

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sophie Wood
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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.

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 are making good progress in relation to their starting points across all areas of their growth and development. This is largely attributed to good quality care planning which includes external expertise, collaboration with placing social workers and the young people themselves. The home enjoys professional and appropriate relationships with external agencies. Such resources are tapped into quickly. Young people receive the individual support they need.

Relationships between the staff and young people are strong. Placing social workers commend this aspect. Young people settle in quickly and the team consistently implements clear boundaries, behavioural expectations and a safe, nurturing environment. Young people form appropriate relationships with the staff. Key working systems are strong. Young people begin to appreciate the guidance and advice they receive. Safer decisions are being made by individuals. Risky behaviours, such as running away have significantly decreased. Young people are also beginning to make mature choices with regards to their own health and educational needs.

Young people are influential in their own care planning. Their views and opinions are also keenly sought in continuing to develop the service. Young people feel empowered and they learn to think for themselves. This culture encourages feelings of safety and belonging.

Leadership and management systems are continuing to evolve. The Registered Manager has improved upon her own Regulation 34 monitoring processes and has clear development plans in place. Shortfalls and weaknesses have been identified through internal monitoring and these areas are being tackled. Examples include,

staff supervision and appraisal and the quality of individual risk assessments. Improvements are already noted but renewed systems have yet to become embedded. Regulation 33 reports do cover all of the required areas. Some aspects are diligently viewed whereas others need better evaluation to ensure speedy improvement. A requirement is made in this regard.

Five recommendations are made from this visit; none of which have an immediate or adverse impact upon the welfare and safety of the young people. Rather, they are concerned with strengthening the quality of some of the systems and documentation already in place.

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
33 (2001)	conduct Regulation 33 visits and produce a written report on the conduct of the home. This requirement is made within the context of improving upon the evaluative content of these reports (Regulation 33 (4)(c))	30/11/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that placement plans are monitored by a key worker who ensures that the requirements of the plan are implemented in the day-to-day care of that child. This recommendation is specific to ensuring that personal identity sections are made clearer (NMS 25.2)
- ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files now or in the future. This recommendation is specific to clearly recording the progress made by young people (NMS 22.5)
- regularly review incidents of challenging behaviour, examine trends or issues emerging from this, to enable staff to reflect and learn to inform future practice. This recommendation is specific to ensure the effectiveness of any use of a physical restraint is fully explored (NMS 3.21)
- ensure that the home's location and design promotes children's health, safety and well-being and avoids factors such as excessive isolation and areas that

present significant risks to children. This recommendation is specific to making better use of the upstairs games room (NMS 10.2)

- ensure that managers and staff are clear about their roles and responsibilities. This recommendation is specific to ensuring the Registered Manager is included in staffing and placement decisions affecting the home. (NMS 21.4)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people are making good progress across all areas of their development. The speed of such progress reflects the amount of time each young person has been living in the home; some are very newly placed. Never-the-less, solid, and in some cases, exceptionally good progress is being made, especially when measured against individual starting points.

Young people frequently join the home having experienced much disruption, negative influences and challenging personal circumstances. It is extremely significant to note how quickly strong and positive attachments are made between young people and the staff. This forms the basis of making good progress because young people trust the adults around them. They frequently take their advice. Placing social workers commend this aspect by saying, 'attachments are a real strength' and 'the young person trusts the staff and wants their approval.' Young people make similar comments, such as, 'I trust the staff' and 'they give me good advice.... they care about me.'

Young people are routinely making appropriate decisions which impact positively upon their own safety and well being. Incidents of being absent and running away are significantly reducing. Young people are safer. Young people are beginning to think about consequences and longer term decisions in relation to their health and education. Each young person is at a different stage within this journey but all are benefitting from the consistent approach of the staff team. A confident staff group understands that young people need to learn from their mistakes within the boundaries of a safe environment.

Young people begin to develop self confidence. This is aided by an extensive activity programme. Young people are discovering their talents and interests, thus developing their own personalities. This is complemented by a strong approach to key working, whereby personal histories are safely explored and young people start to make sense of their pasts. They are dealing with their own circumstances and making positive plans for their own futures.

In line with their age and understanding, young people take greater responsibility for their own health needs. Some young people maintain their own general health appointments and others take responsibility for engaging with external specialists. This may include their medical, as well as their psychological well being. In the event of a young person making unsafe health decisions, the staff team perseveres with

age appropriate guidance and support. Young people are learning the trust and responsibility to make their own decisions is earned.

Young people are making variable progress with regards to their educational development. The vast majority of the young people are enjoying better attendance at school and this is improving their chances of success. A number now have clearer ideas as to their chosen career paths. Those experiencing current difficulties are receiving targeted support. Staff are tirelessly encouraging their attendance and making realistic demands on individuals. This tactic is beginning to show dividends. Young people say, 'I'm now doing a course I enjoy' and 'I've never seen the point of school but I have to go.' Staff say they are not dis-heartened by such variable responses. They see it as a challenge to persevere. Comments from staff members include, 'if we work hard enough, most children eventually discover the benefits of a good education. It's our job to make sure they get to this.'

Young people appreciate their home environment. They enjoy the privacy of their own bedrooms and take care to personalise them. Young people are also beginning to value the positive links the home enjoys with its local community. The home is viewed positively because young people make regular and appropriate use of local leisure facilities; they also join in with community events, including local fund raising.

Young people receive the help and support they need to maintain positive and appropriate relationships with their family members and friends. Such arrangements and relationships are sometimes difficult and complex. Young people place very high value upon the support they receive. They are empowered to make important, and sometimes difficult, decisions which aids their emotional health and development.

Young people are effectively supported to become independent and enter the next stage of their lives. Individuals take advantage of the systems within the home that give them the opportunities to practise and develop important life skills. The home celebrates many success stories of young people moving on from the home who have kept in touch because of the significant attachments made during their time here.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy positive and respectful relationships with the staff. These become quickly established because the team is consistent and young people are valued. Young people quickly respond to feeling cared for and genuinely liked. There is a lot of laughter and affection within the home. The team is confident in dealing with the challenges of new young people moving in. Initial difficulties are well read and successfully managed. Staff rapidly establish trust and confidence. This accelerates young people settling in.

Not all of the young people get along with each other. Staff deal with such challenges with confidence and competence. Their combined experience and relevant

training ensures conflicts and disagreements are proportionately managed and resolved. Young people learn to live alongside each other and begin to tolerate differences. Valuable life skills are learned. There are also examples of young people moving on from tolerance to developing meaningful friendships with each other.

Young people play an active role in shaping service delivery. Their views and opinions are gathered in a variety of ways. Regular house meetings, key working sessions, preparation for reviews and monitoring visits are all used to capture and record young people's feedback. Where appropriate, young people's ideas have a direct impact upon decisions. Examples include, activity provision and décor: some of the questions asked at staff interviews have been directly developed by the young people. The presenting and changing needs of young people influences the staff training programme. Individual and specific staff training, outside of the mandatory subjects, is continually updated to reflect such needs. This includes specific health issues and managing behaviours which are unsafe.

Comments from young people range from, 'I am listened to' and 'I am not listened to.' Examples of young people being dissatisfied with decisions are more common at the start of a placement. Staff deliver such messages consistently and use language free from terminology. This is readily understood. Placing social workers say, 'staff set appropriate boundaries and I am already seeing positive results.' Risk taking behaviours, as well as the need to implement physical interventions and sanctions, are dramatically decreasing. Such progress is a direct consequence of staff's implementation of firm safe boundaries, rules and expectations.

Placement plans routinely capture the specific and individual needs of each young person. These documents accurately reflect the local authority's plans and also the young person's own views and opinions. Such plans are subject to on-going updates and amendments. They are working documents, as are individual risk assessments and behaviour management strategies. Monitoring systems, including Regulation 33 and Regulation 34, routinely critiques care planning processes. This ensures their overall quality continues to be of a good standard.

Staff are aware of the presenting needs of the young people. Weekly staff meetings further examine how well individuals are being supported. The effective use of key working is scrutinised at these forums. The current team knows the young people very well. Individual staff members describe young people's needs, often in much greater detail than the placement plan itself. Although very positive, this detailed understanding is not always being transferred to placement plan updates. Given the home's current recruitment drive, there is a potential risk that new staff members may not readily pick up key information, such as meeting personal identity needs. It is recommended that these areas are reviewed and made specifically clear.

Young people are appropriately supported with regards to their health needs. Staff implement their own varied training to encourage young people to take responsibility for their own well-being. Key working is used to provide an educative approach around health risks, such as smoking, alcohol and drug use, sexual relationships and healthy eating. Young people's responses are variable. Some heed such guidance

and are making encouraging progress. Those who are resistant to this input, continue to receive it from a dedicated and persistent staff team until it starts to sink in. One placing social worker states, 'in taking responsibility for their own health needs, this young person is so much safer than they have ever been, what an amazing turn around.'

This same enthusiastic approach is having a similar impact upon young people's educational needs and outcomes. Overall, young people's attendance has significantly improved. Some individuals are making mature choices about their future plans. Young people say, 'I know exactly what I want to do....staff helped me to find the college course I needed.' Those experiencing current difficulties are receiving individualised targeted support and encouragement. Staff work collaboratively with social workers, school representatives and individual young people to promptly address concerns and find solutions. Young people understand that staff have a strong commitment to education and do not tire of promoting its value.

The home's varied and exciting activity provision is a real strength. Young people value this and frequently refer to it as, 'one of the best things about the home.' Staff skilfully introduce stimulating pastimes as a positive alternative to negative behaviours. Staff say, 'keeping young people busy and positively engaged gets rid of the boredom factor which can lead to problems.' Social workers say, 'using up all of that energy productively has already reduced their ability to get into mischief!'

Young people live in a spacious and comfortable home. The on-going refurbishment and maintenance programme is providing high quality décor. Young people personalise their bedrooms and they are currently pleased about the planned refurbishment of the kitchen. Communal areas are furnished and decorated to an excellent standard, save the upstairs games room which is currently underused. At full occupancy, such space is at a premium and it is recommended that better use is made of this particular room.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Robust safeguarding procedures are understood and implemented by the staff team. Regular training in this regard pointedly targets the very issues experienced by the current group of young people. This includes internet safety, running away, drug and alcohol awareness and child sexual exploitation. As a direct consequence, placing social workers speak of, 'a massive reduction in unsafe behaviours' and 'the young person being so much safer.'

A small number of young people give examples of feeling unsafe and this is attributed to specific incidents, involving particular peers. Staff and placing social workers articulate an acute awareness of such issues. They are fully able to demonstrate the effectiveness of the collaborative management strategies in place. The staff team further describes how such incidents may cross the threshold of

potential bullying behaviour. Such examples are swiftly managed with positive results. Young people learn to examine their own behaviours and the impact these have upon others.

The staff team is particularly good at reducing risky behaviours. Young people engage with their key workers and positively respond to the guidance they receive. Instances of running away and being absent have dramatically reduced for all of the young people. The team is skilled at investigating the pull factors, including the very personal reasons why such behaviours occur for individuals. A targeted and personalised approach, in close liaison with placing social workers and the local police results in a massive reduction. Young people are much safer than they were before.

The staff team conscientiously thinks about its use of physical restraints and sanctions. Accredited training and personalised behaviour management plans sees such use as extremely minimal. The overall use of physical restraint interventions is also decreasing; some young people have never experienced this, those who have are already experiencing minimal use. Recording tools have recently been updated but there remains a need to improve upon evaluating the effectiveness of using such measures. A recommendation is made in this regard.

Staff are good at recognising the very individual risks for each young person. More recently, a culture of collective responsibility around risk assessment has developed. The Registered Manager encourages this and staff across all disciplines contribute to this process. Some assessments are clearer than others. The Registered Manager is already working to improve this.

Since the last inspection, one allegation against a staff member has been appropriately managed. Although safeguarding procedures between the school and the home became confused at one point, the welfare and safety of the young person remained paramount. Appropriate lessons were learnt and improved communication systems between the home and school has resulted.

Thorough and rigorous recruitment procedures protect young people. An on-going recruitment drive is being managed by those across the organisation with the appropriate skills, training and experience. Young people contribute to this process. New staff do not commence until all of their required checks are satisfactorily returned. A similar, rigorous approach is applied to the chaperoning of visitors to the home and no agency or volunteer staff are used.

Young people live in a safe physical environment. Good quality provision is further complemented by regular health and safety checks. Young people understand these; they fully participate with fire drills and help to take care of their home. Additional security measures are clearly described and agreed with young people and placing authorities.

Leadership and management

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

The home is effectively managed by an experienced and suitably qualified Registered Manager. The current team is comprised of long-standing and new staff, with a recruitment campaign on-going. The wider organisation recognises the need to recruit a suitably qualified and experienced deputy to assist the Registered Manager. This is recognised within the home's development plan and is aimed at strengthening the middle management structure.

Alongside such developments, the service has also recognised the need to further develop its supervision and appraisal processes for all staff. This work is underway. The initial movement of new staff through the induction and probationary process is slick. New members say they are very well supported. Immediate and subsequent Diploma training is well structured and delivered in a timely manner. An extensive training programme also provides more experienced staff with additional skills which impacts very positively upon the quality of service delivery. Current supervision and appraisal practice is however, variable. Opportunities to evaluate the impact of some very good training are being missed. Too much focus was being placed upon the regularity of supervision as opposed to its content and value. These shortfalls have already been recognised and targeted plans are in place to address these.

The current team is focused and cohesive. Staff possess the qualifications they require and new staff are where they should be in terms of accredited training. Duty rosters reflect good staffing levels. Young people are well supported and supervised where necessary. This is sometimes achieved through the use of overtime and there is an element of staff providing cover needs to the organisation's other homes. One example of a placement being made during the Registered Manager's absence is also noted. Such practice potentially undermines the Registered Manager. There is also a risk of the home's resources being used to supplement the wider organisation.

Since the last inspection, the home has fully addressed the two recommendations made. These were about keeping physical restraint records in a bound book and involving young people with staff recruitment. No external complaints have been received about the home but a complaint made by a young person has been satisfactorily concluded. Young people are actively encouraged and supported to air their concerns and issues.

Placing social workers describe the home's Statement of Purpose as 'accurate and comprehensive.' This document is routinely reviewed and updated. Young people understand the contents of the Young Person's Guide and confirm that key workers provide additional explanations when necessary.

Monitoring systems and processes have also been identified by the home as needing to improve. The Registered Manager completes weekly and monthly checks aimed at reviewing and improving outcomes for young people. Such monitoring sees recent improvements to risk assessments and the home's communication with the school. Regulation 33 visits have been disrupted and the use of more than one visitor impedes the consistency of these reports. Some areas are robustly scrutinised, such

as the quality of placement plans. However, other key areas, such as physical restraint records are simply being counted. This lack of evaluation is not helpful. More positively, both processes actively seek and include the views and opinions of the young people.

Care records are confidentially stored. Young people freely add to these when they choose to. Over time, such records demonstrate the good progress being made by young people. This is further endorsed by placing social workers whose comments include, 'significant progress', 'outstanding communication helps the progress' and 'a massive transformation.' Although good evidence of progress can be located, this could be made clearer and more readily available for the young people to see for themselves. It is recommended this aspect be reviewed in order for young people to make better sense of their time at the home should they choose to view these records later on.

The Registered Manager demonstrates open and transparent practice. The home's track record in responding to inspections is positive. Requirements and recommendations are swiftly responded to. Incidents and significant events are openly shared with appropriate agencies. This includes notifications to Ofsted.

The overall good quality of the home, its furnishings and resources, good staffing levels and an extensive activity provision all suggest financial viability. Young people enjoy the security and stability this brings to their lives.

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.