

Inspection report for children's home

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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This is a multi-site children's home, the main house accommodating three young people whilst its satellite unit can accommodate one additional young person, giving a total for the registration of four young people aged between eight and 17 years of age.

Both the main house and the satellite are located in a small village near the outskirts of a small market town. The main house is a compact, comfortable detached family house with a sizeable garden. The satellite home is a two bedded semi-detached property with a large garden. Both homes afford individual bedrooms and have communal spaces downstairs. Each home has their own statement of purpose, but share common policies and procedures. Both houses draw staff from an extended staff group based at the main house.

Both houses enjoy easy access to a range of recreational, social and sporting activities and there are regular bus services available within the nearby market town, enabling the young people, where appropriate, to develop their self-reliance and independency skills.

Summary

This was a full unannounced inspection that concentrated on all key national minimum standards (NMS). The inspection took place over two days. The home's Registered Manager was available throughout the inspection. Three young people were living in the home, two in the main house and one in the satellite unit. None of the residents in the main house wished to make any direct contribution to the inspection process. The young person in the single bedded home was not present due to education and other commitments, however, all young people were afforded the opportunity to complete questionnaires, asking them to comment on their experience of living in the home.

This children's home is judged to be good. The home provides a good standard of care and support that helps young people in their education, personal, social and emotional development. The home's Registered Manager provides effective leadership which results in staff being clearly focused on meeting the needs of the young people. Staff relationships with young people are both caring and very supportive. Young people are benefiting from living in a home that is well managed and organised to achieve good outcomes for those individuals accommodated.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Fire safety in the home has improved considerably since the home was last inspected, all fire detection, warning and fire fighting equipment has been tested and serviced at all required frequencies. The home's fire risk assessment has been updated and amended to ensure that all known risks are being minimised and managed appropriately.

The conducting of room searches are now only undertaken in line with the home's stated policies and procedures, this has helped to appropriately accommodate young people's legitimate desire for privacy. The recording of all such searches has also improved, it is much clearer as to whether a young person has been present during a room search or not. If young people have

not been informed prior to the search and have not been invited to be present the rationale for this is now clearly recorded.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people benefit from comprehensive support which encourages them to develop a positive approach to diet and how to improve their health. Young people are provided with the necessary support and guidance to ensure their good health and well-being is maintained. Meals provided are varied and young people are encouraged to contribute to the menu planning process on a weekly basis to ensure that their personal preferences are accommodated.

Menu records confirm that young people are provided with a balanced menu that demonstrates a clear understanding of what constitutes a healthy nutritious diet. The menus produced show a good awareness of cultural and religious preferences, ensuring that each young person receives a diet specific to their needs. The home encourages all young people to celebrate culturally significant festivals and to be tolerant and respectful of each young person's belief and cultural heritage.

Health issues that relate to ethnicity, race, sexuality, faith and belief are fully assessed in respect of each young person and are respected by the staff team. Staff are actively involved in engaging with young people about a range of health-related issues which result in consistent improvements to health and fitness. Young people's good health and well-being is being successfully promoted because staff are knowledgeable and aware of each individual young person's needs.

Appropriate support from medical professionals is provided and a high level of liaison takes place between staff and these professionals to ensure young people's health needs are fully met. All staff have up-to-date training in basic first aid, administration of medication and food hygiene. The home has appropriate consents in place that allow for emergency treatment if needed. Young people, where appropriate, benefit from a comprehensive therapeutic programme which is tailored to meet their individual and often complex emotional needs. The home's records confirm that staff support young people to attend medical appointments and that health issues are dealt with promptly.

Young people's health and safety is also promoted through the home's policies and procedures for the safe storage and administration of medication. Administration records demonstrate that staff are following pharmacy instructions in relation to the health needs of individual young people. Staff are able to respond to accidents and unforeseen medical needs because they have access to first aid boxes and have been trained in basic first aid skills. Young people's health and safety is further promoted by managers who monitor all accidents and injuries that occur in the home.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

Young people are clearly benefiting from a service that has a good focus on safeguarding. The home has good leadership that effectively promotes their safety and welfare, supported by a good range of operational policies and procedures. Staff receive ongoing training in child protection and behaviour management that helps underpin safe day-to-day practice.

Young people's privacy and confidentiality is promoted by sound guidance and good staff practice. Staff ensure that they do not enter young people's rooms without knocking. Young people's care records are maintained securely and contents are not discussed inappropriately. Staff are aware of the young people's right to privacy and how this may be safely promoted.

Young people are aware of the complaints procedure and feel confident that complaints will be addressed effectively. The young people's guide to the home gives comprehensive information about who to contact in external organisations if they wish to complain to them. All complaints recorded had been appropriately dealt with, each had a clear resolution and young people are routinely afforded the opportunity to sign the record to signify their acceptance of the outcome. Young people's refusal to accept or sign is also recorded.

The home's Registered Manager has an active focus on community relationships to try to ensure that the home maintains an acceptable presence in the local area. Staff and young people are aware that unacceptable behaviour of any kind is not tolerated and will be challenged.

Young people living at these two homes are aware of the reason they are being looked after and how staff will promote their safety and protection within the home and in public places. Staff are appropriately aware of the types of behaviour which young people may display and accordingly develop risk assessments that minimise the potential for young people to subject themselves or others to harm. Staff know how to respond to challenging behaviours. Young people are encouraged to reflect on the consequences of their behaviour after such incidents to learn how to help themselves to be safe and behave responsibly.

Young people are protected from bullying by the vigilance of staff who are guided by clear policies and robust training. No young person identified bullying as a problem at the time of the visit or in completed questionnaires. New staff are trained in safeguarding procedures during induction and staff demonstrated a good understanding of how to respond to allegations, disclosures or abuse.

The home follows its own policy and procedures regarding young people who leave the home without permission; these practices are also consistent with a wider police protocol. Young people are actively discouraged from having unauthorised absences and records demonstrated that procedures are being consistently followed. Young people's protection is underpinned by individual risk assessments and clear guidance to staff about what actions to take once a young person has left the home. The home's responses to this behaviour are comprehensively focused on the needs and risks of individual young people in terms of promoting their safety. Staff in the home are focused on developing supportive and consistent relationships that encourage alternative and safer ways of behaving.

Young people are encouraged to behave well, to establish, achieve and maintain levels of behaviour that are socially acceptable and that will sustain them in the wider community. The home's records not only detail sanctions used for poor behaviour but also positive consequences and rewards for behaviour that deserves congratulation and praise. Staff are acutely aware of the need to balance their interventions with positive feedback about young people's achievements, rather than on just punishing poor behaviour.

Whilst it is clear that the home has good policies and staff procedures in place to deal with searching young people's rooms and notifying external authorities when young people are

suspected of bringing illicit or narcotic substances on to the premises, it was unclear if these policies and procedures are always followed. Concerns are recorded, but are not explicit in detailing the actions taken to safeguard young people.

Safety and welfare are taken seriously and young people live in a home which is both physically safe and secure. For example, risk assessments on the environment are completed and updated on a regular basis and staff within the home are all involved in these routines to ensure that health and safety is promoted by everyone. Portable appliance testing for electrical safety has been done on all equipment in the home and all safety equipment has been regularly serviced. Frequent checks are undertaken on fire equipment and emergency lighting, and fire drills are regularly completed. The Registered Manager ensures that utilities, domestic equipment and vehicles are checked to ensure they are safe to use. Young people live in a home which provides physical safety and security.

Staff personnel files were not available on the inspection date, as they are held centrally at the parents organisation's head office. These files were, however, examined on 23 June 2009. The owning organisation has clearly defined recruitment process which protect young people by ensuring that all of the NMS requirements are met, prior to any staff member being deployed into any of their homes. A written record of this process is maintained for inspection and is followed in respect of all staff currently employed.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people receive good individual support that is consistent with their identified needs. Staff have a supportive attitude towards education and take a keen and active interest in young people's development and learning. Young people are living in a home where they are consistently encouraged to enjoy and achieve.

Staff have access to a comprehensive range of information that identifies specific needs and support for each young person. A key worker system is in operation where a member of staff takes some responsibility for the delivery and monitoring of a young person's care and support. Key workers are responsible for ensuring everyday requirements are being met and that social workers and other professionals are kept informed about young people's progress and development.

Staff acknowledge the different needs of each young person and these are identified in individual plans of care that detail the aims of each placement and the actions expected to facilitate successful outcomes. Staff understand the importance of acknowledging young people's differences so that needs relating to areas such as ethnicity, religion, gender and disability can be identified and met, placement plans identify any religious ethnic or cultural needs. Staff are aware of known and potential risks and this information is communicated effectively to the staff team.

Staff actively promote the social inclusion of young people in the home's daily routines and events. Young people are supported to access and attend various community-based activities. Staff keenly support young people to develop their own interests and hobbies. Young people are supported to access specialist external services to ensure all their identified needs are being met. The Registered Manager reviews and updates assessments so staff are informed about what they can do to reduce potential risks to young people.

Staff encourage and support young people to attend their educational placements. The home has access to the company's own education facility, which is registered with Ofsted. It is clear that young people are being well supported with their formal learning and development. Staff are comprehensively informed about the progress young people are making because regular contact takes place between schools and the home. Staff are encouraging and positive about education which helps to build young people's confidence. All young people covered by this registration have a properly constituted personal education plan and an agreed education placement. The home actively facilitates young people in accessing appropriate advocacy services and external support systems whenever a young person feels they have a legitimate complaint, either against their placing authority or the home itself.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

The care received by each young person living at this home is effective. Case files confirm that the young people's progress is reviewed within the statutory time periods. Staff attend regular in-house meetings to record and update each young person's general progress during the periods between reviews. Placement plans include summarised health and education plan details.

All young people resident in either of the two homes covered by this registration are encouraged to make a positive contribution to their placement and the running of the home. Young people are involved in all aspects of their care and are given every opportunity to contribute to their own care planning arrangements. Staff actively seek the views of young people at an individual and group level and respond in a way that values their opinions.

Young people are appropriately supported to maintain contact with their families in line with arrangements detailed within their care plans. Young people are supported by staff wherever necessary during family visits. Placement plans and supportive case file records make explicit the authorised arrangements for contact between each young person, their family, friends and professional workers such as social workers.

The home's records confirm that young people are actively involved in decision-making processes within the home. Regular, informative dialogue between staff and young people takes place when considering any issues that affect the running of the home. Key worker sessions consider issues related to young people such as confidentiality and how feedback from young people should be acted upon in a safe and meaningful manner. The interactions between staff and young people reveal that the home continues to provide a relaxed setting where the involvement of young people is used to positively shape the nature of the care provided.

Staff meeting minutes demonstrate that issues with young people are dealt with using a consistent, safety-conscious approach within clearly agreed parameters. The young people's meeting records, key worker sessions and the home's general records continue to support the view that staff are enabled to offer realistic boundaries, be consistent in practice and promote the welfare of each young person in a positive manner.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people receive adequate allowances to cover personal requisites and clothing and are well informed about their entitlements because the home has good arrangements and systems in place to manage allowances, personal needs and pocket money.

Young people benefit from a spacious and comfortable environment. Both homes are subject to an ongoing process of redecoration and refurbishment with repairs and maintenance being addressed in order of importance. Staff work to a schedule of domestic routines to ensure the home is clean and tidy. Young people are able to personalise their bedrooms and they are satisfied with the accommodation provided.

Young people are helped to plan for independence and staff encourage and support them to learn the life skills they will need when they leave the home. Staff provide lots of practical opportunities for young people to experience routines that help them become more independent. The home sometimes does this in the absence of an agreed local authority plan, but this is not treated as a barrier to providing young people with the help they need.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

Both the homes covered by this registration are well managed which contributes significantly to the positive impact on the care and support young people receive. Good communication is a feature of the home, which enables staff to be well informed about daily events, routines and the progress of each young person.

Staff know and understand the stated aims and objectives of the service which is consistent with the home's statement of purpose. The commitment from staff is a strength and most absences are covered from the existing team, or cover staff, who are already known by the young people to ensure their continuity of care. Young people are well informed about what the homes do because staff take time to explain and describe their services and how they can be influenced to suit individual needs.

Young people are given a handbook that is in an appropriate format to help them learn about what the homes provide. The number of staff on duty is always enough to meet the needs of young people which supports their welfare and protection. The organisation that runs these homes has an induction, core training programme and support system in place that helps to provide staff with the necessary skills and knowledge to support and care for young people.

There is good leadership and management support because the Registered Manager is qualified, skilled and experienced and provides effective leadership to the staff team and young people. The Registered Manager is actively involved in the day-to-day operation of the home and has clear expectations that the staff team will achieve the best possible outcomes for all young people in their care. Formal supervision of staff, particularly those staff still undergoing their probationary employment period, has not always been provided for the duration, or maintained at the frequencies, required by the NMS.

Young people are being looked after by a staff group that is experienced, and enthusiastic but which currently does not meet the required level of qualifications in child care. There is a good emphasis given to staff training and development which is focussed on areas relating to young people's needs. The current shortfall in the home achieving the expected 80% of staff having completed their NVQ at level 3 in childcare is due to changes in personnel rather than by any

lack of commitment to, or provision of, adequate training. The home's manager was able to demonstrate that all staff currently deployed to the home, other than those currently undertaking their probationary employment, are enrolled on suitable training courses, to enable this shortfall to be addressed.

Young people are provided with appropriate levels of supervision and support because staff manage their time effectively and are deployed in a way that meets their needs. The staff rotas are flexible to meet the changing needs and circumstances of young people. Good management systems are in place to share information between different shift teams. Young people are being nurtured and comprehensively supported because their needs are being met and risks are managed in a preventative way.

Good systems are in place to monitor the service and daily lives of young people currently living in the home. The organisation has established a pattern of management monitoring and reporting procedures, which is effectively implemented by the home's Registered Manager. The organisation conducts monthly inspections to look at welfare issues within their homes. Findings are reported back to the company. Records seen demonstrate that the content of these reports reflect an accurate picture of life for young people resident here. These reports are available to staff.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. All of the home's relevant recording systems take account young people's identity, race, culture and religion. The home provides an environment where the value of equality and diversity is understood, promoted and celebrated.

The Registered Manager actively monitors and evaluates the practice standards of staff and the quality of services being provided and the impact the home is having on the care of young people. The manager has access to feedback from placing authorities, parents and young people, all of which help to inform her assessments. Areas for improvement are quickly identified or anticipated and positive steps are agreed and implemented to overcome any difficulties and to carefully plan the development of the service.

Young people's care files are very well organised to include all of the information detailed in schedule 3 of the children's homes regulations 2001. Confidential or third party information is kept in a separate section of the care file to enable the home to respond, in a timely manner, to any request made by a young person to read their care file.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

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- ensure that all records relating to incidents, including those involving physical interventions, sanctions and searches are comprehensively completed in line with the homes own policies and procedures and that these records clearly detail all actions taken by staff to ensure the safety of the young people in their care (NMS 22.8, 22.9 & ss.10)
 - ensure that levels of staff supervision are maintained at all times in line with the frequencies and durations indicated in the NMS (NMS.28.2)
 - ensure as soon as possible that 80% of the staff deployed to the home have completed an NVQ Level 3 or equivalent qualification in childcare. (NMS 29.5).