherever appropriate, young people are taught about alternatives so they have choices and learn about other cultures. Their good health is also

promoted by a clean and quiet environment and attention to their individual needs, such as smoking habits. Young people said that staff teach them to eat healthily.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

The welfare and safety of young people is promoted well, in particular by the high staffing levels and the awareness of staff. Discussions between staff and young people occur continuously and are often about safety and welfare issues affecting the young people. However, in the case of complaints, appropriate procedures are not always followed after an investigation by the local authority and also complaint records do not always show the outcome. Young people feel that the staff keep them safe and offer important advice. This is particularly effective when young people are at risk of absconding. During both on site and off site activities, young people enjoy a high level of privacy as they always have their own rooms. Room searches are required infrequently but there is no evidence of young people being informed of such events, which is potentially disrespectful and destabilising for young people. On the other hand, the opportunities for bullying by other young people are small and well monitored.

Whilst young people are on site and also away on trips, the home provides them with satisfactory levels of physical safety and security. Vehicles are carefully checked and risk assessments are undertaken. Fire safety measures, such as drills and tests, are also thorough although there are several versions of the risk assessment, which have also not been reviewed. Electrical items are also risk assessed but do not take into account their fire risk, for example, if items are used under staircases. Also, the site risk assessment does not take into account the public right of way, the use of which by the public has the potential to impact on the safety and privacy of young people. Staff dogs are brought to the home and also taken on trips. They have certain therapeutic benefits for young people but the potential safety and legal implications are not reflected in policies.

Recruitment also contributes significantly to the safety of young people. The selection and vetting of all staff and volunteers working with young people in the home is of a good standard. It now involves young people, which is good practice and valuable experience for them. Recruitment is an area in which there has been a clear improvement. However, there is no evidence on file that gaps in employment are investigated and this poses a potential risk to young people.

Young people are competently assisted by staff to develop socially acceptable behaviour and this is an important theme running through the service. However, there are discrepancies in practices that potentially place both staff and young people at risk. Certain types of physical interventions that are measures of control are not recorded or monitored, such as when items are forcefully removed from young people. Also, there are different understandings amongst staff about the measures of control policy, for example, regarding whether and when items can be removed against the wishes of a young person. These are important issues for management to consider. In other respects though, behaviour management training is thorough and recording is sound, although the physical intervention log does not follow the prescribed format.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Individual support is provided to young people all the time and is of a high standard. Staffing is always at least one-to-one and is geared towards the individual needs of young people. Education is addressed holistically, addressing the range of needs of young people in the classroom, recreationally and socially. However, the coordination between types of activity (for example, between education whilst on site and learning whilst on trips) has improved substantially so that outcomes for young people are better. Also improved is the positive involvement of young people in local towns, for example, in clubs for trampolining and for motor-cross, which helps to develop their social skills. The home provides outdoor activities as a key part of its service and this is provided with skill and enthusiasm by the team.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Attention has been paid to ensuring that young people are able to move into and leave the home in as planned and sensitive a manner as possible; this sometimes includes transfers between the two homes. A high emphasis is placed on getting to know young people when they are first admitted, especially as many are placed during emergency situations, and this contributes substantially to the effectiveness of their placements. Communication between all staff and young people is given the utmost priority, and this is reflected in the positive relationships that prevail between staff and young people. Staff display sophisticated interpersonal skills when they interact with young people. Through such discussions, young people are also able to contribute significantly to day-to-day decisions and learn how to make appropriate choices, which is a critical skill for most of them. Staff take into account individual needs, such as communication and behavioural difficulties, during formal meetings and informal conversations.

Young people have their needs assessed and reviewed effectively and comprehensively. This is reflected in their written placement plans. The format of these is clear and the major issues for each young person are subsequently traced through various documents. This means that young people's needs are addressed more consistently and effectively. Placement plans show how family contact will be maintained and young people consider that the attention to family contact is a strength of the service. A high level of resources, such as staffing and vehicles, mean that there are rarely any obstacles.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The high level of individual support and involvement in daily decision making mean that young people receive a good preparation for adulthood and independence, given the short timescales they live at the home. This applies in particular to their social skills, for example, regarding anger management and dealing with difficulties. It also applies to many practical skills, such as budgeting for shopping and anticipating future expenses. Similarly, young people learn from being involved in an attractive and well-presented property that is clean and tidy. However, there is malodour in the lounge that is reportedly caused by staff's dogs.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is satisfactory. Progress has been made by compiling an appropriate policy. Individual needs are met particularly well and issues of diversity are

addressed during the education of young people; staff training is underway to develop their understanding of this issue. Another improvement is the creation of a format to identify individual young people's specific needs arising from their backgrounds, such as any religious requirements. The statement of purpose is up-to-date and reflects the equal opportunities policy of the company. The information received by young people is also of a good standard being varied, colourful and attractive.

Young people are looked after by competent staff who are themselves well supported and guided in safeguarding and promoting the young people's welfare. There are formal supervision meetings and there is also substantial peer-group support and advice, which is to the credit of the team. A particular improvement is the performance monitoring of staff in which they are held accountable to a greater extent than previously. Policies and procedures are up-to-date and available for reference by staff. These matters help to ensure that young people receive a consistent level of care. Although this report indicates several areas that require attention, the service is well placed to improve further and there is sufficient managerial capacity and skill to resolve issues.

Training has become a strength of the service since a designated trainer has been appointed. Individual training needs are carefully managed and induction training is thorough. There are gaps regarding levels of National Vocational Qualification training, and also training in working with families, but these are being addressed at present. Monitoring also applies to all other areas of the service and the required systems are in place. In addition, young people benefit from a service that has achieved and maintains the Investors in People quality assurance status.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
16	ensure there is a written record of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of the investigation (Regulation 24(5))	7 August 2009
22	ensure the procedure considers the measures which may be necessary to protect children in the home following an allegation of abuse, for example, when local authority enquiries are complete (Regulation 16(2)(e))	7 August 2009
22	ensure any measures of control, restraint or discipline are written in a volume that includes all the required matters (Regulation 17(4))	7 August 2009
22	ensure there is a record of the date and circumstances of any measure of control, restraint or discipline used on a child (Regulation 28(1) schedule 3)	7 August 2009

24	ensure the home is kept free from offensive odours (Regulation 31(3))	7 August 2009
26	ensure that unnecessary risks to the health or safety of children are identified and as far as possible eliminated, with regard to the fire risks posed by electrical equipment, maintaining an up-to-date fire risk assessment, and assessing the risk posed by the public right of way (Regulation 23(c))	7 August 2009
27	ensure there is full and satisfactory information in relation to all applicants, for example, regarding gaps in employment (Regulation 26(3)(d))	7 August 2009

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children's bedrooms are searched only in accordance with the guidance, and only on clear grounds that are explained to the child concerned, and where failure to carry out the search would put at risk the welfare of the child or others (NMS 9.8)
- ensure that staff are provided with written guidance on the home's procedures and practice, with respect to physically removing items from young people against their will (NMS 28.8 Appendix 1)
- ensure that staff are provided with written guidance on the home's procedures and practice, with respect to the health and safety policy and the presence of staff dogs on site and on trips (NMS 28.8)
- ensure that a minimum ratio of 80% of all care staff complete their National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 (NMS 29.5).