

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Morgan
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Date of last inspection	4 November 2009
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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. The home is located in a relatively isolated rural area, a car drive from the nearest town. It is in adapted farm buildings and there are no immediate neighbours.

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

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

Summary

This full inspection was an announced visit over two days, which considered previous shortfalls as well as all areas of current practice. As a result, the overall quality rating is raised to satisfactory.

A new manager is in post and this is a period of substantial development during which established practices are being challenged and explored. The last inspection made nine actions and four recommendations, most of which have now been addressed. These raised concerns about leadership in particular; the competence of the staff team, and the effectiveness of training. In particular, attention was drawn to shortfalls in meeting the individual needs of young people arising from their gender, culture and religion. Substantial progress has been made in addressing issues of equality and diversity.

This inspection concludes that substantial progress is being made and there is sufficient capacity to develop further. However, monitoring, quality assurance and written policies, in particular, require attention.

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

Improvements since the last inspection

The last inspection made nine actions and four recommendations. These have all been addressed except for ensuring that a minimum ratio of 80% of all care staff have completed their National Vocational Qualification at level 3. An important development is the appointment of a new manager. The new manager has undertaken various steps to ensure there is effective communication with staff. For example, appraisals are being undertaken with all staff and there is closer monitoring of their attendance at staff meetings. These are important contributions to consistency of practice. The manager has also ensured that staff received refresher training regarding the management of complaints. Greater emphasis is now placed on staff understanding the practicalities of their learning, for example, regarding complaints. This helps to ensure that young people and other complainants are dealt with in a positive way.

Individual needs are now addressed well by the home's care staff and teachers, especially at the point of admission. Similarly, young people are exposed to positive images, events and discussions about social diversity. Young people are now adequately protected by individual risk assessments that take into account the likelihood of them being absent without authority. This is particularly important because of the isolated position of the home. Appropriate consideration is now given to the balance of genders in each of the three staff teams. This helps to ensure that the individual needs of young people are suitably met.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people enjoy good quality, home made meals that are healthy and nutritious. They are encouraged to cook meals themselves and they eat with other young people and staff. Mealtimes are important social occasions that provide a structure to the day. Young people also have opportunities to plan and shop for meals, especially if they are living in the semi-independent annexe. Fresh fruit and salads are routinely provided and items such as fizzy drinks that may exacerbate negative behaviours are avoided. Special diets that arise, for example, from ethical or religious beliefs are also addressed well. Young people who are vegetarian, for example, are helped to obtain appropriate ingredients.

Young people's good health is also facilitated by appropriate attention to their individual health needs. They are registered with doctors and dentists and all appointments are supported by staff. Young people know they can choose male or female doctors. Staff encourage young people to pursue healthy lifestyles, for example, by rewarding them for not smoking. Outdoor activities are an important feature of the service. The arrangements for dealing with prescribed medicines are also addressed satisfactorily. However, health plans include insufficient directions to staff about the management and prevention of incidents of self-harming behaviour.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people's privacy is respected reasonably well overall and their information is confidentially stored and handled. They have individual bedrooms and can secure their belongings if they choose. However, staff do not always respect bedroom privacy sufficiently, for example, when a room search is necessary. This is an important issue for young people affecting their sense of security. Young people understand the complaint's procedure and use it with confidence. Such complaints are addressed promptly and recorded adequately. The manager ensures that issues are carried forward to staff supervision meetings, where appropriate. This is an important contribution to maintaining and improving standards. However, the policy is incorrect in places and gives insufficient guidance to staff. For example, young people are not always kept up to date with progress or given a clear, formal conclusion.

The welfare of young people is fully promoted by a high level of staff training in safeguarding procedures. Staff training and high staffing levels also help to ensure young people are protected well from bullying. Young people are kept occupied by regular activities, which reduce the opportunities for bullying to occur. The same arrangements also reduce the impact of young people being absent without authority to a minimum. Social workers are always informed of such events and young people have the opportunity to discuss their feelings with them. This helps to identify any problems that are arising in the home.

Young people are assisted to develop socially acceptable behaviour at all times; young people feel staff are usually fair. This is achieved through positive interactions between staff and young people. Inappropriate behaviour, such as homophobic or racist comments are challenged by staff. Individual young people's negative behaviours are assessed. Extreme behaviours are appropriately managed by increasing staffing levels or altering care practices. The operation of the behaviour management system, including the reward system, and its consistency between shifts is currently under review by the new manager.

The home provides young people with reasonable levels of physical safety and security. Equipment checks and servicing occur routinely. The understanding of young people and staff is regularly checked by fire drills. Young people are also protected by a high standard of selection and vetting of new staff. It is to the credit of the organisation that young people are involved from time to time in the interview process. This is valuable experience for young people and their observations are useful to the organisation. Good practice is also shown by candidates undertaking extended visits to the home as part of the recruitment process.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Individual support is successfully achieved by high staffing levels in the first instance. Young people's needs are also met by the composition of staff teams being adjusted in terms of gender and skills. Care and education staff engage well with young people and this is an important feature of the care that is provided. Young people receive good attention to their religious and cultural needs. There is now better attention to this area of care from the moment referrals are received. Young people are taken to specialist shops for toiletries and cooking ingredients, for example. These opportunities are also used to extend the social skills of young people in a controlled way, subject to any personal risk assessments that may be in place.

The education of young people is also strong. It is well organised and is available on site but also occurs in local facilities, such as colleges and work placements. Young people are helped to achieve academic qualifications and awards as well as practical ones. Achievement at all levels is celebrated and facilitated well. Examples of success include fundraising for a charity, art awards and playing musical instruments. This also shows how the service effectively uses the interests' young people already have to develop their skills and confidence. To a large extent, the effectiveness of the service is increased by the combination of care, extended trips and education. A wide range of recreational and sporting activities are offered, including canoeing, fishing, golf, swimming and shopping.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Young people have their needs assessed as soon as possible and their placement plans are adapted as new information comes to light. Recent improvements to planning mean there is now close attention to religious and cultural needs. There is good recording and progress is monitored effectively. Young people are made aware of their plans by their key workers in particular and are actively involved in reviewing their own progress. There is also good involvement of young people in decision making generally, whether it be for activities, budgeting for meals or more important matters. Young people receive clear direction about how to make appropriate decisions. Decisions about negative or offending behaviours, for example, are discussed in detail. Young people enjoy good relationships with staff facilitated by staff often

being on duty for several days at a time, both on site and for trips. The staffing arrangements also mean that the needs of individual young people are not compromised by the needs of the group.

Young people are helped to maintain constructive contact with their families by staff. There have been significant successes in this area and young people are positive about the arrangements and the support they receive. Staff also facilitate appropriate access to the home by families and this too is well received by young people. Constructive family contact is an important ingredient in achieving effective transfers of young people from the home. Young people are fully involved in decision making about their next placements. Admissions are often at short notice but staff make direct contact with new young people whenever possible. The manager ensures that as much research as possible is done before admissions so that young people experience positive transitions.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people receive excellent opportunities to develop their social and practical skills in readiness for greater independence and adulthood. Opportunities are provided on site but also in a variety of other locations. In this way young people are appropriately challenged and provided with an unusual breadth of experience. Budgeting and catering skills are taught, depending on the age and ability of the young person. Young people are taught to adapt their skills to different environments and locations, including camps. They are routinely involved in purchasing their own toiletries and are helped to access specialist shops to meet their cultural needs.

When they are on site, young people enjoy a good standard of traditional, farm house-style accommodation that is located in hilly countryside. The home is clean and well presented throughout. Young people have ample privacy in their own bedrooms and study space is available in several other areas too. There are also opportunities for greater independence in the annexe where there are bedrooms, a lounge and kitchen.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people are helped to achieve greater personal equality of opportunity through the support of teachers and care staff. Education and care staff challenge and help young people explore prejudicial attitudes that are commonly racist or homophobic. For example, trips may include visits to war museums to see the impact of fascism. In addition, young people receive opportunities to learn positive things about other groups in society. Religious events such as Divali are celebrated via theatre and arts activities. The principles of equality and diversity are reflected in the home's up to date Statement of Purpose and young people's guide. New young people receive several documents that staff discuss with them, which help them understand the way the home works. This is reflected in their personal files, which are well presented.

Over half of the staff are new to the service in the last year. The manager is providing strong leadership and taking this opportunity to establish good practice amongst the whole team. He is based in the staff office, which is an important and practical way of supporting staff during this transitional period. Staff are also guided in promoting young people's welfare through

formal supervision and appraisals; this cross-references well with the training they receive. Competency levels are reduced somewhat by the shortfall in qualified staff arising from the staff turnover although this is being addressed. However, young people benefit from good staffing levels. These are kept under review and as a result, for example, waking night staff are employed when required. In addition, the competence of the staff team is supplemented well by a thorough training programme and a designated trainer. Staff benefit from recent improvements to the training methodology. There is now closer attention to practice issues and staff are tested on their understanding of the practical implications. Young people benefit because the lessons from training are tested in supervision meetings.

The quality of the service received by young people is adequately monitored. This is undertaken by the manager and also the organisation. However, opportunities to obtain feedback from young people are not always taken. The manager is also not using the monitoring system to improve the quality of care, as required. Previous examples of good consultation, for example after trips, have ceased but are under review. On the other hand, the manager undertakes occasional spot-checks on trips, which is good practice.

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
32	ensure that the person carrying out visits for the provider interviews children to form an opinion of the care provided (Regulation 33(4)(a))	28 June 2010
33	ensure there is a system for improving the quality of care, and, ensure that it provides for consultation with children, their parents and placing authorities. (Regulations 34(1)(b) and 34(3))	28 June 2010

Recommendations

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

- ensure that health plans identify any preventive measures and monitoring required of staff, with regard to self harming behaviours (NMS 12.2)
- ensure that children's possessions are only searched in accordance with the guidance (NMS 9.8)
- ensure the complaints policy addresses the matters identified in this standard (NMS 16.3)
- ensure that a minimum ratio of 80% of all care staff complete their National Vocational Qualification at level 3. (NMS 29.5)