

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Robin Whistlecraft
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home provides care and accommodation for up to three young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, aged between eight and 17 years. The home is owned by a private childcare organisation.

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**.

Young people accommodated in this home, in the medium to long term, make good and sometimes significant progress, given their starting points. This is because through receiving good, consistent and committed care, young people overcome challenges and difficulties and staff go on to build influential relationships with young people. As a result, young people develop social and independence skills, self-confidence and self-esteem.

The home takes placement plans and tailors its practice to the individual needs and abilities of each young person, thereby promoting positive behaviour and skill development. Some young people are able to reflect on the progress they have made. Young people come to value the home and staff for their patience and determination. One has written to the managers, saying: 'You spent months fighting for what I needed and it turned out to be what I needed, and has made such an impact to me. All the time you and your staff spent talking to me, helping me and most importantly being there when I needed them.'

Managers and staff understand safe working practice, and support young people's learning for keeping themselves safe and healthy. Managers commit high staffing levels to young people who present high risks, while assessing risks and until finding successful strategies. Some young people still take some risks, but those are far less than prior to coming to the home. Managers and staff apply consistent boundaries and clear expectations for the young people, including for how they interact with each other.

Leaders and managers have effective systems for monitoring the conduct of the home, reviewing its quality of care and establishing development plans for the home. As a result, improvement is a continuous pre-occupation for managers.

This report contains one recommendation for improving the detail and clarity of some entries in the home's central record of the use of physical restraint.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure entries in records are legible and clearly expressed. This is in relation to the central records clearly identifying how young people's behaviour meets the threshold for the use of physical restraint, and avoiding technical jargon in descriptions of the techniques and holds used to restrain a young person. (NMS 22.4).

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people who live in this home over the medium to long term make good progress. They learn better ways to manage their personal challenges. They improve their social skills and they develop self-confidence and self-esteem. These young people develop trusting relationships with staff so that they are able to disclose and reflect on personal experiences. Some young people are able to look back and appreciate the progress they have made. One young person wrote to the home, saying: 'I also have confidence in myself and the self-esteem to do things, to say how I feel. I look back and can't believe how far I have come.'

Young people generally improve their attendance in education, some of them significantly. Young people who are at the home over the medium to long term achieve well in education, and some of them make significant progress. One wrote, 'I now have numerous qualifications to my name.'

Young people have regular access to health professionals and to regular health checks. Young people learn about health and healthy lifestyles. For example, they learn about sexual health and safe sex. They also learn how to protect themselves through self-examination for unusual lumps. They enjoy a varied and balanced diet, though some still benefit from support to make the right choices all of the time.

Some young people smoke even though they do not experience encouragement from within the home, and have access to smoking cessation programmes. Young people experience support for their emotional and psychological health, for example, from children's and adolescent mental health workers. These factors mean that young

people develop insight into their health and take fewer risks with their health over time, but some still take some risks.

Young people influence the home in a number of ways. They contribute to the menu choices and help cook meals. They choose leisure activities and personalise their bedrooms. Some practice wallpapering and painting when they help decorate their bedrooms. Young people are also able to explore relationships and dynamics within the home, including their impact on other people. They also prepare for their case reviews so that they are able to express their views and wishes about the future shape of their lives. These examples demonstrate that young people are able to participate in decisions that affect their lives, both in relation to daily living and in more complex matters.

Young people have appropriate contact with friends and family. They experience support in reflecting on how they can manage family relationships. One young person wrote, in response to a survey form Ofsted: 'I have made such progress since being here and have regained decent contact with my family and with relationships with others.'

Young people learn the basics of self-care and other skills they will need as adults through the home's daily regime. However, as they get older they benefit from individual programmes through which they develop a wider range of skills and knowledge. This means that they develop confidence in their skills. One young person wrote, in response to an Ofsted questionnaire: 'Staff have prepared me really well and I'm now on full independence and have learnt to cope with budgeting and buying appropriate things to help me live on my own.'

Quality of care

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

Over time, young people learn to manage differences and develop the tolerance to get on in a group. Staff explore group dynamics and young people's impact on others within individual key work sessions. Young people say that staff are consistent when applying the home's rules. Staff are effective at building relationships with young people, who think that staff have their best interests in mind. One said 'it's from the heart of all of the staff really.' This means that young people learn to trust staff enough to share distressing experiences and reflect on strategies they can use in the future.

Young people know how to complain. Staff and managers actively seek young people's views and wishes through group meetings, key worker sessions and day-to-day conversations. As a result young people influence aspects of the day to day running of the home. Staff also support young people in rehearsing what they go on to say in their statutory care reviews. One young person said: 'I had my review; staff helped me out with what I wanted to say. They got me to write it down. I understand the plan. They explained it all.'

The home uses individual strategies to support each young person, such as personal targets and incentives, individualised independence training programmes and individual key work discussions. This means that over time young people develop skills to manage how they deal with frustration, how they interact with other people and how they understand their lives. One young person wrote in an Ofsted survey, 'the staff team...supported me through the good and the bad times, and if it wasn't for them I wouldn't have been able to manage the difficulties I have encountered without serious repercussions. They have taught me to look after myself and to manage emotions.'

Young people are cared for in line with their individual care plan. Managers and staff are proactive in arranging for the meeting of young people's needs, including by other agencies and on behalf of placing authorities, if necessary. For example, managers seek out specialist psychiatric assessment services in order that all involved have a more informed understanding of some young people's needs. Managers alert placing authorities if there are doubts about the quality of another stakeholder's services, for example in relation to education. Managers also challenge shortfalls in partner organisations services, such as poor information sharing, in order to improve the service offered by the home. As a result, the home is effective in contributing to young people's plans.

Staff manage young people's medication in a safe and effective way. The home ensures that young people benefit from a healthy and varied menu, controlling access to unhealthy snacks. Staff encourage young people to exercise. In addition, staff advise young people about safe sex and sexual health, self-examination for unusual lumps, as well as health risks that are specific to some young people. Staff register young people with various health professionals and ensure young people receive regular check-ups. In addition, the home proactively supports some young people to benefit from the involvement of child and adolescent mental health services. For example, by arranging referrals and appointments. As a result of these factors, the home provides a healthy environment for young people.

Managers and staff proactively support young people's education. For example, by obtaining homework so that young people who initially try to avoid going to school have to do school work in the home instead. Managers use established contacts with further education colleges to explore risk assessments and possible courses for some young people. The home also identifies work experience placements to support young people's education. These factors mean that most young people return to full time education.

The home identifies young people's diverse needs from the outset. Managers and staff also promote young people's awareness of diversity. They do this, for example, through theme nights exploring the food and traditions of different cultures. Staff record and celebrate some of those events with photographs and displays on a communal wall. Staff research healthy and varied recipes in order to provide vegetarian options for meals. Staff also support, through key work sessions, some young people who experience confusion about their sexual identity. As a result, of this approach, the home effectively addresses young people's diverse needs. A

parent wrote in response to an Ofsted survey, 'the staff have shown full respect for my daughter's [cultural] roots where appropriate'

The home operates in an appropriate location. The provider maintains, decorates and furnishes the home well so that it provides a homely and welcoming environment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel safe, that there is no bullying in the home and that they have staff with whom they can raise concerns. One young person wrote about the staff in an Ofsted survey: 'they have kept me safe.'

Staff are aware of each young person's vulnerabilities. The home maintains risk assessments that clearly describe the risks that apply to each young person, together with actions that staff are to take to address the risk. Managers review and update risk assessments regularly, including after specific incidents. This means that young people benefit from care that responds to the risks, both known and emerging, in their lives.

Over time, the frequency that young people go missing reduces to a minimum. Staff use key work sessions to encourage young people to reflect on how they can keep themselves safe. Early in their placement, where young people leave the home without permission, risk assessments mean staff try keep them in sight. This enables staff to be assured that the young person is safe, and to take immediate action if a risk emerges. The procedures that staff follow, in the event that a young person goes missing, are in accordance with local police protocols. These factors mean that the home safeguards young people who go missing as far as is reasonably possible.

The home's manager has close links with local safeguarding agencies through providing safeguarding training to workers elsewhere in the local authority's geographical area. The home's managers encourage local police to pop into the home regularly in order that young people become familiar with them. Managers also invite the local police to talk with the young people about specific behaviours to improve young people's awareness of the risks, both in terms of their safety and in terms of potential offences. This means the home promotes young people's awareness of the potential consequences of their behaviour. A young person said the purpose of the home is: 'To keep us safe and do the best for us.'

Staff address both negative and positive behaviours by deploying clear consequences for both. The home promotes positive behaviour by the proactive use of personal incentives in response to positive behaviours. Staff use physical restraint as a last resort. On a few occasions, staff have not been clear in central records about how young people's behaviour met the threshold for the use of physical restraint. Also, occasionally staff use technical jargon to describe the restraint technique that was used to restrain a young person. Staff record the necessary information elsewhere, within individual young people's records, and the central records were updated

during the inspection. This means that there was no adverse consequence for young people because of this. One young person wrote in an Ofsted survey: 'Staff do not hold unless we are causing danger to ourselves, or others.'

Managers carry out appropriate pre-recruitment checks on prospective staff. Staff understand their responsibilities if there is a suspicion or allegation about possible abuse to a young person. Staff keep the home secure and managers ensure that repairs are not left outstanding. Staff carry out regular checks on fire detection, safety and fighting equipment. Staff carry out regular evacuation drills. These factors mean that the home is a safe environment for young people.

Leadership and management

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

Managers demonstrate that the home can continually improve. They have addressed the only recommendation made at the last inspection. They are aware of the home's strengths and areas for development because they periodically review the quality of care provided in the home. Those reviews identify patterns and trends and, where relevant, specify actions. For example, surveying parents for their views about the home or ensuring young people contribute to the home's development plan. Managers review and update the home's development plan and this record demonstrates their actions to address areas for development such as replacing various items of furniture. This means young people benefit from care that managers continually seek to improve.

Managers ensure there are sufficient staff to meet the young people's needs. At times of higher risk managers increase staffing levels. The provider ensures that managers and staff keep up to date with national policy and legislative changes. Staff receive regular supervision which they value. Managers monitor core training and ensure that staff undertake periodic refresher training. Managers support staff with individual training needs or goals. These factors mean that a competent staff team cares for the young people.

The home generally maintains clearly written records on young people, keeps them up to date and stores them securely. The provider has introduced a system for collating and summarising young people's progress, in relation to a range of incidents and events, through charts and graphs. This system, together with reports for and minutes from care reviews, enables managers to show the progress that young people make after coming to live at the home. This means that managers are able to demonstrate the positive impact that the home has on young people.

The provider has created a clear Statement of Purpose for the home, and managers operate the home within its aims and objectives. The home provides young people with a guide that accurately reflects their rights and the expectations on them. The provider regularly monitors the conduct of the home through visits and reports carried out by someone independent of the home's management. Managers ensure that they act on any recommendations made following such visits. These factors

mean that young people receive care that is consistent with what the provider sets out to deliver.

The provider maintains the home well. Managers arrange regular health and safety checks and inspections, for example by specialists on gas or electrical installations. Managers appropriately notify relevant authorities about significant events. These factors mean that the home provides an environment that promotes young people's welfare.

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.