

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Simon Morley
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Date of last inspection	26/03/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a privately owned children's home. It is registered to provide accommodation for up to four children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties. When young people need additional support to move into more independent living they can stay at the home after they are 18.

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 has gone through a period of significant change in the last four months. Three young people have moved out of which two were successful outcomes. Four weeks before the inspection three younger children moved into the home all with challenging emotional and behavioural difficulties.

The manager has struggled to get good quality information from the placing authorities to assist in new children's admissions. Admissions have been close together and left staff ill prepared to care and support children's diverse and complex needs. This has impacted on the outcomes and levels of safety children experience that were previously judged as outstanding. Information currently available to help children and young people understand about life in the home is not in suitable formats to meet all their needs.

The manager is new to the post and started at the beginning of April this year. Before that he worked in the home as the deputy manager. He has not yet applied to register as the manager with Ofsted.

Two children placed out of authority are on-roll at school in their own local authority area but are not going to this school. Staff in the home work hard to provide home tuition. This is a similar situation for a third child who only has a part-time school place. Staff provide firm boundaries, routines and structure for the children and have made some early successes with improved behaviour. Staffing levels have been increased to help cope with the frequent squabbles and tantrums of the children and

encourage better behaviour.

The impact of recent admissions has affected a young person still living in the home who is working towards achieving more independent living. Institutional practices have started to creep in. The noise and behaviour of younger children are not compatible with young people struggling with the transition to adulthood. This transition is further compromised with levels of ability to make appropriate social relationships and manage personal finances.

Safety is given a high priority with various strategies of risk management to keep all children and young people safe. This is a challenging time for staff with the admissions of children so close together.

The staff team are positive and enthusiastic about what they can achieve. They are motivated and want to see the best for the children and young people in their care. This is supported by good quality training although not all staff have achieved the recommended qualifications. There is a strong commitment to improving the service that is shared by the staff team and manager. This is reflected in the levels of management monitoring and development plans for the home. However checks undertaken by the registered provider do not focus enough on how well children and young people make good progress.

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
2000	ensure the manager is registered under this Part in respect of the home (Care Standards Act 2000, Part II Section 11)	03/08/2012
11 (2001)	ensure the children's home is conducted so as to promote and make proper provision for the welfare of children accommodated there, in particular ensure that admissions to the home are compatible for both the needs of children already living in the home and for children moving into the home and avoid institutional practice (Regulation 11 (1) (a))	31/07/2012
12A (2001)	agree and sign the plan for the child's placement in accordance with the provisions in Regulation 9 of the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (Regulation 12A (1))	31/07/2012
18 (2001)	promote the educational achievement of children including regular attendance at school and where applicable at college (Regulation 18(1) (b))	03/09/2012
28	maintain a record in respect of each child accommodated in the	31/07/2012

(2001)	home which includes a copy of any plan of care of the child prepared by his placing authority and of the placement plan. (Regulation 28 (1) (a))	
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Recommendations

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

- ensure staff have up-to-date information about each child's educational attainment and progress (NMS 8.7)
- ensure children receive the support they need to prepare them for adulthood in particular learn to establish appropriate social relationships and develop financial capability, knowledge and skills (NMS 12)
- make available to children a copy of the children's guide in suitable formats that meet their communication needs, age and understanding (NMS 13)
- ensure all existing staff in post before 1 April 2011 attain a minimum level 3 qualification (NMS 18.5)
- ensure that visits in accordance with Regulation 33 focus on how well the home supports children to enjoy and achieve. (Statutory Guidance, Volume 5 paragraph 3.12)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Outcomes for children and young people living in the home are variable. There has been some recent successes with young people achieving very well in their lives. This is not consistent for all young people.

Children recently admitted to the home are not in full-time education. Young people struggle to maintain a place in college and younger children only go to school on a part-time basis or not at all. However, children and young people do benefit from extra educational programmes that care staff in the home are providing. Unfortunately, outcomes from this are compromised by the lack of information about children's educational needs, current attainment and future targets.

Compared to their starting points on admission to the home children are making good progress with improvements in their behaviour. Children respond well to the boundaries, structure and routines in the home that are appropriate to their age and understanding. Children are learning how to build positive relationships and to treat people respectfully.

Children and young people benefit from regular involvement in activities in the community. This helps develop their social skills and promotes their individual

hobbies, interests and lifestyles. Young people benefit from the efforts of staff to help them learn about their backgrounds, culture and religion. As a result, young people are able to explore and experiment with their identity. They also grow up with a better understanding of why they are in care.

Children and young people do acquire suitable practical and life skills to help prepare them for adult life. However, young people struggle in particular areas with the transition to adulthood. This includes sustaining appropriate social relationships and developing skills and knowledge to manage their finances. This compromises the readiness to move on into more independent living.

The impact of new admissions has effected a younger person still living in the home. This is reflected in comments such as 'this used to be a good home until this lot moved in'. When all the children are together it is a very loud, noisy environment and there is a danger of slipping into institutional practices. For example, very recent use of plastic cutlery and cups, locking food away and locking of internal doors. This is not conducive in supporting young people to live like adults.

Quality of care

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

Staff want the best for children and are consistently focused on their welfare, health and safety. This is reflected in some of the comments from young people, for example, 'this is the best place I have ever lived, staff are so cool'.

Staff work hard to build up positive relationships with children and young people they look after. Firm, fair boundaries and honest open discussions with children and young people lead to improvements in behaviour and a reduction in conflict. This is supported with individualised rewards and goals for children and young people to realistically achieve. Similarly any consequences for poor behaviour are individualised and reviewed to ensure their effectiveness with regard to the age and understanding of individual children. Parents commented 'behaviour is changing from bad to good, children are learning boundaries'.

Staff are flexible and have adapted their practice and routines of the home to meet the needs of a younger group of children new to the home. The wishes and views of these children also significantly influence the running of the home. Children are able to choose their goals, decide how they spend their free time, go shopping with staff, and choose food and items for the home and their bedrooms.

In-house care plans are in place and these become more detailed over time as additional background information about children and young people is obtained from placing authorities. The manager ensures that planning meetings with other professionals contribute directly to children and young people's individual care plans. Staff ensure on a daily basis these plans are implemented to meet the diverse needs of children and young people. Individual needs based on age, gender, race, religion and culture are suitably promoted.

Children and young people enjoy a range of activities such as, baking, painting, trips out, going to the park, bug collecting, educational activities, music and computers which promotes their individual interests and chosen lifestyles.

Although children and young people are not going to school or college on a full-time basis, staff are working hard to address this. The manager ensures there are regular meeting with other agencies and staff are creative in providing additional educational programmes at home. Staff also work proactively with a range of agencies and professionals to promote positive outcomes in other aspects of the lives of children and young people. This includes the physical and emotional health, social and behavioural development. As stakeholders and parents commented, 'staff are very supportive all round' and 'he's come on well, can't fault the staff'.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people generally feel safe living in the home and being out in the community. Staff try and limit the amount of risk taking behaviour children and young people engage in. There are plenty of adults for children and young people to talk to if they have any concerns.

Young people rarely go missing from the home and staff ensure they return safely. Close supervision of younger children means that if one of them should leave the home there are always staff on hand to follow them and guide them home safely.

Children and young people are generally free from bullying. Staff respond well to aggressive incidents between children. The amount of arguing, shouting and screaming from children compromises staff efforts in maintaining a peaceful and calm environment. This is exacerbated by the number of admissions to the home in a very short space of time.

Behaviour management practice is suitable. Children and young people are responding to the strategies staff are using. There is limited use of sanctions if a child or young person does not behave well. Staff are patient and manage such incidents well. Use of sanctions is monitored well both for their effect and appropriateness. Physical restraint is rarely ever used. This is seen as a last resort to protect the safety of a child or young person.

In-house care planning ensures risks to individual children and young people are identified. Protective factors, for example, higher staffing levels and closer supervision of children are in place to keep children and young people safe. Risk management is thorough and regularly reviewed to ensure this part of care practice meets children and young people's needs and reflects their progress and development. Gaps in safety measures do arise when children are admitted with a lack of information about their needs and backgrounds. The manager strives hard to address this through planning meetings and reviews with placing authorities.

Staff know the safeguarding procedures in the home and are confident in using them. Concerns about a child or young person's safety are reported to the appropriate authorities. This helps ensure children and young people are suitably protected from any harm.

Staff turnover is low and new staff are appointed in line with the registered provider's recruitment and vetting procedures. These are thorough and comprehensive to ensure that staff are suitable to work in a children's environment.

Leadership and management

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

The manager took up his new post at the beginning of April this year. He has not yet applied to Ofsted to become the Registered Manager of the home as required by legislation.

Staff and the manager have a wide range of experience in working with children and young people. This is supported by a good quality training programme, development opportunities for staff and effective supervision. In addition, all staff have or are working towards the minimum required qualification or higher. As a result, children and young people are looked after by staff who are well trained, competent and supported to meet their needs. All staff agreed that 'training helps us support children and young people to improve their behaviour'.

The home is suitably resourced to meet the needs of children and young people. Staffing levels have been increased to cope with the needs of children new to the home. The manager regularly monitors the quality of care. This has identified areas for improvement. These include producing a children's guide to the home and information about complaints in different formats. This is to meet the communication needs of all children living in the home. In the meantime staff take time to explain this important information to children. The manager and staff have also planned to make children's bedrooms more personal and appropriate to their age and level of needs. Development plans have improved as recommended at the last inspection, with a better focus on benefits for children and young people.

Monitoring by the registered provider of the management of the home is regular. This meets minimum standards but does not focus on outcomes for children and young people. Subsequent reports fail to inform how well children and young people progress and the reasons for this. As a result, this is a missed opportunity to consider further developments of the service for the benefit of children and young people. For example the quality of the admissions process does not appear in any development plans.

Responsibility for admissions to the home is shared between the registered provider and manager. The current process is poor. Staff and the manager only have partial information about the social, educational, health and developmental needs of

children. Although the manager does challenge placing authorities to provide this information he has not been successful. The lack of individual care and placement plans from placing authorities compromises the outcomes, safety and placement stability for children. The manager commented that in his experience 'all admissions are like this' and referred to the start of his new role as 'a baptism of fire'.

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.