

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is part of a small private organisation providing up to six placements for young people who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home is located in an isolated rural area, a car drive from the nearest town. Living accommodation and education may be provided across three adapted farm buildings.

Overall effectiveness

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

The home provides personalised, sound care for young people. There are suitable individual plans and risk assessments for each young person which are used day to day. The quality of care provided by staff and managers promotes improved outcomes for young people. Young people's views about the quality of care and their relationships with staff are mostly positive. Relationships between staff and young people have improved recently as a result of increased stability within the staff group. This is helping young people to feel safe and more secure. Young people are safe because staff identify, and are vigilant to, the individual risks for each young person. However, there are a few shortfalls in the identification and minimisation of risks associated with the remote environment and with recruitment systems. These have not had a significant impact on the safety and welfare of young people, but they have the potential to do so. Other small weaknesses are identified concerning the quality of key working to guide, support and advise young people and the degree of involvement of young people in staff appraisals. As a result, the effectiveness of the home is satisfactory overall.

Areas for improvementStatutory 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
29 (2001)	ensure that accidents and injuries are recorded and kept up to date. (Regulation 29 (1) Schedule 4.4.)	18/11/2011

Recommendations

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

- improve the effectiveness of the home's location risk assessment, specifically to identify, prepare for, and better address, the issues of bad weather and safe searching for young people if they abscond from the home (NMS 10.8)
- ensure that the children's home has a record of the recruitment and vetting checks which have been carried out on those working for the children's home, including all the matters listed in the minimum standard (NMS 16.3 and 16.4)
- ensure that the system for recruiting staff and others includes an effective system for reaching decisions in the light of any criminal convictions or other concerns about suitability that are declared or discovered during the recruitment process (NMS 16.5)
- ensure that staff performance appraisals take into account the views of young people (NMS 19.6)
- ensure that young people receive good support, guidance and advice from staff which addresses their individual needs, for example, concerning health, behaviour and the risks of leaving the home without permission. In particular, provide clear records of this work which are helpful to young people. (NMS 3.6, 4.4, 5.1, 5.8, 22.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are making sound progress overall and are developing a positive self-view. Some young people have developed a good understanding of their background and their emotional resilience is much improved since placement. This is because there is a more consistent staff group who spend more time talking to young people, encouraging them and valuing their opinions. Young people's progress in self-confidence and understanding also arises from their increased inclusion in their care plans and open communication with their families and the professionals who are involved in the decisions being made about them.

Young people are enjoying improving health and are making wider and more nutritious food choices. They are being physically active outside and are trying new outdoor challenges, such as rock climbing and 'geocaching'. These activities benefit their emotional, as well as physical health. Young people are discouraged from smoking because the social aspect of this is being minimised. Staff ensure that they do not smoke where young people can see them and have changed the designated smoking area for young people to ensure that it is well away from the house. A smoking cessation service session is being attended next week by staff and young

people together. Food hygiene and first aid training is also planned to take place shortly. This too is being undertaken jointly by staff and young people so that health is a priority for everyone at the home.

The educational achievement of young people is satisfactory overall. Some young people are undertaking practical 'ASDAN' challenges and improving their problem solving skills through a variety of outdoor and home based and community independence activities. They are also able to begin attending mainstream schools on a gradual introduction with support from staff. This represents good progress from their starting points. Some young people's attendance at school has recently been regular, but has been interrupted by periods of being missing from the home.

Young people are benefitting greatly from appropriate contact with family and others who are important to them. This is because staff and managers are committed to facilitating and supporting this. For example, staff lay on transport to the home and supervise contacts, enabling siblings to choose and enjoy fun physical activities together. Young people are also acquiring improved practical and life skills at the home. Staff ensure that they are encouraged to participate in keeping their rooms clean and tidy, helping with food preparation and clearing up, shopping and laundry. This is sometimes undertaken as part of contact time with relatives when it is part of the overall care plan. As a result, young people are able to make a positive contribution to the home and have some involvement with the wider community.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy sound relationships with staff and with each other. They generally behave appropriately. This is because staff clearly show and express their care and concern for young people and prioritise each young person's care in accordance with their individual care plans and risk assessments. Young people have good opportunities to be involved with decisions about their care plans. For example, they are offered good support to have their say in young people's review meetings, to add their comments to records made about them, to speak regularly to family members. and all professionals who are involved in their care.

Young people are given a good quality guide to the home when they arrive and staff show them what to do if there is an emergency. Staff also explain how to make a complaint and ensure that young people have access to a telephone to make calls. Staff take the time to explain to young people why it is not possible to act upon their wishes in every case. As a result of improved staff practice in all these areas, young people are generally better engaged and are more settled.

Staff support young people's general health and education well overall. They ensure that appointments are made with relevant health and education professionals and encourage young people to attend them. They tailor daily activity plans to ensure that education is provided in a way which suits young people's individual interests and aptitudes. This enables young people to succeed and encourages their self-

confidence. However, there is less evidence of high quality, regular individual key working with young people. It is not clear that all opportunities are being used to best effect to work directly with young people on addressing identified issues, such as sexual health, relationships, and the risks associated with going missing. As a result, young people's progress in understanding the health and safety consequences of their lifestyle and behaviour choices is satisfactory rather than good.

The home is well maintained and is welcoming for young people. Bedrooms are newly furnished and many areas have been freshly decorated, providing a more homely feel. Young people are able to relax indoors alongside staff and feel proud of the pleasant environment. This provides them with an incentive to help keep their home clean and tidy, assisted by staff that provide a good role model, showing young people how to take care of their surroundings.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report that they generally feel safe in the home and outside it. They feel confident to talk to staff about their concerns, including if they feel unsafe. Staff recognise the particular vulnerabilities of individual young people. They effectively consult and work together with managers to ensure that staffing levels and practice are tailored on an individualised basis to minimise the risks for young people who want to abscond. The instances of some young people going missing have recently increased, while other young people whose risk of absconding is deemed to be equally high, have not left without permission on any occasion. These young people undertake activities on the high moorland and are able to enjoy the challenging landscape safely in a planned way alongside staff. There are appropriate risk assessments in place for outdoor activities and the home's vehicles are adequately maintained to promote safety. However, the location of the home poses particular safety risks to young people if they are leaving the home without permission, particularly when there are adverse weather conditions. The home's location risk assessment does not very effectively or specifically identify or address issues such as access to equipment and preparation for searching safely and quickly for young people when there are adverse weather conditions or if it is dark.

There is minimal use of restraint overall since the last inspection and it is reducing. This is because staff have received training which has effectively raised their confidence and ability to use de-escalation techniques. If restraint is used, this is only to protect persons from significant harm or serious damage to property. Staff are pleased with the success of their improved strategies for behaviour management, and say 'we are pulling together and restraints are a lot less likely'. Young people are responding well overall to the praise, financial incentives and activity rewards that they receive when they behave well. One young person states 'I've calmed down since I've been here' and staff say 'It's brilliant, the new young people have a different attitude, are up for all the options and are soaking everything up'.

Young people's safety is enhanced from improved working together with local police, local child protection agencies and other children's home's providers in the area. Staff are better informed about what to do when there are child protection concerns because policies and procedures are clearer and are explained properly to staff. This means that young people's safety is better promoted, for example, when they are missing and are at risk of sexual exploitation. Staff are liaising regularly with young people when they are missing and are sharing information more effectively with all agencies to improve the response. Staff are making young people welcome when they return and are treating them positively. This has not yet proved effective in every case, but staff's improved awareness and response to young people's triggers is good.

Young people are being cared for by staff that are carefully selected and adequately vetted. Young people are encouraged to give their views about prospective new staff who are undertaking shadow shifts. Staff are rigorous in checking the identification of visitors to the site and have improved on this since the last inspection. The relocation of the office in the main house assists security because staff are based nearer to young people when they are sited in this office than they were previously. However, the home does not retain clear evidence that all the required vetting checks on staff have been undertaken. In addition, central recruitment files do not detail how decisions on recruitment have been made when there are suitability concerns which come to light during the vetting process. These shortfalls have the ability to compromise young people's safety if the identification of staff cannot be verified on site and if unsuitable people are recruited because checks are not robust enough. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that either of these eventualities have happened.

Leadership and management

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

The managers and registered persons have focused diligently on addressing many areas of concern raised at the last inspection. They have addressed most areas of weakness in policies, procedures, recording and organisation. Where policies, procedures and records have been changed, staff have received training and support to understand and implement these. As a result, staff morale and the quality of care they are providing is at least satisfactory in all respects. In addition, there has been considerable work to improve the quality of the indoor environment. This too has benefitted both staff morale and young people's levels of engagement with their home.

The home's Statement of Purpose and young people's guide provide understandable, good information about the service. Staff know that they must tailor the guide to each young person, including providing young people with the individual contact numbers for all those whom they may want to telephone. Placing authorities indicate that the work of the home is positive and proactive, including for the most difficult to manage young people. Placing social workers say that this benefits young people because a young person is 'not rejected, whatever they do'. Regulation 33 reports

are being undertaken by an independent provider and are being more effectively and regularly undertaken than previously. Manager monitoring under Regulation 34 is also improved. As a result of better monitoring, improvements are more consistently driven and the benefits of changes are identified. For example, staff are completing professional training and new staff are being better inducted and enrolled to begin their professional training.

Proposed manager vetting checks through Ofsted are now underway after many months delay in receiving the required application. Nevertheless, the proposed manager models good practice and a high level of commitment to meeting the individual needs of young people. He supports staff practically and emotionally and has successfully implemented three shift teams with qualified leaders who supervise their colleagues on shift. Agency staff are no longer so relied upon and the improved consistency of staffing is significantly benefitting the quality of care. Managers are addressing the gender balance on shifts as much as possible, given the small number of available female staff. Young people are observed to respond well to the manager and some young people who have left the setting value being able to make telephone contact with him and other staff at the home. In addition, staff speak confidently about the support they receive from the manager and evidence suggests that supervision and appraisal is timely and sound, including for new, unqualified staff. The appraisal process does not currently involve young people, but their views and feelings are heard through many other means, such as young people's meetings and the complaints process. The impact of this shortfall is therefore minimal.

Records are generally clear, up to date and securely, yet accessibly, stored. There is evidence of improved timeliness of record keeping and sending of notifications. Managers and staff say that this has been enabled by a more settled phase in the home with fewer young people in residence. However, there is one instance where an injury caused to a member of staff has not been logged in the accident record. This shortfall has the potential to adversely affect that member of staff. Overall, records have been improved to make them more informative and useful to young people, staff and placing authorities, in showing how young people's individual needs are being met and what their progress is. There is a commitment from managers and staff to ensure that significant incidents, including complaints, child protection concerns and all notifiable events, are recorded in more detail. This enables records to more effectively prompt good quality planned care and show how young people's needs have been met.

Equality and diversity practice is **satisfactory**.