

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Rachel Ruth Britten
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The setting is a family-sized home. Care is provided for two young people of either sex who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. A private company owns and operates this setting.

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 **adequate**.

The home continues to provide good quality, personalised and well planned care to young people. However, since the last full inspection in November 2012, the overall effectiveness of the home has reduced from outstanding to adequate. Despite this, young people continue to have positive views about the quality of their care. They continue to feel safe and benefit from staff who manage unsafe situations generally well. However, some young people have disengaged from the daily life of the home and their poor outcomes have led to moves of placement. Young people new to the home are appropriately placed and are settling in well, but it is too early to see improvements in outcomes for them.

Leaders and managers continue to provide a good quality home environment. They provide consistent support to staff and ensure the sound running of the home. Their work with placing authorities continues to inspire confidence from social workers and independent reviewing officers alike. However, leaders and managers have not completed all complaints and allegations work in accordance with regulations and national minimum standards. They have not sufficiently prioritised training and familiarisation with the requirements of regulations in these areas. In addition, their monitoring systems have not helped them to correctly identify or address these areas of weakness. Whilst this has not jeopardised the safety of young people, it has contributed to reduced outcomes for them.

Areas for improvement

Statutory 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
24 (2001)	ensure that the record of complaints shows all the action taken in response and the outcome of the investigation. For example, dated records of referral to Local Authority Designated Officer; any notifications to Ofsted; and summaries provided to members of staff who have been the subject of complaint. (Regulation 24 (5))	01/11/2013
30 (2001)	ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5 takes place, the registered person notifies the persons indicated in column 2 of the table. In particular, ensure that Ofsted is notified of serious complaints about the home or persons working there and suspected involvement of a child in sexual exploitation (Regulation 30 (1) Schedule 5)	01/11/2013
4 (2001)	ensure that if the workers in the home are all of one sex, that the statement of purpose describes the means whereby the home will promote appropriate role models of both sexes (Regulation 4(1), Schedule 1.5)	01/11/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that allegations against people that work with children are reported by the home's designated person to the Local Authority Designated Officer (NMS 20.6)
- ensure that there are clear and effective procedures for monitoring and controlling the activities of the home. This includes any serious incidents, allegations and complaints about the provision (NMS 21.1)
- ensure that the learning and development programme enables staff to keep up to date with professional, legal and practice developments. This applies particularly to child protection training. (NMS 18.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Young people have made adequate progress to develop emotional resilience and understanding of their background. This is because staff create daily opportunities

for young people to talk and express their thoughts and feelings. Staff prioritise young people's contact plans to ensure that they do not miss important visits to friends and family who are important to them, even if these arrangements were made prior to their placement here.

Young people settle into the home quickly because staff work sensitively, using a child-centred but detailed step-by-step process to help young people understand where things are, who is who, and what is in the local community. Young people talk things through in depth with the manager, choose their key workers, take minutes of their meetings and quickly begin to confide in staff about their family stories and histories. One young person said it is 'much better' now she is placed here. Staff listen attentively and ensure photo frames and albums are quickly purchased for young people, so they can personalise the home and begin to collect memorabilia of their time here. All this promotes young people's emotional health and helps them to positively engage from the outset of placement.

Young people enjoy good physical health. For example, they are encouraged to eat and prepare healthy foods which are familiar in their cultural heritage. They are well supported by staff to attend medical appointments as well as to engage with specialist health advisors, befrienders and counsellors as appropriate. As a result, their understanding about healthy lifestyles is good; they take care of their personal hygiene; and they have an emerging positive sense of gender and sexual identity.

Young people have not sustained good attendance at school despite the home's close working relationships with the organisation's local school. For example, a very positive period of some months earlier this year was not sustained following various complaints and allegations from young people's parents about both the school and the home. Nevertheless, young people have been supported by the home to complete independence training and to complete some education with a home tutor. Young people new in placement are embarking on a phased programme of school days in order to return to the routine of full time education. However, it is too soon to see the benefits to young people's educational outcomes.

Young people benefit from positive engagement with the local community, including the immediate neighbours. On occasions young people share meals they have prepared with neighbours, help with their pets or donate spare furniture to them. Young people are also able to walk to the local shop and get supplies. They have opportunities to attend a local cinema, street dance club, pool and some social clubs specifically related to their cultural heritage. As a result, young people feel part of the community and enjoy an adequate sense of belonging even when they have been placed outside of their home local authority.

Quality of care

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

Young people feel that staff are consistently concerned with their welfare. This is because staff listen well to young people and adapt their interactions sensitively in

response to young people's individual moods and preferences. Staff use their skills throughout each shift to ensure that young people are central to the daily routine. As a result, young people have every opportunity to engage and participate. Young people also receive good support to develop their own skills in managing conflict and developing positive relationships. A social worker said: 'Staff are always approachable and work with parents for what's best for the child where possible and if appropriate. The young person I placed made good developmental progress. Staff made positive inroads to forming good relationships that are based on trust and straight talking.'

The views and wishes of young people significantly influence the running of the home and the delivery of care. This is because the home operates with only one or two young people in placement and places their needs at the centre of care practice. For example, young people write the minutes of their weekly meeting; choose their menu and activities each week; and decide upon their personal targets and rewards. Personal targets are achievable and pertinent to each individual. Young people are regularly praised as well as financially rewarded when they meet their individual goals. For example, one young person has achieved her weekly target of not being verbally abusive to staff and next she is working on getting up and ready on time for school. As a result of working this way, staff proactively address barriers to young people's progress.

Young people know how to make a complaint and feel able to do so. One young person wrote in the meeting minutes book, 'I know my children's rights'. The staff team take account of young people's complaints and learn lessons from them. For example, staff learned during the summer 2013 that more care must be taken to agree only appropriate weekly targets which can be clearly measured. This followed a young person's complaint that staff did not see her fulfilling her target and were of the opinion that she was not completing it as agreed. The young person complained that the target was unfair because she lost reward money. The weekly target was then changed to something easier for staff to check upon and the young person's reward money was reinstated. As a result, the young person wrote, 'I've agreed with the complaint and I'm happy with the outcome.'

Staff ensure that all their work is consistent with the home and local authority placement and care plans. They involve social workers very closely to ensure that positive outcomes and continuity of care are prioritised. Young people benefit from this because they get consistent and committed care. For example, staff help and support young people when local authority placement plans are changed due to declining outcomes. They help young people to understand and minimise the adverse impact of having to move when it is not their wish.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report that they feel safe in the home and outside it. There has been no use of physical intervention in the home since the last inspection. All staff provide

consistent role models of calm, de-escalating and positive adult responses. Behaving safely and being aware of their personal risks and vulnerability are priority topics for discussion and conversation in the daily life of the home. Discussions and conversations link to more in-depth sessions with the manager and/or key worker and with professionals and advisors from youth offending services, police and voluntary organisations for young people. A multi-agency approach therefore contributes to young people's safety despite young people's claims that 'I don't need safety advice, I know how to keep safe.'

Positive and proactive behaviour management strategies are consistently applied and risks are individually assessed. Staff are aware of the individual factors, such as important personal relationships, which might drive young people's lack of engagement and desire to be away from the home. Staff respond by giving young people appropriate and manageable amounts of free time in the community. However, staff also welcome friends to visit the home to encourage as much involvement in the family life of the home as possible. Staff monitor young people's whereabouts according to the individual plans and agreements made with social workers in the light of known risks and risks recently taken. For example, staff might expect receipts for expenditure; regular phone call or text message contact with staff; and/or agreements about disclosing where they are so that they can be collected after an agreed amount of free time. If staff become concerned because plans are not being adhered to, they search for young people and follow up all known contact numbers and addresses. They also reconsider arrangements such as free time and payment for fares and activities in the light of any identified concerns. They continuously work with placing social workers and police in the light of their own findings, always trying to engage young people on realistic terms. As a result, young people do not go missing and are not habitually failing to return on time. Staff are confident that young people are safe from exploitation and keeping themselves safe even if their whereabouts and company are not always precisely known.

Investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled fairly, quickly and in a way that provides effective protection for young people. Four complaints were received from young people and one from a parent. Only one of these met the Local Authority Designated Officer's (LADO) threshold for an allegation of harm. In that case the LADO then agreed that the complaint should be handled by the placing authority with in-depth knowledge of the parties involved. However, the LADO was not made aware of three of the more minor complaints about staff care practice. As a result, the home did not receive clear LADO advice about whether the threshold for an independent safeguarding investigation was, or was not, met. Nevertheless, all the complaints were satisfactorily resolved and no poor or unsafe practice identified. Placing authorities and social workers say: 'There is a very clear and transparent system to make formal complaints and the staff are excellent at communicating any concerns or incidents regarding the young person's welfare.' Young people also indicate satisfaction with the outcome of their complaints and have been provided with effective protection throughout. Despite this, effective support has not been provided to the members of staff who have been the subject of complaint. In three instances, they have not received a written summary of the complaint and outcome.

Leadership and management

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

Young people benefit from a Registered Manager who spends considerable one to one time with them. For example, when young people are new in placement she spends many hours sitting with them, talking directly with them about their expectations, wishes and feelings. As a result, young people settle well and develop confidence in the home.

The Registered Manager has been in post for many years, managing three homes in the city until summer 2013. She now only directly manages this home, but continues to support new managers in two other homes. She supports staff well here and develops their expertise. For example, she has delegated to a senior member of staff the development plan and the responsibility for timely carrying out of new developments and improvements to the fabric of the home. Similarly, senior staff are undertaking some of the supervision of staff and are responsible for reviewing the home's statement of purpose document. Overall, these delegations work adequately. However, lack of knowledge of children's homes regulations means that no comment has been added to the statement of purpose about how positive role models of both sexes are provided to young people when the home only employs female staff. Young people have not been adversely affected by this shortfall because they regularly meet good male role models through other staff within the organisation's school and other local homes.

During the period since the last inspection, young people and parents have made a number of complaints. Whilst these have been dealt with safely and to the satisfaction of young people, elements of the regulations and national minimum standards have not been followed. Complaints records do not adequately show the actions taken during the complaint. Staff and managers are therefore unsure whether LADO or Ofsted have been notified appropriately. In addition, records give no indication in some instances whether staff have had written summaries of complaints and their outcomes. The quality of care received by young people has not been adversely affected, but the opportunities for timely liaison and best practice between the home, safeguarding agencies and the regulator, Ofsted, have been missed.

The monthly monitoring by the manager and home visitor continues regularly. However, monthly reports frequently re-state in general terms what the home aims to do and the systems in place. The strengths and weaknesses of the home during the month being reviewed are not clearly identified, and there is too little evaluation of the incidents and concerns that have taken place. In addition, the cumulative figures being counted since the last Ofsted inspection, for example, on complaints, are inaccurately logged. For example, monitoring during June, July and August 2013 fails to clearly identify or address the issues leading to the increasing disengagement of young people from their placement. In addition, monitoring fails to identify staff's out of date knowledge of child protection procedures and how this pertains to complaints and allegations against staff. As a result, regular update training in child

protection has not been identified or taken to the organisation as a training need. Overall, the quality of care young people receive has been not been significantly compromised. Nevertheless, the leadership and management of the home is less effective than it was at the last inspection.

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 the inspection of children's homes.