

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Joanna Heller
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is one of two privately owned children's homes in the area operated by the same provider. It provides accommodation and support to four young people of either sex, aged between 11 and 18-years-old. The home is registered to care for young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties and young people with a mild mental disorder.

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**.

Staffing is consistent with very little change ensuring a stable environment in which young people are nurtured. Young people benefit from individualised care tailored specifically to their needs. Staff are competent, caring and committed to ensuring the best outcomes for young people. Social workers refer to a team of people who 'live the home' and treat the young people as if they were their own.

Young people and staff develop strong mutually respectful relationships which underpin the success achieved in ensuring positive outcomes for young people. There is very strong ethos of learning in the home. The expectations on staff to continually learn and develop, provides positive role models for young people and permeates through into high expectations for young people.

Young people know that staff will always be there for them and feel that the home is very good. The staff team consistently work well together to provide an excellent quality of care. However, some young people choose not to accept the support and guidance offered and this may result in less positive outcomes for some young people.

The home is led by an imaginative and dynamic management team with high expectations who enthuse staff to perform at a high level. The manager was asked to further develop the fire risk assessment and to maintain a record of staff references being validated through a telephone call.

At the time of the inspection two young people were living at the home, one of whom had the opportunity to contribute to the inspection.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- evidence telephone calls are made to verify the suitability of the applicant and the validity of the reference supplied (NMS 16.1)
- ensure that avoidable hazards are removed; in particular review the fire risk assessment to ensure that it is sufficiently detailed, outlines the fire precautionary arrangements in place and how risks will be minimised (NMS 10.3)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

The home provides young people with a stable, secure and happy environment. The building provides young people with spacious accommodation that meets their needs. Each young person has their own personalised bedroom which they are able to lock and keep private. The home is welcoming and provides young people with a homely environment in which to grow. Young people's experiences of the home are positive and they have made good individual progress. Attachments quickly develop between young people and the staff who nurture them to develop their emotional resilience.

Young people are able to maintain appropriate key peer and family relationships as they wish, subject to any court orders. Young people and staff enjoy positive relationships with each other. Young people are consulted daily on the running of the home and how day-to-day decisions are made.

Young people are healthy and are supported to be aware of how to maintain healthy lifestyles. Young people are supported to develop self-care and independence skills to prepare them for their life after they leave. Risk-taking behaviours such as going missing have reduced, although these have generally been replaced by being absent without permission. Young people while declining to share their whereabouts when absent from the home, do let staff know that they are safe and will call for assistance in returning to the home when they need it. This is an area of growth for some young people.

Young people have made some improvements in their commitment to education having attended college courses. However, some young people have been unable to maintain these placements and are supported in seeking alternative educational

options in these circumstances. Young people enjoy regular activities, such as, an annual residential trip to their favourite theme park and camping trips which develop their independence and team skills. In addition, young people have been able to develop their confidence through a debating day at Cambridge University.

Young people benefit from individualised child-focused care which accommodates their diverse heritage and life experiences. Young people enjoy living at the home and grade the home as very good.

Quality of care

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

Staff ensure that living in the home makes a real difference for young people enabling them to experience a stable environment. Some young people have experienced multiple placement breakdowns and have not been able to develop relationships in previous settings. However, since living at the home they have been able to develop positive relationships with staff. This is individually demonstrated through the reduction in missing from care patterns, relationship development, and reductions in anti-social behaviours. Placing social workers also state that maintaining the placement has also been an improvement.

The commitment to education and learning in the home is inspiring. Education is positively promoted at all levels with staff actively challenging any barriers to education. Staff try to instil in young people an understanding that education is the key to better life chances. All young people have experienced improvement in their commitment to education. For example, one young person who has not been in any education in recent years secured a college place and attended daily for a time. When educational placements breakdown, staff are highly proactive in liaising with local providers setting up various college and apprenticeship interviews. Staff themselves demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning providing highly positive role models to the young people. Staff have effectively liaised with educational providers and provided educational outreach support. The commitment of staff has successfully ensured that some young people leave the home with much better educational outcomes than were previously thought possible.

Young people and staff enjoy very warm and positive relationships with each other. Young people refer to staff who are always there for them and have the time to listen to them. Staff ensure clear, consistent boundaries are in place. They seek to talk through issues with young people to understand why they act as they do. Staff then work with young people to help them through these issues and seek to equip them with the anger management skills they need.

Highly individualised care plans, are regularly updated and are comprehensive as to guide staff effectively in the day-to-day support needs of the young people. Young people are encouraged to discuss their feelings and issues regarding their individual heritage, needs and aspirations in a sensitive manner, ensuring that their individual needs are met. Staff consult young people on all aspects of their lives and ensure

that the care and support provided is highly child focused. Staff provide strong role models from a variety of backgrounds and young people's individual needs are exceptionally well met. Young people know how to complain and have confidence in the home to effectively respond to any issues they raise.

All of the young people are healthy. Staff promote healthy lifestyles and young people are supported to access medical professionals such as doctors, dentists and opticians as appropriate. Staff are well trained and competent, having received training in key areas such as first aid, food handling, emotional well-being, self-harming and other issues which affect young people.

A variety of leisure opportunities are offered both in and outside of the home these are arranged both for fun and for educational opportunities such as debating days and trips to the science museum.

Family members are able to visit the young people at the home and staff maintain regular telephone contact with key stakeholders. Staff are dedicated to supporting and developing family relationships. For example, arranging social events on family friendly, neutral territory

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Staff have regular safeguarding training and are able to link what they have learned through to other aspects of care such as young people who go missing. Young people feel safe, secure and well cared for. Young people say they like living at the home and that they like the staff.

One-to-one discussions take place regarding making positive choices and about the potential risky situations that some young people place themselves in. However, some young people continue to make poor choices. Placing social workers refer to committed staff who are imaginative in their strategies to reduce young people going missing from care. Young people have reduced their 'missing from care' patterns as they now inform staff that they are safe and can usually be contacted. Young people do, however, continue to be absent from the placement regularly and staff are not aware of their whereabouts. Young people who go missing are notified to the appropriate agencies in line with local guidelines ensuring that they continue to be safeguarded according to the homes powers. Staff have been proactive in raising concerns regarding the frequency of some young people's patterns of being 'absent without permission', with placing authorities. In some instances this has led to the manager requesting a strategy meeting, in order to review how best agencies can work in partnership to safeguard the young people.

Young people know the behavioural expectations and rules, and staff enforce these rules fairly. Restraint is not used and sanctions are rare Staff find that discussions regarding consequences and choices are more effective. Staff and placing authorities have noted a decline in some of the boundary pushing and anti-social behaviours

exhibited. This is due to the consistent boundary setting by the staff team as a whole. This has enabled young people to understand that they cannot always have what they want, when they want it. Rewards for achievements whether educational or personal, are regularly given.

Young people are safeguarded from unsuitable people gaining employment in the home through robust vetting practices. No staff are employed until background checks such as Criminal Records Bureau checks, verification of qualifications; employment history and identity are undertaken however, the manager has not always recorded the verification of references through a telephone call. This has the potential undermine the otherwise robust recruitment processes in the home.

Management ensure good systems are in place to ensure the safety and security of the building. Regular checks are undertaken to ensure the on-going safety of the building. However, the fire risk assessment is not sufficiently detailed to reflect the appropriate preventative measures in place, which safeguard young people.

Leadership and management

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

This is a well-resourced and exceptionally well managed home. Young people and placing authorities comment on the competence, friendliness, professionalism and caring nature of staff. One placing social worker commented this "is the best provider I have ever worked with".

Little changeover occurs in the staff team, most of whom have worked at the home for several years, ensuring continuity for young people. Staff and management display exceptional commitment to ensuring young people have the best life outcomes possible.

Staff stated that "they feel like an extended family and work cohesively together as a team to ensure young people can feel part of that family". This in turn ensures young people feel well cared for and that young people are nurtured. Staff are extremely well trained and competent. Staff work purposefully with stakeholders to ensure that their high aspirations for young people are shared.

Staff are very well supported and nurtured by the manager. The manager is constantly looking to develop and expand their knowledge and inspire staff to do the same. The commitment to staff training is exceptional. For example, a number of staff have been able to undertake professional training in nursing, social work and information technology, seconded by the home. Staff benefit from a wealth of relevant training, in-addition to core training and staff refer to working in a 'learning centre'. Some staff have been able to qualify as practice supervisors to support social work students further enhancing staff qualifications and knowledge base. The home has consistent arrangements with local universities and the local authority ensuring regular access to relevant training opportunities. Fresh ideas are brought in through the regular student placements. Staff demonstrate reflective practice, always

trying to understand what worked or did not work in a particular situation and why. This is then discussed in the regular team meetings and individual supervision sessions.

The manager ensures key information about the home is made available to young people. The welcome pack provided to all young people includes a copy of the young people's guide. Care records are well maintained and are regularly updated. Files are stored securely. Staff are proactive in chasing up placing authorities to hold reviews or supply paperwork where they fail to do so.

The home is well staffed enabling individualised and child-focused care. Staffing is deployed flexibly according to occupancy levels and ensuring the needs of the young people are well met. The organisation has effective systems in place for monitoring the standards of care within the home. No recommendations or requirements were made at the previous inspection. The management team constantly strive to improve the levels of care and support in the home and is supported in this through monthly professional and clinical supervision. The organisation is accredited with Investors in People. The annual team away days help staff feel real ownership of the home and explore opportunities to further enhance the quality of care provided.

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.