

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sharon Lloyd / Denise Jolly
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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 privately owned and is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to six children and young people of either sex, aged between 11 and 17 years of age.

Overall effectiveness

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

Young people appreciate the good support that staff provide to meet their needs. They have good outcomes in all areas of development and this is recognised by parents and social workers as well as young people. Staff demonstrate commitment to young people. Through effective behaviour management strategies and good relationships, they support young people to develop confidence and prepare for the future.

All young people rate the home as 'outstanding' and recognise the progress they have made there. They report they get on well with the manager and the staff and know they have their best interests at heart. Parents say it is 'brilliant' and report that 'young people come on leaps and bounds'. Social workers comment on the massive improvement in young people's anger management, social interaction and improved levels of confidence. They attribute these to the good quality of care and effective relationships between young people and the staff team.

Young people raised concerns about the length of time they have to wait for damage to be repaired and their bedrooms to be decorated in accordance with their taste. They also raised concerns about a shortage of play equipment.

Although young people feel well cared for and safe, there are shortfalls in safeguarding and in leadership and management. These include shortfalls in recruitment processes and the health and safety of the physical environment, including the kitchen. The manager does not receive professional supervision and there are weaknesses in the monitoring of the operation of the home. Although staff have had training in safeguarding and in restraint management, not all staff know the correct procedures to ensure young people's safety and welfare are promoted. Shortfalls in staffing levels impact on the organisation and management of the home.

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
27 (2001)	ensure the manager receives appropriate training and supervision (Regulation 27 (4))	05/11/2011
4 (2001)	ensure all required information is contained in the Statement of Purpose and that it accurately reflects the operation of the home (Regulation 4 (1) (6))	05/11/2011
26 (2001)	ensure that full and satisfactory information is available on every staff member's file to demonstrate that each person is fit to work at the children's home (Regulation 26 (1-6))	30/11/2011
23 (2001)	undertake immediately a comprehensive health and safety risk assessment of potential hazards in the kitchen and forward a copy of the report to the inspector. (Regulation 23)	30/03/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that young people have access to a wide range of positive activities that promote their enjoyment, in particular, ensure there are adequate play materials in the home (Volume 5, statutory guidance, 2.127)
- ensure that the home provides a safe environment, that hazards are removed where possible and that any activities in which young people participate are so far as reasonably practicable, free from avoidable risks. In particular, ensure that young people are safe when using the kitchen. (Volume 5, statutory guidance, 2.60-2.64)
- ensure that staff work effectively in partnership with other agencies concerned with child protection and in particular they know how to respond to disclosures or allegations of abuse (NMS 4.7)
- ensure that reports of visits to the home made in accordance with regulation 33 demonstrate that proper scrutiny of the operation of the home has taken place and that young people have had the opportunity to comment upon their care (Volume 5, statutory guidance, 3.12)
- ensure that there are enough suitably qualified and experienced staff to meet the needs of the young people and that ancillary staff are not left in charge of young people (Volume 5, statutory guidance, 3.16)
- improve monitoring of the home's records and take action to address any failure to comply with the home's policies or shortfalls in recording (NMS 21.2)
- support staff to deal with conflict positively, in particular where young people are stealing from each other (Volume 5, statutory guidance, 2.87)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people have good outcomes and report they make good progress in all areas. They say they have improved their behaviour and anger management. A parent said, 'My child is 100% improved in all ways since being there'. A social worker said, 'I have goose bumps when I think of how well he has done there'. She noted the 'massive' increase in a young person's self esteem and social skills since being at the home.

Young people's mental, emotional and physical health needs are well met. For example, a young person who had put off having an important operation has done so since living at the home and this has had a major impact on the quality of the young person's life. Young people give up or reduce their level of smoking and reduce their dangerous misuse of alcohol. One said, 'I stopped smoking a year ago. One member of staff really helped me to stop'. They attend appointments with local dentists and opticians and are registered with local GPs. Their sexual health needs are well met and they know about local health facilities for young people. They are well looked after when they are ill and receive the treatment they need.

Young people make very good progress with their education and those who have not engaged in education prior to their admission attend well and achieve success in national examinations. A young person commented on the effective encouragement and support he receives to complete his homework and achieve well at school. A social worker commented on the 'imaginative and practical' way the staff are helping a young person who 'has been failed by the education system' to develop reading and writing skills. Three young people have completed their formal education and are applying for employment. One young person successfully obtained suitable employment supported by staff but unfortunately this has now ceased.

Young people prepare for independent living by budgeting, shopping and cooking independently. They also clean their own bedrooms and do their laundry. They use public transport wherever possible. They develop confidence and learn to make their own decisions. A parent commented, 'They have taught my child to stand on his own two feet. He has come on leaps and bounds'.

Young people enjoy a range of activities such as trips out with staff and annual holidays. They report that a lack of play equipment prevents them from fully enjoying the large garden. Young people do not participate in local clubs or contribute to the local community. They do, however, make a positive contribution to the home by participating in household chores and decisions about changes in the décor of the home.

Quality of care

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

Young people report that staff are concerned about their welfare. They say they can talk to staff about matters that concern them and they are listened to and supported. They consider that staff do their best to help them. Young people identified how staff help them. For example, 'They help me to keep off the booze', 'I am getting more skills and qualifications since being here' and 'I was putting myself in danger before. I go all crazy in my head. They help me stay calm'. A parent said, 'Staff talk to them and listen to them and explain things. They show the kids respect, so the kids respect them.'

Young people benefit from the support of the independent counsellor who contracts with the home. She provides an opportunity for them to talk about their concerns away from the home. They appreciate time spent with key workers; however, for some young people, this is infrequent because some key workers are part time staff members whose availability is limited.

Young people report that their monthly house meetings with staff can be combative. Decisions are not made or are not clear and as a result issues relating to the home and communal living are not always resolved. For example, they report that each young person stores their food in their allocated kitchen cupboard. Some young people steal food from others and this matter has not yet been resolved.

Young people know how to make a complaint and they say they know that the manager will do her best to address it quickly. However, they say that when it relates to furnishings and funding, responses take a long time and issues are not always resolved. For example, some have asked for broken furniture to be replaced and their bedrooms to be redecorated to suit their personal style, but this has not yet been accomplished, after several months.

The home is undergoing refurbishment so that the lounge and one bathroom provide a high standard of comfortable living accommodation. The kitchen has recently been refitted, also to a high standard. However, risks in the layout of the kitchen are not being managed well.

Young people confirmed their views are taken into account in the decoration of the home and choice of furnishings. Young people's bedrooms are in need of renovation and young people have chosen colour schemes and some soft furnishings and are waiting for this work to be completed. Young people sometimes sleep on unsuitable mattresses. The exterior of the home is in need of renovation. For example, mortar from between paving slabs needs replacing and exterior woodwork needs painting. This makes the home appear uncared for.

There are opportunities to engage in fun activities within the home. For example, a selection of board games and a number of electronic games are provided and young people particularly enjoy the electronic games. All young people have televisions in their bedrooms, which they enjoy when they want to relax on their own. Although a pool table is available, cues are broken so young people can not currently enjoy this game. There is a large garden but no outdoor equipment or balls. The young people said this is the main downfall of an otherwise excellent home.

Placement plans relating to individual young people are held on their confidential files. These demonstrate that young people's diverse and individual needs are recognised and addressed. For example, a young person's emotional wellbeing is supported through sessions with a counsellor, in accordance with their placement plan. Another young person's need to develop self esteem and a skill for later life are encouraged through enabling the young person to join a local sports club as a helper. Young people confirm they are encouraged to attend planning and review meetings focusing on their progress and needs. Some choose not to attend.

Young people maintain high levels of contact with their families and their social workers. Some young people are in daily contact with families and parents confirm that staff keep them up to date with their child's progress and that they are welcome to visit the home. One parent said, 'You feel at ease when you talk to them, they're brilliant'. Staff escort young people long distances for contact visits and understand the importance of promoting good relationships between young people and their families.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report they are safe in the home and are confident that staff keep them safe. They have sound relationships with staff and say they could approach any member of staff if they felt unsafe.

Five requirements relating to safeguarding were followed up and have been partially met. Young people report a low incidence of restraint and records demonstrate there have been only two restraints in the last year. Since then, the recording tool has been improved and made fit for purpose. However it has not yet been tested because there have been no further restraints in the home. Some staff have had training in behaviour managements and restraint, however, not all staff who need it have had refresher training.

There have been no allegations or complaints against staff. Although all staff have had training in safeguarding children, not all know how to respond appropriately to an allegation or disclosure of abuse. This means that should a young person make an allegation of an offence, there is the potential for their evidence to be contaminated. Records show that the incidence of young people being missing from care is low. Staff work closely with the police and other agencies to promote the safety of young people who are missing and ensure their fast and safe return.

Staff use effective behaviour management strategies which enable young people to develop self control and to manage their anger. Social workers report that young people 'thrive' in the well structured environment and settle well because of the way staff invest in young people and effectively manage their anti-social and challenging behaviour. Staff members develop good relationships with young people. They work

consistently and with commitment so that young people feel very well cared for. They are aware of each young person's particular safeguarding needs through risk assessments and take action to address them.

The home notifies serious events to the appropriate authorities. Episodes of aggressive behaviour from young people are sometimes dealt with by calling the police to the home and this may result in young people being arrested. A requirement to minimise the police involvement in the management of young people's challenging behaviour remains outstanding. Although no young people have been arrested since the requirement was made, the police have been called to the home and this poses a risk of criminalising young people unnecessarily.

Satisfactory health and safety measures and adequate routines are in place to promote the safety and wellbeing of young people. However, some shortfalls in the safety and cleanliness of the premises place young people at risk of physical harm. For example, the fire escape steps from the cellar are slippery and cluttered with debris. This means that in the event of a fire, any young person using the laundry or pool room would be at risk of slipping on the escape route.

Staff files demonstrate shortfalls in recruitment and selection procedures. For example, they do not demonstrate that references are verified by telephone calls and some references are not dated and signed. Files of established members of staff show no evidence of decision making processes relating to previous convictions and gaps in employment are not routinely explored. Records of interviews are not kept.

Leadership and management

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

The manager has managed the home for five years and has nearly completed a qualification in caring for children and young people and in the management of a children's home. The deputy manager is suitably experienced and holds a relevant child care qualification. Not all care staff are qualified in caring for children and young people so the home cannot demonstrate that staff have the recommended qualifications and competence to meet the needs of the young people.

The Statement of Purpose sets out the aims and objectives of the home. However, it does not provide an accurate explanation of the therapeutic services on offer. It also contains inaccurate information relating to staff qualifications. This means the document does not provide a fully accurate reflection of the home's services for commissioners and parents.

The consultant is a qualified social worker who carries out monthly monitoring visits to the home on behalf of the provider. Whilst monthly monitoring visits are routinely carried out, records of the visits do not routinely record how young people's views are sought or the reasons as to why they were not seen during the visit.

A number of issues in respect of staffing levels and deployment have yet to be

satisfactorily addressed. Staffing levels are currently depleted because some staff have moved to work at the company's other home and some staff work part time. One staff member has been recruited but this does not cover the shortfall. Gaps in the rota are mostly covered by staff working overtime and a small number of relief staff. The staff team demonstrate commitment to providing young people with consistency of care.

Although the reduction in staff numbers has had no noticeable impact on the outcomes for young people, there has been an impact on the organisation and management of the home. The manager spends a large proportion of time working alongside staff to support young people so that their needs continue to be met. This means she is not in full time day to day management of the home and there are shortfalls in the organisation, management and monitoring of the home.

The manager receives no formal professional supervision. She seeks informal guidance from the consultant as needed but the lack of formal arrangements for supervision leave the manager at risk and lacking in confidence about some aspects of the management role. There is some role confusion for staff members and this means young people are not clear about whether to approach the handyman or the manager in relation to decisions about new furnishings and equipment. Staff members who are not employed or supervised as care staff assume responsibility for the supervision of young people and take on the role of care staff. For example, the company's handyman escorted a young person to a new placement.

Requirements and recommendations from previous inspections have been mostly addressed. Some requirements relating to safeguarding are repeated. Minor discrepancies between records and missing information result in an unclear picture of events in the home, including how well the staff carry out fire safety checks. Management monitoring has not adequately identified shortfalls in recording or in housekeeping.

Staff report they are very well supervised, supported and advised by the manager and deputy, who are always available to them. New staff, in particular, appreciate the good guidance that the manager provides. They have regular staff meetings where they discuss the operation of the home, consistency of working practices and young people's individual needs and progress. They initiate changes to placement plans as necessary. They report they are well trained. However, they recognise they would benefit from training that relates to a young person's specific needs but that this has not been provided.

Social workers and parents speak very highly of the service the home provides and comment on the excellent communication with themselves as well as the very high levels of care and concern they show to young people. One parent said, 'they've really looked after my child well. It's brilliant. We couldn't have asked for a better place'. Another said, 'It's the best home I've seen...and I've seen quite a few'. A social worker said, 'the difference in this young person has been absolutely huge. He has blossomed and is really settled there'.

Equality and diversity practice is **satisfactory**.