

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.

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 outcomes for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and the relevant National Minimum Standards for the service.

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

The home is a large detached house with a walled rear garden, situated in a residential area. It is within walking distance of the local shops, railway station, cinema and the beach.

The home provides care and accommodation for up to eight young people, of either gender, aged between 11 and 17 years. There are many areas for quiet relaxation, games, television and computers within the house. Six young people currently live in the home.

Summary

The overall quality rating is satisfactory.

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

At this unannounced key inspection all of the key standards were inspected and the two actions made from the previous visit were followed up. Both actions have been achieved.

Young people enjoy living in the home and they benefit from sound relationships with the staff team. The home is fully staffed, it has a history of low staff turnover which provides consistency for those accommodated. A number of records and systems present shortfalls, and these are further exacerbated by monitoring systems which lack vigour. Actions and recommendations made from this visit are explained within the main body of this report.

Improvements since the last inspection

Two actions were made at the previous inspection visit on 25 November 2009. The home was asked to ensure that all carpets are either cleaned or replaced, and also to make repairs to the chipped enamel on one bath. Both actions have been successfully completed, resulting in an improved physical environment for young people.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

Young people are encouraged to eat healthy, nutritious meals and they take an active role in shopping and meal planning. Kitchen and dining areas are spacious and well equipped; both rooms are readily accessed by young people and the staff team actively encourage mealtimes to be social occasions. However, the walk-in larder is

routinely kept locked and this restricts young people from accessing some of the snacks available, independently.

All staff members receive appropriate training and guidance in food hygiene and healthy living. They effectively implement such knowledge in practice and this impacts positively upon the young people. Allergies and special dietary requirements are clearly recorded and provided for. Young people can be assured that they receive the guidance they need to make healthy food choices and they are encouraged to express their personal likes and dislikes.

Every young person is registered with local core health services, including a GP, dentist and optician, as soon as they move into the home. A separate health booklet is maintained for each individual, and its format enables staff to write clear health objectives. Routine and specialist appointments are being effectively supported, where necessary, and the local looked after children's (LAC) nurse visits the home every six weeks. All health files hold written consent for treatment. Scrutiny of such files shows some omissions, for example, an incomplete immunisation record and health history; this information is being chased by the manager and LAC nurse.

Young people receive clear support and guidance on generic health matters. Staff adopt an educative approach and cover topics which are commensurate with each young person's age, understanding and their current circumstances.

Prescribed medication is securely stored and clear records of incoming and outgoing stock provides good safeguards. All staff have received first aid training; however, the home's provision of medication administration training has lapsed over the last couple of years. The home's policy is to double sign for all medicines administered and one recent omission is noted. There is also an example of disparity with regards to the administration timing of one particular medication and an example of no clear guidance in place for the staff to follow in terms of being aware of the possible side effects to look out for. Despite the regular internal auditing of such records, these shortfalls had not been identified or rectified.

Young people say they feel well cared for when they are ill. The home holds pain relief for every young person. Observation during this inspection saw a young person being sensitively cared for when unwell, with GP advice being sought as soon as the symptoms presented.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is satisfactory.

Young people confirm that staff always knock on doors to seek invitation before entering bedrooms. They also value that they can keep their rooms secure by having their own key. Care files are securely stored in the office and staff receive clear and explicit information with regards to confidentiality and the sharing of sensitive information throughout their induction period. The organisation is currently exploring the transfer of paper to electronic records and has not yet factored this into its policy

and procedural guidance, which presents potential risks to the security of confidential information.

Young people say they know how to make complaints and representations. They also use house meetings and key working sessions to raise concerns less formally. A pre-printed complaint format records the issue and the action taken. It also has space to record the young person's own view of the outcome. The most recent entry does not include sufficient information to demonstrate how this particular complaint was investigated, although the young person has stated their satisfaction with regards to the outcome. This shortfall was not identified through internal quality assurance mechanisms.

All staff receive mandatory safeguarding training within their induction period and beyond. The manager has also undertaken safer recruitment training. The policy and procedure is clear and specific; it is also congruent with local authority procedures. Staff demonstrate a sound awareness of their responsibilities and the home implements an on-call rota, in order that any child protection concern can be reported, and dealt with, without delay.

Young people say that bullying is not an issue within the home. They feel effectively protected. A clear policy is further supported through the implementation of individual risk assessments, which describe each young person's perceived risk to be either a victim or perpetrator, within the home and also the wider community.

Staff know what to do in the event of a young person being absent or missing from the home. Individual risk assessments describe the actions to take and these clearly detail each individual's perceived vulnerability. Written records of such incidents are made, but these do not always accurately describe the action taken, or the content of the discussion held, upon the young person's return.

Incidents and occurrences which necessitate liaison and notification to other authorities, including Ofsted, are being made by the manager in a timely manner. The home demonstrates transparency and openness in this regard, in the best interests of safeguarding those accommodated.

The home works hard to encourage young people to engage and behave in a positive manner. To this end, many clear reward systems are in place. Staff demonstrate a keen desire to empathise with young people and they try to understand their frustrations and difficulties. Approved sanctions are implemented where appropriate and these are being recorded, but there is little evidence of robust monitoring. This restricts the ability to review the effectiveness of the sanctions currently in use.

The home's policy and procedure with regards to the use of physical restraint is explicitly clear, and every staff member has received accredited training. Written records of every such incident are in place and these are being monitored by the manager. The current format does not contain all of the information required under the regulations and this places staff and young people at risk.

Young people live in a physical environment which provides good levels of safety and security. Routine health and safety checks are being undertaken and clearly recorded, and the home possesses adequate insurance cover. Young people are conversant with the fire evacuation procedure; this is taught as a priority to all newcomers, including staff, and it is regularly practised. The fire risk assessment has recently been reviewed; however, it does not accurately reflect the current issue that young people are regularly smoking in the house, posing a very real risk to fire safety.

Robust recruitment practices serve to protect young people. New staff are thoroughly vetted before their employment commences and this includes an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau check. Personnel files are in good general order; however, not all examples hold sufficient written details to explain how decisions to appoint are reached, whereby individuals do not meet the organisation's own recruitment criteria. Visitors to the home are suitably vetted; they are required to sign in and out of the building and do not have unsupervised access to young people or the home.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is good.

Young people enjoy very positive relationships with their key workers, and the wider staff team. They are empowered to choose their own key workers; it is usual practice for two to be allocated to each young person. The specific needs of individuals are effectively communicated to the team; this is achieved through detailed handovers, weekly staff meetings and group supervision sessions. Young people speak very positively about staff support. Comments include, 'I get the help I need', 'they always listen when you need them to' and 'I'm really happy with the support I get'.

The value of education is publicised and effectively communicated to young people; creative rewards are used to encourage school attendance and key workers liaise regularly with teachers and tutors. Care plans detail the educational arrangements in place and young people are supported to access the provision which best suits their needs. Examples include mainstream schools and colleges, individual tutoring arrangements and the organisation's own school provision.

Young people speak very positively about leisure activities. Personal hobbies and interests are carefully researched as soon as young people move in. Individual outings are frequently used for effective key working time, whereby staff are able to spend uninterrupted time with a young person.

The home is spacious within and this aspect allows young people to have the freedom of movement to be alone or in groups. A number of communal areas include lounges equipped with televisions and games stations; there is also computer provision, with internet access. The rear garden houses two guinea pigs and is large enough to accommodate outdoor activities.

Regular external activities include the use of local community provision, such as the leisure centre, bowling alley, ice rink, roller skating and horse riding centre. Young people, particularly older teenagers, really value their ability to go out after school and at weekends, to be with their friends. Such free time is built up over time, in line with good parenting.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is good.

Wherever possible, young people move into the home in a planned and sensitive manner; there have been no emergency admissions in the past year. Referral processes take into account the presenting needs of the young person, as well as the collective needs of the current group. Such practice has a positive impact upon all concerned and initial visits are encouraged to assist with the settling in process. A section is detailed within the home's own documentation to record all initial referral and assessment information; one example shows this section to be incomplete and this presents a risk of inaccurate care planning.

Every young person has a placement plan; individuals understand why they are living in this particular home and they know what to expect in terms of support packages. Individual care plans are derived from the information provided by placing authorities and a very detailed booklet is completed. This document outlines the presenting needs of the individual, and explains how these should be met. Progress is recorded in a separate format, a daily log which is maintained by the staff on duty. Additional separate care files hold health details and other sources of information. This amount of information, held in numerous places, makes it difficult to accurately track and record the progress of young people. Key information, particularly clear review evidence, is at risk of being lost or muddled. Reports are produced for statutory review meetings but there is no formal process in place to conduct in-house reviews of progress, although much pertinent information is shared verbally amongst the team.

Positive family and friends contact is valued by the home. Young people enjoy regular contact with those who are important to them and such arrangements are accurately recorded within care files. Where necessary, and agreed with placing authorities, staff provide practical assistance, in terms of transport and supervision. This information is appropriately recorded.

Young people preparing to move into independent living arrangements are very appreciative of the support and guidance they receive. They speak with genuine affection about staff members. 'I will really miss them'. This view is further endorsed by direct observation; a previous service user, who now lives locally called in to see the staff, and has been doing so for the last few years.

Young people say they are routinely invited to share their views about their own circumstances and the more general aspects of the running of the home. This view is further supported by written records of key worker sessions and house meetings.

Recent consultation with young people has resulted in obtaining the internet, and flat screen televisions are to be purchased for their bedrooms.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

Young people are effectively supported to maximise their independence skills. Pathway plans are in place for those of such an age and the home implements its own living skills programme. This is adapted in accordance with the age and needs of each young person. The acquisition of independence skills is maximised because young people are permitted to take risks and to make mistakes; this is achieved within sensible risk assessment criteria and guidance. This aspect is highly valued by the young people.

Young people are actively encouraged to keep their bedrooms tidy, to assist with meal preparation and to use laundry facilities independently. Each young person is supported to open a savings account and their bedrooms and clothing clearly reflect their own unique tastes and preferences.

The home is spacious and well maintained. Furniture and fittings are of good quality and these remain in good order. A rolling programme of maintenance and decoration ensures good aesthetics, which the young people value. The home is located within easy travelling distance of local amenities and this aspect enables young people to travel independently and to be less reliant upon staff support.

There is plenty of communal space, and this ensures that young people are able to easily choose to be alone, or to engage in group activities. Bedrooms are personalised and the young people have valid input into the decisions about the decoration of the remainder of the home. Throughout the course of this visit, young people were observed to be making full use of the premises. They are very comfortable in their immediate surroundings and clearly view it as their home.

Organisation

The organisation is satisfactory.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Young people are treated, and respected, as unique individuals; diverse needs are clearly featured throughout the care planning process. Staff work hard to encourage individual self expression and their good role modelling encourages the acceptance and value of differences.

The home routinely reviews its Statement of Purpose, young person's guide and website, to ensure that information remains current and up to date. Hence, all stakeholders can be assured that they are in receipt of clear and accurate information with regards to the services provided.

Induction processes are comprehensive and thorough; new staff members complete

a very detailed induction pack under the direct supervision and support of a senior staff member. Time is also spent at the company head office receiving additional guidance and core mandatory training. Staff members say they feel very well supported from day one and they are not expected to undertake lone duties until they are deemed as competent to do so. The scrutiny of such records largely supports this view; however, there are examples of incomplete induction records, as well as the absence of clear and specific recorded probationary reports.

Similar shortfalls are identified within staff supervision records. Those sampled are extremely variable in terms of quality; some examples contain a total lack of information, which presents the risk of issues and concerns relating to performance going unnoticed, and therefore not being rectified or supported. Less formal mechanisms are in place; staff members talk of an 'open door' policy, operated by the manager and they feel they can readily approach senior staff members with regards to any practice issues or concerns that they have.

A rolling programme of mandatory training provides staff with the guidance they need to be effective. The manager is suitably qualified and the majority of staff have completed the National Vocational Training (NVQ) in caring for young people. The remaining few who have not are new staff, and they will commence with NVQ training once their probationary periods are satisfactorily completed. In addition to mandatory training courses, staff are given additional training opportunities which further enhance their practice. Examples include, life story work, drug and alcohol awareness, Asperger's Syndrome, infection control and assertiveness training for supervisors.

There is a good gender mix of staff and duty rosters ensure that new members work alongside more senior and experienced colleagues. Hence, young people are suitably safeguarded and looked after by an experienced staff team during each shift. Effective deputising arrangements are in place and staff know who to contact in the event of an emergency and whilst 'out of hours'.

Monitoring and quality assurance mechanisms are in place, and reports are being completed and submitted in accordance with the regulations. It is evident that all of the required elements are being examined; however, current emphasis is being placed upon the quantity of information as opposed to its quality. One example includes staff supervision meetings, whereby the regularity of meetings is being monitored, but attention is not being paid towards viewing the actual notes; hence the shortfalls with regards to the contents have not been identified. The Regulation 33 visitor is not always signing the records viewed during such inspections. There is little evidence in place to demonstrate that the monitoring mechanisms being implemented by the manager and provider are being brought together, so as to effectively review current provision and make plans for the continued improvement and development of the home.

Administrative records and care files are being maintained in accordance with the regulations, albeit the unwieldy nature of some of these records makes it problematic to easily retrieve pertinent information.

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/s meets the Care Standards Act 2000, Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider(s) must comply with the given timescales.

Std.	Action	Due date
13	ensure there are suitable arrangements for the recording, handling, safekeeping, safe administration and disposal of medicines received into the children's home (Regulation 21(1))	30/11/2010
16	ensure that a written record is made of any complaint, the action taken in response, and the outcome of the investigation (Regulation 24(5))	30/11/2010
22	ensure the written record of the use of any measure of control, restraint or discipline includes all of the elements as listed under this regulation (Regulation 17(4))	30/11/2010
26	review and amend the current fire risk assessment to ensure that adequate precautions are taken against the risk of fire (Regulation 32(1)(a))	30/11/2010
31	complete induction and probation records fully to ensure that all permanent appointments are subject to the satisfactory completion of a period of probation (Regulation 27(1)(a))	30/11/2010
33	review the contents and manner in which Regulation 33 and 34 monitoring is conducted, recorded and used effectively to improve the quality of care provided in the children's home (Regulations 33 and 34, Schedule 6)	30/11/2010

Recommendations

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

- review the arrangement of locking the larder door, in order for children to prepare snacks and drinks for themselves at reasonable times (NMS 10.8)
- ensure each child has a clear written health plan covering medical history and immunisation (NMS 12.2)
- review the current procedural guidance on privacy and confidentiality (NMS 9.2)
- ensure written records are made of the circumstances of all incidents of absconding, all action taken by staff, the circumstances of the child's return, any reasons given by the child for absconding, and any action taken in the light of those reasons (NMS 19.6)

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- ensure regular monitoring of the record books to monitor compliance with the home's policy, procedure and guidance and to identify any patterns in incidents leading to disciplinary or restraint action becoming necessary (NMS 22.11)
 - demonstrate in writing how the registered person's system to decide on appointment, or refusal of appointment, of staff in the light of any criminal convictions or other concerns about suitability has been implemented. (NMS 27.2)
 - develop a clearer format for placement plans (National Minimum Standard 2.1)
 - ensure staff supervision records adequately cover all of the elements as listed under this standard. (National Minimum Standard 28.4)