

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC016697
Inspection date	01/10/2013
Inspector	Barbara Davies
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	18/02/2013
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a privately owned children's home which is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four young people with emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The home continues to be fully occupied.

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 **outstanding**.

Young people thrive through receiving personalised care that promotes all aspects of their individual identity. A social worker said, I have witnessed that staff support children and utilise a bespoke strategy for each young person rather than a scripted response for all.'

Staff meet young people's individual needs as set out in their placement plan. From their starting point, young people have made exceptional progress, particularly in their education and their behaviour. This is supported by one professional who commented, the children I work with have been placed in this establishment have been there for a long period of time and have come a long way during the process.'

The service is extremely child-focused and the views of young people are central to practice. Staff are strong advocates for young people. They support young people to express their own views within the home; during statutory reviews and at other times, raise concerns on their behalf should this be requested. They also support empower young people to raise concerns on their own behalf, such as requesting changes to minutes of a statutory review meeting. A professional commented, 'This is an outstanding provision where I see that children are held central to the ethos of all staff involved in their care.'

The very positive views expressed by young people about the care they receive are almost unreservedly supported by social workers, parents and carers.

Leadership of the service is dynamic and there is a desire to continually improve the

service. The rigorous monitoring of practice informs the development of the service.

There are no breaches of regulation identified. Recommendations for improvement relate to supporting young people to take age appropriate risks; more robustly raising concerns with a placing authority and the storage of confidential information.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- encourage children to take appropriate risks as a normal part of growing up (NMS 4.4)
- ensure confidential information is always stored securely (NMS 22)
- escalate to a more senior level within the local authority, concerns raised by a young person with that local authority to which they have not received a response. This refers specifically to concerns about the lack of a pathway plan and amendments requested in respect of factual inaccuracies within the minutes of a statutory review. (Volume 5 statutory guidance, para, 2.31)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people benefit from a stable environment with a well-established, consistent staff team. Over time they develop and sustain attachments with the staff and are helped to strengthen their relationships with their family and friends. Through the individual and regular therapeutic counselling they receive, young people develop an understanding of their background and history and develop emotional resilience.

Young people become self-aware and are better able to articulate their thoughts and feelings. The long-term nature of the placements has many benefits for young people although these sometimes make it more difficult for young people to make an emotional detachment when moves are planned. In acknowledgement of this, the home is a strong advocate for moves to be well considered for impact and well planned.

Young people receive excellent healthcare advice at an age-appropriate level. Over the tea table and at other times, they regularly engage in lively discussions with staff about topical subjects such as, the impact of substance misuse. Young people enjoy these discussions and, as a result, they are well-informed about key issues that could potentially pose a risk to their health. They do not engage in risk-taking behaviour and there is no substance, alcohol or drug misuse.

Young people remain healthy because of the routine health checks they receive and the rigorous monitoring of their individual health requirements. Meals are traditional, hearty, healthy and nutritious; and provide young people with a well-balanced diet. Although no young people currently participate in any regular, organised physical activity, they keep physically fit by participating in activities that are organised as part of the daily routine. Young people often accompany staff on bicycle rides and whenever possible staff walk to school with young people. Swimming at the open air pool has been a regular activity that everyone has enjoyed throughout the summer.

Young people make good and sometimes exceptional progress in their education. They all maintain exceptionally high attendance levels with only occasional absences due to illness. There are examples of young people who have successfully been re-integrated back into mainstream school after long term exclusions and who, on moving onto secondary school, have achieved levels four and five in their SATS results. This is in line with their peers. Other young people have been successfully supported to complete vocational courses at a level in line with their ability. Where transitions to the next phase of education causes disruption for young people, the home works tirelessly, flexibly and imaginatively with placing social workers, parents, schools and colleges in an attempt to maintain the school placement.

Young people are helped to acquire practical skills ahead of their move to independence. For instance they meet with friends in the community; independently travel to college and are involved in shopping and cooking. However, social workers query whether the nurturing nature of the home inhibits young people from taking age-appropriate risks. The absence of a pathway plan further exacerbates the matter but is the primary responsibility of the placing authority.

Quality of care

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

Staff have consistently high aspirations for all children and young people and young people recognise that staff are genuinely and consistently concerned with their welfare. Education is highly valued and promoted well. The home is imaginative in its approach to education and has successfully addressed gaps in young people's education with the use of home tutors, resulting in moves back to a mainstream school or a college placement. The home works closely with education providers and provides practical classroom support within the school and college environment for young people who are assessed as having a higher level of support needs. This has been an effective in helping young people sustain educational placements that may otherwise be at risk.

Young people progress in all aspects of their development because their well-being is at the centre of staff practice and staff are committed to giving them the best possible chance of success. Although young people do not currently have specific interests or hobbies that they follow, they take part in a range of stimulating, age-appropriate activities through which they learn to make constructive use of their leisure time.

Staff set clear, consistent and appropriate boundaries to which young people respond and behaviour is consistently good. Through the skilful work undertaken, young people form strong, trusting relationships with staff and with each other. They learn to respect each other's differences and develop an appreciation of each other's qualities. A young person said, 'I like spending time with my house-mate and I like it when an ex-resident comes to visit.' Young people enjoy taking in activities both individually and as a group. Their views about their care and the running of the home are highly valued and are taken into account within placement planning and when planning outings, menus and changes to the décor.

There have been no complaints in the interim since the last inspection and within questionnaire responses young people, parents, carers and placing authorities consistently indicate extremely high levels of satisfaction with the service. Young people know how to complain but prefer to deal with things directly and informally with staff. One young person commented 'I say it as it is and the staff respond to me quickly.' A social worker commented, 'I can't fault the quality of care provided'.

Arrangements for the storage and administration of medication are safe and the health needs of young people are well met. By conducting their own research, in addition to the advice received from medical professionals, staff are well informed about the specific health needs that young people have. Staff receive training in how to manage specific issues and make sure that young people have access to the services they require.

The home provides a homely and comfortable environment in which young people feel relaxed and at ease. The need for the refurbishment of the sitting room is recognised within the home's development plan. Young people invest in the home, partly as a result of their ability to have their own pets. The Registered Manager's dogs are also frequent and welcome visitors.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

There is an exceptionally strong safeguarding culture in the home. The manager is proactive in consulting and working alongside external agencies, such as the police and the local safeguarding board in order to influence policy development in the area within which the home is located. Staff are well versed in safe care practices and know how to protect both themselves and young people. When asked whether staff understand how to protect children and safeguard their welfare a professional associated with the service responded 'absolutely evidenced throughout the staff group.'

Young people do not report bullying to be an issue and in questionnaire responses all of them said that they get along together most of the time.

Staff are very knowledgeable about safeguarding issues and the potential for child sexual exploitation. All staff are trained to at least a level two in the local authority safeguarding procedures and three senior staff have attended the level three training; this demonstrates a real commitment to promoting good safeguarding practice. Staff are aware of safeguarding procedures and of the internal and external procedures for reporting concerns.

There are no incidents of young people going missing from the home although there are a couple of occasions where young people have absented themselves from school without permission. Although such instances are extremely rare, staff have a good understanding of the likely known movements of young people at these times and have agreed 'safe places' where they go to meet with staff. These strategies are effective in helping staff to quickly locate young people and ensure a speedy and safe return to the home.

Behaviour is well managed. Physical restraint is rarely used as staff are usually effective in the applying diversionary techniques to de-escalate situations and avoid the use of. The home has its own accredited behaviour management trainer and staff benefit from regularly re-visiting behaviour management techniques during team meetings.

Sanctions are used sometimes and mostly relate to an early bed-time. Young people perceive this to be fair and staff see this as a time that they spend with young people to reflect on the day's events. However, the appropriateness of issuing this sanction to an older teenager was explored with the Registered Manager who agreed to review this.

Senior staff have attended safer recruitment training and the home's procedures for recruiting new staff include all the checks required to assess a candidate's suitability to work with children. These are rigorously applied in practice. Information submitted by applicants is scrutinised for inconsistencies and there are recent examples of applicants not being appointed for giving false information.

The home provides a safe environment with regular maintaining and testing of all equipment. Young people know what to do in the event of a fire as they regularly take part in fire drills. Staff complete health and safety training relevant to their role, for instance care of hazardous substances and manual handling.

Leadership and management

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

The responsible individual is also the Registered Manager. She is highly qualified for her role, holding qualifications in both social work and counselling. She is committed and demonstrates great enthusiasm, energy and drive. These qualities are replicated throughout the staff team who are all passionate about their work. As a result, young people are settled and confident in their environment.

Young people enjoy stability from a small, cohesive and consistent staff team. No new staff have started working in the home since the last full inspection in July 2012. The staff know the young people well and they in turn know the staff well.

Despite first impressions to the contrary, staff are knowledgeable, competent and confident in their roles. This can be attributed to the considerable time and financial investment made in the support and training they receive. Staff are regularly supervised in their role and records demonstrate that their practice is scrutinised within these sessions. Staff meetings are regular and provide forums for care planning; information-sharing and healthy challenge of each other's practice. Given the small size of the staff team, information is easily disseminated among colleagues and this contributes to the provision of consistent care.

Initially, staff complete an internal induction training programme that equips them with an understanding of their basic roles and responsibilities. All staff receive regular updates on the core competencies. All, except one staff member who is currently completing this, holds a professional qualification commensurate with their role. Their knowledge, skills and practice are enhanced and kept up to date through attending specialist training events, such as a recent training event attended by three staff on the Munroe report.

The provider is not required to complete visits in line with Regulation 33 as she is in day-to-day charge of the home. Although one such report from an independent person has been completed during this inspection period, this practice has not continued. However, obtaining a regular, objective view of the home's practice from a professional who is independent of the home, is being considered as part of the home's development plan.

In the meantime, the provider regularly monitors the records and practice of the home. Reports completed in line with Regulation 34 are thorough and show an insightful awareness of the home's strengths and weaknesses alongside demonstrating a commitment to the continual improvement of practice. A professional associated with the service said, 'I find that the staff are always looking to learn and improve their service and do seek feedback in order to be able to achieve this.'

The home's development plan also identifies areas for improvement; these are both realistic and achievable within the timeframes set. For instance, the refurbishment of the sitting room. The provider was not required or recommended to make any improvements following the interim inspection of the home in February 2013.

Young people's files are well-maintained and mostly stored securely. They contain information that is thorough and up to date in relation to the recording of events that take place in the lives of young people. Should young people choose to access their files, the information will give them a sound understanding of their time in the home and the reasons for decisions being made.

There is evidence that the home is robust in contacting placing social workers to

request that missing information, such as a pathway plan, is completed and forwarded to the home. However, there is no evidence of this being escalated to the team manager or to the officer within that authority who has responsibility for Looked after Children. While not the responsibility of the home, the absence of this information means that there is a lack of formal agreed direction and identified timescales.

There is evidence of good partnership working and networking which enhance the opportunities available to young people. This is particularly evident within the education sector. Here, partnership working between the home, parents, social worker and school have enabled young people to be successfully supported back into mainstream school and more recently to avoid exclusion.

Some social workers query how well the home supports their plans in relation to moving young people onto the next phase in their life. However, the home is balancing the different dynamics involved; they are preparing young people for likely moves while supporting them to make a challenge should they want to.

There have been no significant events that require reporting to external bodies although the home is aware of the requirement to do this should it be necessary. The home maintains almost daily contact with placing authorities to keep them abreast of developments and social workers report excellent levels of communication.

The home provides a safe environment which is well maintained. Health and safety requirements are met.

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.