

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Anna Williams
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This privately owned children's home is part of a large organisation which operates many children's homes in the area. The organisation is also able to provide schooling for children with special educational needs. The home can accommodate up to three young people aged 10 to 17 years who have emotional and behavioural difficulties.

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**.

This children's home succeeds in supporting young people to achieve outstanding outcomes. Experienced and well-trained staff deliver highly personalised care. Each young person's unique needs are clearly identified and consistently met. Young people are positive about the staff and the care they receive. A strength of the home is the strong partnership working with placing authorities and external professionals. Positive feedback has been received from parents of children placed in the home.

Areas for development include ensuring that the home's records capture any debrief with staff who have used a restraint. Positively, there has not been an incident of physical intervention for four months. However, this information is required by regulation. Staff receive an annual appraisal of their work practice. However, this appraisal does not include direct feedback from young people on staff performance. Otherwise robust recruitment practice is compromised by weak telephone verification of written references. The organisation's policy on vetting does not direct the Registered Manager on how and when verification should take place. Consequently, some inconsistencies exist within candidate recruitment files. Investigations into allegations or suspicions of harm are handled quickly and in a way that protects young people. However, records of the outcome of allegations have not been provided to staff involved in a timely manner. This was rectified during the inspection.

The Registered Manager provides strong leadership. She has a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the home. There is a development plan in place to

drive forward further improvements. However, the staff team are not aware of the content of the development plan. Shortfalls identified within this inspection do not have a direct impact on the welfare of young people within the home.

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
17B (2001)	ensure the volume kept for the purpose of recording restraints contains confirmation that the person using the restraint has been spoken to about the use of the restraint. (Regulation 17B (3) (h))	02/12/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure staff are aware of the content of the home's development plan and understand their individual role in achieving the targets set (NMS 15.3)
- ensure telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references prior to a member of staff commencing duties (NMS 16.1)
- revise the appraisal format to ensure it takes account any views of children the service is providing for (NMS 19.5)
- ensure there is a clear and comprehensive summary of any allegations made against a particular member of staff, including details of how the allegation was followed up and resolved, a record of any action taken and the decisions reached, is kept on the person's confidential file and a copy is provided to the as soon as the investigation is concluded. (NMS 20.7)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **outstanding**.

Young people who live at the home receive very high levels of close individual support. Young people benefit from regular key-work sessions which cover a wide range of topics such as supporting young people through change in their lives and discussing risk taking behaviours. These sessions provide young people a safe forum for discussion and learning. Young people develop emotional resilience and a more

positive self-view because they receive highly effective emotional support. They make significant progress in all aspects of their lives. Young people speak positively about living in the home. One young person said 'the home could not do anything better, I am quite happy here'. Placing social workers commented: 'this is the most stable [child] has been in a very long time', and '[child] continues to show improvement in their behaviour, emotional well-being and social skills'.

Through consistent and effective behaviour management strategies and support, all young people make significant progress in managing anger and challenging behaviours. One young person commented 'I have changed since living here, I am not so angry now'. A placing social worker stated '[child] is now much more able to regulate their emotions and feelings'.

Young people build confidence academically through bespoke packages of learning and staff openly praising their educational achievements. Young people who historically have not engaged in formal education are supported to re-engage through creative individual educational transition plans. This means that all the young people now attend an education placement. The home has close links with the organisation's school. This close liaison with the school and all educational establishments ensures that education staff are kept up-to-date with significant events in the young person's life. Young people's attendance and educational progress are exceptional.

Young people take responsibility for their personal and social development, for example through caring for small pets. They talk enthusiastically about community activities they are involved in, such as uniformed organisations and sports clubs. These activities encourage individual young people's talents and provide opportunities to make new friends.

Young people engage with therapeutic services offered by the organisation. This promotes their emotional health and provides further opportunities to reflect and discuss significant life events such as bereavement. Young people attend all routine health and development checks. They learn from advice given and do not partake in alcohol or substance misuse. Young people maintain an extremely healthy, active lifestyle. This benefits their well-being now and in the future.

Young people maintain contact with family and those significant to them. Comments from a placing social worker include 'the home has gone above and beyond to maintain the contact plan'. Complex and intensive contact arrangements have been successfully facilitated by staff. The staff team understand each young person's family histories and experiences which enables tailored responses to any fears and worries they express. The home provides an accommodation service to further support family time together. Parents commented how valuable they felt this service was to supporting quality contact time. This ensures young people are able to maintain attachments and spend time with those important to them.

Young people consistently engage with daily living chores and targets. These are appropriate to the young people's age and placement plan. Young people share tasks

such as assisting at meal times, cleaning and household chores. This provides young people with excellent opportunities to prepare for adulthood.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from warm relationships with experienced and committed staff members. Staff work with young people from their individual starting points and build upon their existing strengths and help them develop new ones. Small achievements and progress are openly praised. Good quality records document young people's significant progress. Comments from young people include: 'I love all the staff, especially my two ladies that are my key workers' and 'the staff are all fantastic'. Positive feedback has been received from parents about the quality of the staff. Comments from placing social workers include: 'communication between me and the home is excellent, I feel very well-informed', and 'staff have been nurturing, and sensitively supported [child] through some traumatic life events'.

Young people's views are sought through regular house meetings. Their engagement in these sessions is consistently good. Through these meetings, young people have seen the creation of the upstairs chill-out room, as well as changes in activities, menus and equipment bought for the home. Comments from young people include: 'staff listen to what we say, things change and stuff gets bought', and 'we have house meetings where we all have our say'. Young people know how to complain. There has been one complaint since the last inspection. This has been investigated robustly and resolved fully. These effective consultation systems ensure that the voice of the young people remains strong within this home.

In-house placement plans are up-to-date and highly individualised. Staff knowledge of these plans is excellent. Issues relating to the identity and background of young people are identified and fully addressed within daily planning. Diversity and learning about other cultures and backgrounds is appropriately celebrated within the home. Some young people attend a local church. Young people contribute to their personal placement goals through monthly targets. Young people commented: 'I pick my goals for the month with my key worker', and 'I like to look at how many stickers I have achieved'.

Extensive information and individual support is provided to young people on issues such as illegal drugs and sexual health. This information is shared sensitively and in line with each young person's development and understanding. This means young people gain appropriate knowledge to help them keep safe and make informed choices. Arrangements for the administration of medication within the home are safe and effective.

Staff successfully support and encourage educational attendance and achievement. A step-by-step approach to learning has successfully supported young people back into full-time education. Residential staff have supported young people within the school setting during key transition periods. This effectively supports the young person to

build confidence around a return to schooling and learning. Activity planners are created with young people and engagement with them is good. A wide-range of activities is offered to young people. In-house activities include arts and crafts, baking, pamper nights and bracelet making. Trips take place to popular attractions such as Chessington and Thorpe park. Local community events are attended, like the annual carnival and folk week. This offers young people a wide range of activities and experiences.

The quality of the accommodation is outstanding. The home is located near to local shops and leisure facilities, and within walking distance of the main town shopping area. This positively supports young people's community involvement. The home contains high-quality furnishings, and is decorated in a homely and colourful manner. Young people's artwork, drawings and certificates are on display. This openly celebrates their talents, progress and achievements. Young people can reflect on activities and trips they have been involved in through photo displays. The home benefits from a range of rooms for private visits, study and relaxation. The rear garden provides space for play and growing fruit and vegetables. Young people like the home and its location. One young person said 'I like my bedroom, it's my space and I chose the colours'. This provides superb accommodation for young people to relax and feel comfortable in, and feel part of the local community.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report that they like living in the home and feel generally safe. They do not identify bullying as an issue. One professional commented about one report of bullying within an education setting involving a young person 'the staff acted promptly like a protective parent, this makes [the child] feel protected'.

In May 2013, there were two occasions when young people were reported missing from the home. Agreed procedures were followed. Young people received good support and guidance upon their return. There have not been any incidents since then. Staff spend a great deal of time talking through any identified concerns to develop young people's own understanding of safety issues and the reasons adults are concerned. As a result young people's risk-taking behaviours reduce and they feel cared for and protected.

The use of sanctions is relatively low. A young person commented 'I know the rules of the home, the staff treat us fairly'. Young people shared some negative views about the use of restraint in the home. However, recently revised reward charts, positive praise and a consistent approach to behaviour management has successfully led to a period of four months without the use of restraint. Although in general restraint records are clear, they do not capture when the member of staff is debriefed following an incident. This is a regulatory requirement. However, staff do confirm that verbal debriefs occur which are not recorded. This allows for verbal discussion and learning from every incident.

Staff demonstrate good knowledge of safeguarding procedures and processes. Significant events relating to the protection of children are notified appropriately. Investigations into allegations of abuse or harm are handled quickly. If this involves staff, they receive appropriate support. However, the formal outcome of investigations is not shared with staff involved in a timely manner and filed on their confidential file. This does not support the member of staff and the Registered Manager to reflect and learn from such investigations.

Otherwise robust recruitment processes are compromised by the lack of a consistent approach to the verification of written references. One candidate commenced duties before references had been verified as true and accurate. Other candidates files do not demonstrate the date that references were verified. The organisation's vetting policy and procedure does not make reference to the verification of references. This has led to these inconsistencies between some staff files. Young people are appropriately involved in the recruitment process of new staff. This demonstrates to young people that their views are valued.

Young people live in an environment which is safe. The home is very well-maintained. Routine health and safety checks of the building and equipment protects young people and all who visit the building. Regular drills ensure young people know what actions to take in case of an emergency.

Leadership and management

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

There is a Registered Manager in post. She continues to study towards a level 5 Diploma. This demonstrates commitment to obtaining relevant skills in leadership and management. The Statement of Purpose clearly describes the facilities and services offered by the home and is followed in practice. The children's guide contains all required information in a child-friendly format. This ensures that young people, placing social workers, and parents are all clear about the services on offer and aims of the home.

Staff, including the Registered Manager, receive high quality supervision on a regular basis. Comments from staff members include: 'I get excellent supervision', and 'there is really good support working here, you never feel on your own'. Staff receive an annual appraisal of their performance. This ensures that the quality of staff practice is monitored and challenged as appropriate. However, the annual appraisals do not include opportunity for young people to feedback about individual staff performance. This does not allow young people to be appropriately involved in appraising the staff who care for them on a day-to-day basis.

Staff hold relevant childcare qualifications, or are working towards these. They undertake training in key safe care topics such as child sexual exploitation, first aid and fire awareness. These are appropriately refreshed at regular intervals. In addition, staff are supported to attend further courses which enhance their skills and understanding of working with individual young people. Recent courses attended

include 'promoting mental health' and 'let's talk about sex'. This ensures that staff are equipped with up to date and relevant skills to meet the diverse needs of the young people within the home.

The home has maintained an outstanding quality of care and maintains a good overall judgement. This demonstrates sustained and consistent good quality care. A previous recommendation to consider the impact of an all-female staff team has been fully met. The home now employs a male member of staff. The young people also have opportunity to meet with a male independent visitor, which some young people do on a regular basis. This provides young people with positive adult role modelling from both males and females.

Records are stored securely. They contain all the information as required by regulation. Young people are encouraged to add their own personal statements and comments, and do so. Records capture young people's lives and progress made in a sensitive and respectful way. This ensures the story of a young person's life in the home is detailed and contributes to an understanding of their whole life story.

Internal monitoring visits take place within required timescales and involve the views of young people. These reports are challenging and drive forward improvements within the home. An action plan is created after each visit and any shortfalls identified are promptly addressed. Management monitoring is undertaken on a quarterly basis. Patterns and trends are identified within these reports.

These self-evaluation systems feed into the home's development plan. The plan holds targets and aims which further improve outcomes for young people. However, the staff team does not know the content of the development plan. Consequently, they are not supported to understand their individual role in achieving the targets outlined within the current improvement plan.

Progress towards the current development plan is good. Young people are now more actively involved in creating and reviewing their own reward goals. The key working system is being reviewed to further enhance already excellent individualised support for young people. This demonstrates a commitment of the Registered Manager to further improve the outcomes for young people within the home.

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.