

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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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 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.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is privately run. It is registered to accommodate and provide care for up to 8 young people aged between 11 and 17 years.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

At this inspection, five young people are enjoying living at the home. A mix of boys and girls are suitably accommodated; some have been living at the home for a long time and others are newer to the home. The team recognises the potential for such moves to change dynamics and they closely monitor the relationships between the young people.

Individual needs are being met through robust care planning processes. Such plans are reviewed and amended in accordance with the changing needs of individuals. Key working sessions are meaningful and are used to target areas of need. Staff respond appropriately when situations change and good internal communication systems ensure a consistent approach. Young people are clear about their placements and appreciate the help and support they receive.

Young people make good overall progress in relation to their starting points. The home is good at providing medium and longer term placements because the team enjoys working hard to achieve longer term goals. This is primarily focused upon young people leaving care equipped with the necessary life skills for semi independent living.

Young people begin to appreciate the value of education and their health needs are robustly monitored and supported. The team is confident in allowing young people to take appropriate risks and to learn from making mistakes. This increases their ability to make safer choices as their emotional intelligence develops.

Monitoring and quality assurance systems are being developed. Current processes lack rigour and the home recognises the need to improve in this area in order to achieve the best outcomes for the young people.

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
5 (2001)	keep under review and where appropriate, revise the Statement of Purpose. This requirement is made to ensure the Statement of Purpose accurately describes the services provided (Regulation 5 (a))	08/03/2012
17A (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. This requirement is made within the context of ensuring that all of the elements, as listed under this regulation are included (Regulation 17B (3) (a)-(i) and (4) (a) and (b))	08/03/2012
33 (2001)	ensure the person carrying out Regulation 33 visits shall (a) interview, with their consent and in private, such of the children accommodated there, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as appears necessary in order to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home. This is to ensure that reports evidence clear and robust monitoring. (Regulation 33 (4) (a))	08/03/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure children's health is promoted in accordance with their placement plan and staff are clear about what responsibilities and decisions are delegated to them and where consent for medical treatment needs to be obtained (NMS 6.5)
- ensure the home provides a comfortable and homely environment and is well maintained and decorated (NMS 10.3)
- ensure the registered person can demonstrate that it consistently follows good recruitment practice. This recommendation is made within the context of accurately recording interview questions and making decisions about the suitability of applicants. (NMS 16.2 and 16.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people receive the care, guidance and support they need from a competent staff team. Progress is made because staff members are consistent and get to know the young people very well. Individuals feel valued; they learn to recognise their own strengths and needs and trust the adults who look after them. Comments include, 'I trust the staff, they are like my family' and 'they give me good advice'.

Initial assessment processes seek to obtain clear information with regards to the cultural backgrounds and origins of young people. Staff use this information sensitively to promote a positive self image and sense of personal identity. Young people are encouraged to make sense of their past experiences and they engage in valid discussions during key working sessions. Appropriate external support is sought to help them when this process brings difficulties and challenges. They stand to benefit from improved outcomes because of this approach.

Young people enjoy positive contact with those who are important to them. Staff facilitate such arrangements in accordance with placing authority agreements. Parents, relatives and friends receive a warm welcome and are encouraged to maintain positive relationships with the young people. Good social networks are being developed and maintained. Staff members are sensitive and empathic with regards to friendships and social needs. Young people enjoy spending time outside of the home with their friends. In the event of young people making unsafe choices, such as staying out late, appropriate consequences are implemented, in line with good parenting. Young people say they don't always agree at the time but they appreciate that the staff want what is best for them. They know they are cared for and this impacts very positively upon their self-esteem.

Young people enjoy good physical health. All are registered with local General Practitioners, dentists and opticians. Medical histories are chased and staff are fully aware of any current and ongoing health concerns. Staff adopt an educative approach, particularly with older teenagers. Good links are being maintained with external agencies, such as sexual health services. Young people do not always make the desired choices in terms of looking after their own health. However, the staff team implements a consistent approach which frequently leads to positive outcomes.

Over time, young people learn to make positive choices with regards to their school attendance and attainment. The staff team perseveres and recognises that many of the young people have had negative experiences of school in the past. Their chances of success are increased because the home explores a variety of options until the most appropriate provision is found. In the event of young people refusing to attend, or experiencing difficulties with attendance and learning, staff implement a variety of reward and support systems. This provides young people with the best possible chances of success.

Young people receive the help they need to make informed choices and decisions about their futures. The home uses its own pathway planning format and young people are encouraged to take ownership of this document. Individuals speak with confidence about their future plans and aspirations. They develop a very real sense of ambition and are assisted to share their views and opinions at their review meetings. Comments include, 'I know exactly what I want to do when I leave school' and 'the staff are really helping me to think about my future'.

Quality of care

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

Young people learn to develop appropriate social skills through receiving consistent messages from the staff team. Effective role modelling also plays an important part in learning to behave appropriately and respectfully. Staff are confident in managing the issues and dynamics which are sometimes presented by a mixed group of young people. Triggers, flash points and friendship issues are well known. Staff intervene when necessary; they are quick to praise positive conduct and are equally good at encouraging young people to develop appropriate coping skills when others cause them anxiety.

Young people say they are regularly consulted about the running of the home. They feel empowered to make decisions about activities, free time and the decoration of their home. Forums including structured house meetings and key worker sessions are effectively used. However, young people also place particular value upon informal mechanisms such as mealtimes and outings, where they are equally encouraged to speak their minds and share their views. Staff are described as 'caring, a good laugh and sometimes strict'.

Young people understand their wishes may not always be met. Staff take time to explain the reasons why, using language and rationale which is appropriate for the individual. Complaints processes are clear, readily available and understood. Young people say the staff are approachable. They routinely seek out their key workers, as well as the manager and confirm they can easily contact their own family members and social workers in private. Such factors create an open and transparent environment, within which young people understand and value their rights to be heard.

Placement plans are made up from a number of different files and this can present difficulties in locating the most up-to-date information. Some information is held electronically and the home is continuing to streamline its documentation in an attempt to avoid over duplication. Such plans are consistent with placing authority documents and they are also subject to ongoing review to ensure they remain up to date and relevant. Young people receive the support they need as a result.

The presenting health needs of individuals are being effectively supported. All of the young people are registered with local health services and the staff team receives appropriate training in order to provide ongoing continued support. This includes medication administration, first aid and healthy eating. Each young person has a separate health file. This holds key information including: a health and medical history, details of immunisations and allergies, and records of appointments attended. Key workers are responsible for updating such information. This is being maintained to a good overall standard but there is one omission in terms of having written consent for treatment in place. Young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their own health needs as is appropriate to their age and understanding. Where necessary, staff intervene and work very hard to encourage them to make safe and appropriate choices. When necessary, referrals are made to external health services for promoting and supporting individual's mental and

emotional well-being.

Young people are making good progress with regards to their educational attendance and attainment. The home provides them with a range of opportunities including: mainstream schools, the organisation's own registered provision, home tutoring arrangements and local private resources. Responses to presenting needs are creative and personally tailored in order to provide young people with a service that best suits them as individuals. Staff are enthusiastic and encouraging; the home is suitably resourced in terms of internet access and quiet areas for study and young people are richly rewarded for their efforts.

Young people say they enjoy a wide range of activities, both within their home and through accessing their local area. The care planning process actively seeks to discover young peoples' preferred hobbies and interests. Positive behaviour is rewarded through activity provision and young people are provided with opportunities to enjoy group, as well as individual activities. The home is appropriately furnished with games equipment chosen by the young people.

The home is spacious; it provides good levels of privacy and communal areas are warmly decorated. Young people can choose to spend time in each others company playing on games stations or quietly in the lounges, should they desire additional privacy and quiet. The home is situated in a residential area with easy access to the local town and main line services. Young people practising their independence skills positively benefit from its central location. Bedrooms are furnished and decorated in accordance with individual tastes and wishes; young people appreciate the quality of their rooms and take pride in personalising them. Furnishings and fittings are generally in good order but a list of maintenance needs has expanded over recent months. Members of the team have been completing such tasks following the cessation of the use of external contractors.

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 within their home. The building is secure while unobtrusive in terms of security measures and appropriate staffing levels provide safe supervision. Young people understand physical safety measures, such as fire precautions and confirm that they routinely practise fire drills. They talk very positively about behaviour management systems and say, 'the staff are good at making sure that bullying doesn't happen' and 'arguments are quickly sorted out'.

Young people are effectively safeguarded. Staff receive the training and guidance they need in order to protect young people from possible sources of harm, neglect and abuse. Such topics are comprehensively covered throughout new staff's induction periods and thereafter. All staff receive regular and ongoing safeguarding training. The home's policies and procedures for child protection are congruent with local authority guidance and staff know how to implement these.

Individual risk assessments address key areas of concern. These are routinely updated, though sometimes variable in terms of quality. Issues such as the potential to engage in bullying behaviour are comprehensively covered and staff work hard to reduce the potential for such incidents to occur. Additional risk assessments are used to encourage appropriate risk taking which enables young people to grow and develop in terms of confidence. Individuals are learning to develop safer coping strategies and to think for themselves in line with growing up.

Young people understand the rules and behavioural expectations of the home. Positive conduct is rewarded using appropriate and meaningful incentives. Episodes of negative and challenging behaviours reduce over time. Prescribed sanctions are rare and consistently implemented, as are approved physical restraint techniques. The manager scrutinises such records and engages the staff in some meaningful reflective practice. Written records of physical restraint are generally clear but are not always in line with the revised Children's Homes Regulations 2011. Such omissions present the risk of incidents not being sufficiently analysed.

Staff implement clear procedural guidance in the event of young people being absent from the home. Local authority and police guidance is followed in practice and such incidents are usually uncommon; however, a slight increase has occurred in very recent weeks. Staff are very clear about the reasons for this and are working in partnership with young people and placing authorities to reduce such occurrences. When such incidents do occur, staff maintain regular contact with individuals, as much as they are able to. Staff also take proactive measures in securing young people's safe return as quickly as possible.

Recruitment processes are usually thorough and robust. New staff do not commence with their employment until all appropriate checks and references are satisfactorily received. The home does not use volunteers or agency staff and this results in young people being looked after by a consistent team of safe adults. One example is noted however, of the insufficient recording of the interview process. This omission demonstrates potential shortfalls in terms of safe recruitment.

Health and safety systems and responsibilities are understood by the staff team. A number of staff members retain particular responsibilities and ensure that appropriate checks are conducted on time. Young people live in a safe physical environment; however, a growing maintenance list presents potential hazards.

Leadership and management

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

Young people are being effectively looked after by a cohesive team. Staff are effectively led by a suitably qualified and experienced manager. Seniors possess the qualifications and experience commensurate with their roles and responsibilities and duty rosters ensure the effective deployment of the team. Junior staff are not given additional responsibilities until they are deemed as competent to do so. They work alongside experienced colleagues and speak very positively about the ongoing

support and guidance they receive.

Young people have confidence in their care givers and say, 'they're all good' and 'they look after us well'. The team receives ongoing mandatory training and uses this to meet the immediate presenting needs of the young people. The manager recognises the need to provide the team with additional training if the home is to fully meet its aims and objectives which are outlined within its Statement of Purpose. This document infers a therapeutic environment and provision but such training and guidance has only so far been provided for the manager and one deputy. Placing authorities are at risk of expecting a service which is not being provided.

Staff members do receive regular and ongoing supervision. The manager has already raised issues with regards to the current format and ensures this process is being linked to the appraisal system and individual staff development needs. Staff members say they feel well supported and this is further demonstrated through a comprehensive induction process for new staff. Comments include: 'I have a designated person to supervise me but the entire team is supportive and helpful' and 'I'm really getting to learn this job without feeling pressurised'.

Internal monitoring systems are continuing to improve and develop. The manager regularly completes Regulation 34 reports and these are beginning to examine the quality of the care provision with improved rigour. Monitoring visits are being conducted within the prescribed timescales but the quality of the information obtained is variable, for example, consulting with the young people.

More recently, work has commenced across the organisation in terms of managers producing development plans for their own homes which then lead into the development of the wider organisation. Although in its infancy, this system is beginning to have a positive impact in terms of scrutinising the quality of the provision for the benefit of the young people. The home demonstrates a clear desire to continue to improve and staff meeting minutes show very clear details of previous inspection requirements and recommendations being tracked and monitored.

All records are held securely so as to ensure confidentiality. The home recognises the risks of over duplication in some areas and is already reviewing this. The overall quality of written care records is generally good and gaps and omissions are being addressed through improved monitoring systems.

The manager is fully aware of her legal duties and responsibilities. All such incidents which meet the criteria for notification are readily communicated to Ofsted and placing authorities in the very best interests of safeguarding the young people at the home.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.