

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC008273
Inspection date	05/12/2013
Inspector	Robin Whistlecraft
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	23/01/2013
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This home is operated by a private organisation. The home is registered to provide care for two young people with emotional or behavioural difficulties. However, the home only provides care for one young person at any one time, unless the two children are siblings and it is considered appropriate for them to share a bedroom.

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**.

Overall, young people make good progress in this home when compared to their starting points before coming to live here. They make progress variously in relation to self-esteem; self-confidence; managing frustration constructively and developing social skills. Some significantly reduce the risk they take and discover talents that they are developing to a high standard. This is because the home provides them with high quality, consistent and individual care. That care is personalised and flexible. The care approach adjusts while staff seek out successful strategies and build relationships with the young people. For some young people, successful care enables them to settle sufficiently for involved professionals to re-assess aspects of their lives, so that placing authorities can identify subsequent placements for them.

Young people say they feel safe in the home and that staff act to keep them safe. Young people also confirm that staff are consistent when applying the home's boundaries and routines. Managers review and revise the home's regime so that it changes to address the needs of each young person who comes to live there. Managers and staff work closely with other professionals supporting detailed safeguarding assessments, ensuring they have the information they need to deliver the expected services.

The registered manager has established and maintained effective systems to monitor the conduct of the home and to continually develop the quality of care that the home provides. This means that staff and managers identify areas for improvement and put in effective arrangements to make progress.

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people make good progress in this home. They learn to manage their frustrations, develop sound relationships with staff and improve relationships with their families. Some particularly benefit from the home's consistent boundaries. They settle and take advantage of the opportunity to develop social skills and expertise in leisure pursuits. As a result, they achieve success in sport and gain self-esteem through constructive activities. Others show developing emotional resilience because they make considered contributions to decisions that have significant repercussions for them.

Young people have good physical health, and some improve their fitness while in the home. Young people benefit from a balanced diet and controlled access to unhealthy foods. Young people who smoke, reduce the amount they smoke. Some young people experience improved emotional health because they are able to let go of inappropriate responsibilities. Young people benefit from specialist advice about sexual health and, because of this, have reduced the risks to themselves. This means young people are taking responsibility for their sexual health.

While living in the home young people improve their involvement in school or employment. Young people without education start in new schools. Those who have left school, who find training difficult to continue, gain employment. Some achieve recognition for their efforts, but find it hard to settle. However, because they have settled sufficiently for specialists to assess them, their placing authorities are able to identify suitable placements for them. These factors mean that young people take advantage of education or employment opportunities while in the home, despite poor starting points.

Young people influence the choice of meals and leisure activities, and personalise their rooms and living spaces. Young people prepare for reviews and significant decisions in their lives. Some young people become significantly involved in leisure and sporting activities in the wider community, where they demonstrate natural talent and enjoy specialist coaching. These factors mean that young people make a positive contribution to the home and some are involved in constructive activities in the wider community.

Young people have access to a pay phone in the hall, or can ask staff for use of the office telephone. Some young people carry a mobile telephone in line with current risk assessments. Young people visit, or are visited by family members and friends, in line with assessed and agreed arrangements. The opportunity exists for young people to have friends stay overnight or visit friends for overnight stays, although arrangements have fallen through so far. These factors mean that young people have appropriate contact with family and friends.

The home's regime involves young people in practicing basic domestic chores and

cooking. Some young people need staff intervention and support in order to practice some domestic skills and, at times, personal hygiene skills. Some young people undergo more advanced independence coaching, that is tailored according to the way they engage with the programme. However, because they receive frank assessments about their skills and knowledge, young people are clear about what they still need to learn. This means they are confident about how ready they are for adulthood, when participating in discussions to determine follow on placements.

Quality of care

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

A young person said that relationships with staff '... are really good. Staff are here for the young people.' Staff want young people to make progress. For example, by finding ways for some young people to use and develop skills that they had previously used for anti-social and risky purposes. As a result, those young people develop those skills, under expert coaching, to an advanced level. In addition, they have an appropriate avenue for using the skills and are able to do so safely. Staff support some young people to prepare a curriculum vitae and give copies to potential employers, despite presenting evidence raising doubts about commitment. As a result, those young people obtain jobs. Managers and staff also strongly advocate on behalf of young people to secure appropriate education for them. Staff then support schools in order to maintain young people's education. These factors mean that proactive staff challenge barriers to young people's participation in education and the wider community because they are ambitious for the young people. A social worker wrote in response to a survey from the home 'Relationships are effective in achieving progression for the young person.'

Young people confirm that staff are consistent in how they apply the home's rules and boundaries. Staff use measures of control that are linked to young people's behaviour and adopt new strategies if measures fail to be effective. Staff display young people's achievement certificates and photographs around the home. The regime is revised after each young person comes to live in the home in order to reflect their needs. Staff praise positive behaviour, even if this occurs within challenging periods for young people. A social worker described how staff calmly defuse challenging and tense situations, without causing further escalation, using their knowledge of young people. These factors demonstrate how staff are consistent and place young people at the centre of practice in the home. A social worker wrote in a questionnaire from the home: 'The placement has been fantastic for (the young person), very child centred and focussed.'

Young people know how to make a formal complaint. Managers and staff consider and review how to communicate with and influence young people. For example, staff have used fishing as a vehicle through which to engage some young people in 1:1 discussions. As a result, young people receive support to reflect on their situations and the opportunities ahead of them. In addition, the activity enhances relationship building because staff and young people share pleasurable time together. Also, the young people involved develop additional skills and achieve success in fishing

competitions. This demonstrates how staff support young people in proactive and imaginative ways.

Staff work closely with other agencies, learning new skills and engaging in new and specific practices to support young people. Where necessary, managers challenge other agencies for example in relation to delays in finding education placements. A social worker said 'Communication is excellent... They were very clear in the limits to their role... they were good at giving information for social workers' assessments.' Another wrote 'Communication is prompt and information is clear and precise.' These factors demonstrate how the home supports young people through working effectively with other agencies.

Staff ensure that young people are registered with relevant health professionals. Staff encourage young people who are anxious about certain treatments to overcome their fears. While some young people still need further encouragement, they have made progress in attending dental appointments. Staff take precautionary action if some young people have poor personal hygiene practices. Staff ensure that menus provide for a balanced diet, and intervene to control young people's access to unhealthy foods when necessary. One young person said: 'I think I eat healthy food, but they don't always think so.' Staff arrange for specialist sexual health advisors to visit young people, who then learn from and take responsibility after these sessions. These factors mean that the home provides a healthy environment for young people.

Managers and staff operate an individualised approach to young people's plans and care. There are individual risk assessments and individual missing personal protocols for each young person. Staff review and revise individual strategies in order to find a successful approach to managing specific behaviour. Staff explore and implement individual incentives to encourage young people to make progress. These factors mean that the home provides individually tailored support for young people that reflects their needs and closely reflects agreed placement plans.

The home encourages young people to engage in a variety of positive activities. Some enjoy these opportunities as much as is possible, though some others are more reluctant to try new experiences. The home identifies young people's diverse needs from the outset. Staff promote awareness of different cultures by providing young people with experiences of foods and information about traditions. Staff also promote awareness about sexual orientation because they take young people, who have gay friends, to 'gay pride' events.

The home is appropriately located. Managers ensure that the home's décor, furnishings and maintenance is such that it provides a homely and welcoming atmosphere for the young people.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The home maintains assessments and plans that set out and weigh the risks that

apply for each young person. Staff understand these and are aware of each young person's individual vulnerabilities and the agreed responses. The home creates new risk assessments in anticipation of new circumstances or planned activities. Risks are linked to actions by which staff are to seek to prevent the risk or respond if the risk occurs. Managers regularly review and update the risks and actions, for example in response to events. Managers ensure that young people are still able to take reasonable risks, according to their age and ability, for example lone travel to see family and friends. These practices demonstrate that the home safeguards young people by having clear risk assessments and mitigating actions. A social worker commented, in relation to very specific safeguarding situations: 'They learned the issues around safeguarding in relation to (this specific issue)... were professional... referred on information we needed to know about.'

The home's missing person's procedures accord with local police protocols. Staff have undertaken training in the operation of the protocols provided by the local police. Some young people stop going missing from the home. Other young people stopped going missing but have resumed following significant personal events. The home has clear risk assessments and individual protocols for each young person if they do go missing. The home develops these through effective collaboration with other agencies, including placing social workers and police, at safeguarding or professionals' meetings. Managers and staff make constructive contributions to specialist core assessment and safeguarding meetings. Individual protocols include safeguarding meetings in response to repeated episodes of going missing. Young people confirm that if they go missing staff regularly telephone them to check how they are and encourage them to return. These factors mean that, for those young people who do go missing, staff act as far as is as reasonably possible to keep them safe through these individualised procedures.

Staff encourage young people to develop positive behaviours through the use of individual incentives ranging from praise to material rewards and celebrating achievement. As a result, young people make significant progress in how they manage personal frustration. A social worker wrote in response to a questionnaire from the home, that staff: '...always acted in a positive manner and highlighted achievements, were encouraging and sensitive.' Staff have not used physical restraint as a measure of control since before January 2013. These factors mean that the home actively promotes positive behaviour.

Young people say they feel safe in the home and have adults there that they can raise concerns with. Managers carry out the full range of appropriate pre-recruitment checks on prospective staff members before allowing them to work with young people. Staff understand local safeguarding procedures and their responsibility to report suspected or alleged abuse. Staff ensure that the home is appropriately secure at night and when visitors arrive. Staff carry out regular checks on fire safety measures and equipment, as well as regular fire evacuation drills. These factors demonstrate that the home provides a safe environment for young people.

Leadership and management

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

Managers are committed to staff involvement and development. Managers involve staff in creating the home's development plan. They provide training to equip staff in anticipation that they will move up to the next level of the career ladder. Staff meetings always include discussions about specific policies, regulations and national minimum standards, including new developments such as police approaches to missing person's practices. Staff receive regular supervision which they value. Managers ensure that staff receive refresher training in core topics at appropriate intervals, as well as providing booster training if necessary. These factors show how managers create an environment for young people where staff are expected to keep their practice improving and have some responsibility for improving the home. This approach also stimulates staff enthusiasm to become more effective, for example by visiting an external therapeutic team in their own time in order to develop specific skills to support some young people.

Managers routinely monitor the home's records and annotate them to improve staff practice. The provider monitors the conduct of the home through regular visits and reports by someone independent of the management of the home. Managers review the quality of care in the home through regular evaluations of a range of records. Instead of undertaking these reviews at the minimum six monthly intervals, managers also carry out weekly and monthly audits. These factors mean managers promote young people's welfare by effective monitoring of the care they receive in the home.

Managers use both of those monitoring systems to inform, with staff involvement, their development plan for the home. The resulting plan includes both structural and procedural improvements, and goals identified from experiences with specific young people. The plan identifies targets for improvement, built on relevant strengths and weaknesses in the home. Managers routinely update the development plan as they achieve goals, for example the introduction of questionnaires to test neighbours' experience of the impact of the home. This integrated use of auditing and development tools provides for effective monitoring and improvement of care in the home because managers use sound evidence. These factors mean that young people benefit from care that is subject to continuous improvement.

Managers monitor the progress young people make in order to ensure strategies are effective, and to change strategies if they are not. Managers are able to show the impact of the home on young people's progress by comparing initial referral documentation to successive, subsequent records. For example, routine progress summaries, reports for reviews and independent care planning records. This means young people benefit from individual care managers and staff review and adjust in order to improve its effectiveness.

Following complaints from some neighbours in 2012 managers introduced a regular questionnaire by which neighbours can raise concerns before they become a significant issue. Since then there have been no concerns raised. This means that managers have promoted young people's welfare by being proactive to achieve

amicable relations between the home and the local community.

The home's statement of purpose is clear and the home operates within the stated aims and objectives. Young people receive a guide that accurately reflects the expectations on them and their rights. Managers and staff maintain clear records that are up to date, reflect young people's experience in the home and are stored securely. Managers also ensure that they notify Ofsted about significant events. This means that young people benefit from clarity about the care they should expect and a record of their experiences that reflects their life in the home.

Managers have employed sufficient, suitably qualified staff to address the needs of the young people accommodated. Managers make sure that specialists undertake periodic checks of gas and electrical equipment. This means that managers safeguard and promote young people's welfare through the deployment of competent personnel.

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.