

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Dawn Bennett
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home provides care and accommodation for up to five young people of either gender who have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. The home is owned by a private company.

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**.

This is a good service that impacts positively on young people's lives. Young people enjoy warm, positive and constructive relationships with staff, underpinned by a clear framework of expectations. Staff are well-managed by an experienced Registered Manager who ensures they are well supported. This enhances staff's ability to promote the welfare of young people and keep them safe. There is regular internal management scrutiny of care practice in the home. Working relationships with other professionals, for example education, police and social workers are strong and this helps young people make good progress.

One requirement and two recommendations have been made as a result of this inspection. The effectiveness and appropriateness of consequences given to young people to discourage negative behaviour are not being monitored and practice is not being challenged.

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
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17B (2001)	ensure that within 24 hours of the use of any measure of control, restraint or discipline in a children's home, a written record is made in a volume kept for the purpose of which shall include the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure. (regulation 17B (3) (f))	31/10/2012
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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 sanctions for behaviour are clear, reasonable and fair and are understood by all staff and children (NMS 3.8)
- ensure children develop and practice skills to build and maintain positive relationships, be assertive and resolve conflicts positively. (NMS 3.5).

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are developing good personal, emotional and social skills, which help them with their independence, their self-esteem and to sustain positive relationships with their peers and adults. Young people know the aims of their placement because they are proactively engaging with their key workers on a regular basis and participate in their reviews. As a result, they are successfully talking about and addressing a wide range of topics and issues and have clear aims for the future.

Young people who have not previously accessed health care or led healthy lifestyles are living in a healthy environment where their health needs are identified and services are now provided to meet them. As a result good progress is achieved with young people having the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their own health and lifestyles. Young people who have historically not attended medical appointments now understand the importance of accessing services and are seeing the positive impacts of seeking guidance and taking appropriate medication.

Young people at the home enjoy healthy nutritious meals that meet their dietary needs. All young people are involved in planning, shopping for and preparing meals to some degree depending upon their age and ability.

Young people understand the importance of healthy lifestyles because it is successfully integrated into the ethos of the home. For example, exercise and outdoor activities are promoted and there are clear incentives to understand and stop unhealthy practices, such as smoking. Health issues are explored in day-to-day discussions, key worker sessions and through education. Smoking cessation programmes have ensured that the majority of young people do not smoke.

All young people have good attendance in line with their current educational timetables. Young people who have historically been excluded from school or not attended are successfully supported to attend and make good progress. There are strong relationships between the home and education providers. There is regular communication, which means there is a consistent approach to promoting each individual's education. Young people are rewarded for good achievements and attendance, which is resulting in good educational progress.

Outside of education, young people have active social lives and a good awareness of their immediate and wider community. They use a range of local facilities and resources. They enjoy going to the gym, walking and cycling. They attend community based groups and clubs or enjoy their own free time away from the house. Staff are proactive and positive in meeting young people's needs in relation to personal identity, and are both accepting and encouraging of safe self-expression.

As young people approach adulthood they increase their knowledge and skills to prepare them for moving into further or higher education, training and employment. The routine of the home helps them develop financial skills, capability and knowledge. One relation stated: 'He has matured since living at the house. He is taking more responsibility for himself and learning new skills like handling money and cooking food.' A young person stated: 'I am on an independence plan. I have a bank account. I have money to budget food. I shop, cook and do my own washing.'

Young people have made good progress in maintaining, and in some cases re-starting, regular contact with those important to them. This enables them to better understand their complex backgrounds and assists them in managing emotional attachments. One social worker stated: 'The young person's needs are considered and met with thought and guidance from other professionals and family. They have an excellent rapport with the young person's grandmother, and encourage and facilitate contact between them.'

Quality of care

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

Each young person is offered a personalised level of care that effectively reflects their different needs. For example, all young people have individualised positive behaviour strategies which aim to reward certain behaviours and develop positive skills. Young people also have carefully structured risk assessments, which are an effective tool in informing staff about how best to meet young people's needs. Staff know young people extremely well and this begins during the pre-admission process. Young people, family members and social workers praise the staff for the time they spend gathering information and finding out about each young person. Careful matching helps ensure that there is generally a positive mix of young people in the home.

Young people benefit from a responsive and warm staff group that has a strong commitment to giving young people a high level of care. They demonstrate their

commitment not only in their day-to-day delivery of care, but also by their persistent attempts to try and understand young people's behaviour so as to positively influence it. Staff use highly-individualised behaviour strategies which encourage and reward desired behaviour and discourage negative behaviour. These strategies are generally successful and relationships between staff and young people are friendly and purposeful.

Social workers think that young people are cared for in line with their placement plan and praise the home for effectively liaising with them. They think the home is responsive when requested to make any necessary changes to the day-to-day care of young people. One social worker stated: 'Written information is to a really good standard. Review reports are detailed. There is superb communication; they always notify me of events and incidents. They also phone me on a very regular basis.' The home is effective in breaking down the care plan into individual expectations which the young person is expected to meet. Young people think they are fair and accurate. Social workers say they receive regular and helpful reports on progress against the plan.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The safety and welfare of young people living at this home is promoted at all times. There are policies and procedures in place that address bullying, managing inappropriate behaviours, making a safeguarding referral, missing persons, staff recruitment, complaints and health and safety. In addition, all young people have risk assessments that link to their placement plans. This results in staff having a good working knowledge of safeguarding and health and safety practices.

Young people say that they feel safe in the home and demonstrate this by their generally relaxed behaviour around staff and each other. The home has a clear message, that bullying is not tolerated, and this is re-iterated by staff and in the young people's guide to the home. Where young people are vulnerable to bullying behaviour staff are vigilant in monitoring young people to minimise this possibility. Young people's individualised risk assessments detail particular risks and ways to mitigate them.

A key strength of this home is the partnership work they undertake with other agencies. They have proactive relationships with a range of agencies such as police and youth offending services. Staff support young people to develop tools to self-moderate their behaviours equipping them to socialise, reintegrate with education and progress from the home. One youth offending officer stated: 'They are effectively working in partnership with a range of agencies. They share information with me that is relevant to my role.' This good communication results in consistent, safe strategies being used between professionals. For example, staff take appropriate action if a young person goes missing, in line with clear procedures and practice specific to each young person. Staff are successful in reducing a range of inappropriate behaviours through discussions and developing positive relationships.

However, when incidents do occur they are managed effectively with clear communication taking place between external agencies.

Consequences (or sanctions) are used to discourage inappropriate behaviour and reward positive behaviour and achievements. Physical intervention is only used when appropriate and in line with policy. The consequence and effectiveness of these disciplinary measures are not routinely being reviewed. This could result in practice not being challenged, patterns not being observed and amendments to behaviour management practice not put in place.

In the majority of cases the use of consequences are appropriate. However, some consequences are still being used with young people who are seventeen years old and due to leave care. In another case consequences continue to be applied even though they have not been historically successful. Staff are not consistently applying consequences that are restorative in nature, to help young people recognise the impact of their behaviour on others. Where consequences are not successful in reducing inappropriate behaviours they continue to be used.

Safeguarding young people continues to be a high priority within the home. All staff have completed training in safeguarding. Appropriate policies and procedures are in place and regularly reviewed. This ensures that staff understand what they should do if there is a safeguarding issue. For example, they are familiar with the referral process to the Local Safeguarding Children Board. One youth offending officer stated: 'They are effectively managing the environment to safeguard the young people, themselves and others.'

The home ensures that young people are provided with physical safety and security. Regular checks are undertaken on the home's fire alarm system and the home's utility services. Environmental risk assessments are conducted and appropriate action is taken to keep young people safe.

Leadership and management

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

Young people benefit from a well-managed service that is having a good impact on their outcomes and life experiences.

All recommendations made after the last inspection have been met.

The home is effectively and efficiently managed by a Registered Manager who is motivated and well respected by an enthusiastic staff team. A social worker stated: 'The staff are brilliant. The young person has confidence in the staff team and knows we have regular discussions. The Registered Manager is superb.'

The home offers care and accommodation to young people in line with its Statement of Purpose. The young people's guide is an informative and attractive document. These publications help young people and the placing authority to be clear about

what is on offer.

Other agencies and young people's families are positive about their contact with the home, particularly praising the Registered Manager and clear communication with staff. A young person's relative stated: 'I have nothing but praise for the house. I have no complaints. I have never had any reason to complain.' The Registered Manager is rightly central to the smooth functioning of this home and young people and staff turn to her for decisions, guidance and support. Her signature and comments are highly visible in relevant documentation and young people tell her their views. This means that she is well aware of daily events in the home and the general progress that young people are making.

Staff are positive about their routine and useful supervision, seeing it as an opportunity to reflect on practice. Staff feel that their training needs are well met and that they work together well as a team. This enhances their abilities to promote the welfare of young people and keep them safe.

Records are comprehensive, clear and up to date and the home is thorough in ensuring that appropriate authorities are informed following significant incidents.

This service has substantial strengths and a sustained record of delivering good performance and managing improvement. Where areas for improvement emerge the service recognises and manages them well. The organisation and Registered Manager ensure effective monitoring and evaluation of relevant records and events such as the complaints and child protection. This monitoring and consultation and regular communication ensures proper scrutiny and on-going development of the young people's care.

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.