

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Morgan
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This privately operated home provides care for up to five young men with emotional and behavioural difficulties; it provides a specialist service to young people who present significant risks to others. Young people have exclusive access to a registered school that is also managed by the organisation and each meets with a therapist every week.

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**.

At the last full inspection in December 2012 the service was judged to be outstanding. Since then the service has maintained a high level of consistent care and was making good progress at its interim inspection in March 2013. Outcomes for young people are very good and levels of protection in particular are excellent; there are hardly any safeguarding issues. Highly effective support is given to each young person in line with their individual risks and needs. This is based on full programmes of activities and education and effective behaviour management strategies. The overall judgement is good this time. Recommendations are made to improve the organisation and tracking of young people's progress so that this is more evident. Also, it is necessary for sustained improvement to occur that there is sufficient evaluation undertaken during monitoring exercises.

Young people are pleased with the home and feel safe in it despite their natural reservations. One said, 'The staff are fabulous, but I can't wait to move on.' External professionals, such as social workers, express high levels of satisfaction with the progress that young people make. One said, 'I can't praise the home highly enough.' During the variety of consultation exercises that have occurred they have identified no areas of concern.

Equal opportunities are promoted well both directly through a programme of frequent meetings with young people and also indirectly through strong role-modelling. Young people's individual needs arising from their backgrounds are

addressed thoroughly and effective communication is established with their families, wherever possible. This is an important contribution to the long-term effectiveness of the care packages.

The service benefits from well-informed and consistent management. The particular needs of this client group are fully understood and improvements are continually being made in light of professional developments. Their rights as children to as many opportunities as possible are promoted. Young people are engaged and consulted as a matter of course, which contributes to their self-confidence and understanding of their circumstances.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- implement effective procedures for monitoring the activities of the home. This is with regard to showing in the monitoring exercises any patterns and trends and evaluating them (NMS 21.1)
- ensure each child's placement plan is monitored by a key worker who ensures that the requirements of the plan are implemented in the day-to-day care of that child. This is with regard to those requirements being measurable, attainable and addressed in a timely way. (NMS 25.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people experience good relationships with the staff, therapist and teachers. As a result they learn transferable skills about relationships that are reflected in increased levels of independence in the community and demonstrably reduced levels of risk-taking behaviour. They take up new interests and develop their self-confidence. They complete charity events and develop hobbies such as growing vegetables and volunteering. Their achievements are celebrated and photographed. As a result, young people are more able to accept challenges and react appropriately to difficulties.

Carefully managed admissions usually occur in a planned way for each new resident. They receive a wide range of information about the service and what to expect, which they consider to be well organised and a positive start to their placements. Subsequently, young people accept and complete comprehensive daily programmes, including keeping their large bedrooms tidy. This leads to improved self-discipline as well as clear progress in their education and training. They all achieve high levels of attendance and most complete recognised courses and work-experience in line with their peers.

Young people learn to promote their own good health, for example by stopping smoking, and they achieve age-appropriate weights and heights. They also make particular progress with their emotional health. They become able to concentrate for appropriate periods and reflect on their negative experiences in safe and constructive ways. This helps them articulate their feelings and move forward substantially in their relationships with family members and others. Consequently they are also more able to benefit from the regular recreational opportunities, such as guitar lessons, laser quest and ice skating. When asked what he liked about the home, one young person replied, 'Everything really.' Other consultation exercises over a period of time also show particularly high levels of satisfaction amongst young people.

Quality of care

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

Staff provide strong role models for young people through a variety of ages, genders and cultural backgrounds. The direct care of young people who have deep-seated difficulties arising from severe trauma is exceptional in many areas. Young people are consistently provided with individual respect that encourages them to show positive regard to staff. The accommodation is spacious both inside and out, is of a good standard, and is appreciated by young people. There is also a particularly low level of staff turnover, which facilitates trusting relationships and develops the expertise of staff.

A challenging timetable is used to provide a clear structure to each week, which is in addition to education placements. Young people are expected and helped to fully engage, which they do. This means they have meetings every week with their therapist, three evening workshops a week as a group, and further meetings individually with their key workers. Topics are wide-ranging and are designed to educate and stimulate young people. They address issues such as social diversity as well as offending behaviours and stereotypical attitudes. As one member of staff commented, 'This is not an easy placement for young people.' On the other hand, young people feel fully engaged with the home through the meetings and quality assurance exercises and know they make a difference. They also know how to make a formal complaint but rarely choose to do so; no complaints have been received from anyone-else either.

Up-to-date placement plans are compiled with each young person and a similar process is used for their transitions to adulthood. The plans reflect the views of other professionals and parents, obtained through regular focus groups, and serve to maximise the consistency of support experienced by each young person. This important process, in turn, contributes directly to their outcomes. The plans are of a good standard overall although the targets are less precise and measurable than possible. This means that implementation and progress are more difficult for the manager to identify and evaluate.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people recognise that they are being kept safe and they learn how to keep themselves safe. One young person said, 'I've done well overall in reducing my incidents', which he has. There are exceptionally high expectations of young people that are reinforced rigorously. This occurs to the extent that risk assessment documents are read and re-signed by young people each time an event, such as attending college, occurs. Staff too have a high level of understanding about risks inside and outside the home and are alert to the unexpected. As a result, there are very few safeguarding incidents, no young people go missing, and criminal activity is rare. On only one occasion since the last inspection have staff had to call the police when behaviours became untenable. Social workers consider that the verbal and written communication with them is outstanding and that young people make excellent progress with their self-control.

Behaviour management techniques focus on encouraging and rewarding appropriate behaviour. However, staff are trained to use physical interventions when necessary and young people are held safely on the floor if required. It is clearly accepted that this is highly undesirable and all steps are taken to avoid the need occurring in the first place. Staff and young people are thoroughly de-briefed afterwards and behaviour management plans amended with the result that repetitions decline. Particularly close attention is paid to young people's use of mobile phones and similar technology.

The high levels of success are due to the effective organisation of young people based on extremely good relationships between them and staff. Young people emphasise that the rules are 'fair' and that staff treat everyone equally, which is extremely important to them. Young people understand that they accumulate privileges and that if their behaviour deteriorates they may lose a level of responsibility. Responsibility programmes are effectively used to gradually test and establish young people as safe members of the home and then the community.

At the same time, the senior team challenge preconceived notions about how much independence young people who have displayed sexually harmful behaviour should receive. This is occurring within a framework of external professionals so that the pace of change is acceptable, the public are protected, but the rights and needs of the young people are protected. The manager attends conferences of specialists in this area of care and also networks with managers of similar homes so that the practices of his team are up-to-date. Policies and procedures are current as is the refresher training for all staff.

Leadership and management

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

The home is led by a highly experienced and competent manager who ensures there

is a high level of skill and continuity in the staff team. The manager has an excellent understanding of the challenges facing the service and compiles and addresses developmental issues accordingly. No recommendations were raised at the last inspection. Improvements have included the safe use of technology in the home. Also, young people were consulted about the interactive young person's guide and they compiled a cook book with staff. A vegetable patch has been developed in the garden this year too. Important progress has been made in the sensitive area of permitting young people appropriate levels of independence.

The service benefits from an extensive range of monitoring exercises, including surveys of stakeholders. Young people are always part of the consultation exercises. These produce overwhelmingly positive feedback. Several professionals reported on the 'impressive professionalism' and on the noticeable improvement in young people's development and maturity. In addition, the manager has introduced a new system for capturing visitors' initial views about the home; there is also a suggestion box for young people to use. Monitoring by the manager and by a representative of the organisation occur regularly and ensure that routine shortfalls are addressed. However, these processes do not clearly evaluate the impact of the service and therefore contribute less than possible to continual improvement. Records are presented particularly well and show that young people see their records regularly and understand them.

In terms of the evaluation of the levels of risk posed by young people, the records show that clear progress has occurred. The progress of members of staff is also clearly logged and benefits from the views of young people. Their targets are described appropriately so they can be evaluated accurately. Training programmes are up-to-date and staff receive thorough support. Their skills are developed both generally and specifically to do with the specialist purpose of the home. They are able to cover for each other and there is good capacity within the senior team to improve the service further.

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.