

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Putnam
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is owned by a private organisation. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for a maximum of three children, who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Children living in the home are able to access education through registered provision provided by the organisation. Therapy or counselling is also available to children if this is appropriate.

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**.

Children live in a comfortable, homely environment. They receive an extremely good standard of care from a small, but committed staff team. Children attribute their sense of safety to the way in which staff care for them. Staff get to know children extremely well and utilise this knowledge to prepare individualised plans that inform how children are cared for. Potential difficulties or problems are identified and clear strategies are implemented to help keep children safe.

Staff communicate positive aspirations for children which supports children to progress and achieve positive outcomes. Parents and staff from placing authorities recognise genuine change for children that results from the care they receive.

Leadership and management arrangements are strong. A passionate Registered Manager is supported by a strong leadership team within the organisational structure. Robust systems ensure that monitoring provides a clear understanding of the home's strengths and areas for improvement. However, reviews of the quality of care do not reflect that consultation with children, parents or placing authorities currently takes place. Staff are challenged, supported and developed through effective supervision and appraisal processes, but not all staff are qualified to the expected standard.

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
34 (2001)	ensure that the system established for reviewing and improving the quality of care shall provide for consultation with children accommodated in the home, their parents and placing authorities. (Regulation 34 (3))	28/06/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all existing care staff have attained a minimum level 3 qualification. (NMS 18.5)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Children make good progress in developing a positive view of themselves. Managers and staff utilise systems within the organisation to ensure swift access to therapy or counselling when this is needed. This helps children come to terms with their past experiences and manage current difficulties. Parents say that their children mature and become more confident as a result of their time in the home. Independent reviewing officers refer to significant improvement in the emotional well-being of children, describing them as 'settled and content' within the home. As a result, children are now able to stay in their review meetings and make meaningful contributions. Parents also acknowledge that their children now demonstrate improved concentration and an ability to remain on task.

Children enjoy good physical health. Health needs are met through registration with relevant health professionals and liaison with specialists or experts when required. This ensures positive outcomes for children are achieved. For example, prescribed medication is effectively monitored and adjusted when required, resulting in improved sleep patterns for children. In addition, private dental treatment is sought when necessary to improve the physical appearance and overall confidence of children. Children change their eating habits and keep fit through taking part in a range of activities. Parents say this results in significant weight loss which improves the overall health and confidence of children. Children say that they eat healthy food but still enjoy making cakes and eating chocolate.

School attendance is excellent, at nearly 99%. This ensures children have the opportunity to make the most of the opportunities available to them. Considering the starting points children begin from, educational progress is steady in line with national curriculum levels. However, in some cases this continues to fall behind individual targets set by specialist teachers. Recent school reports describe behaviour targets as 'partially met' and identify that more effort is needed from children to improve progress.

Staff work closely with parents and placing authorities to support meaningful contact that enables children to stay in touch with close relatives. Children say that they have regular contact with their families. Staff frequently drive long distances and stay with children in hotels so they can directly support children before and after contact visits. Visits from parents to the home are also facilitated, including the provision of overnight accommodation in nearby hotels if this is considered beneficial.

Children develop independence as a result of support and encouragement from staff. This is managed sensitively and age appropriately. For example, over time staff assist children to develop the confidence to walk to school on their own. Children undertake domestic chores around the home to reflect normal family life and provide an opportunity to earn additional financial rewards. When older young people are placed in the home, staff ensure that individual needs are sensitively considered when preparing for their independence. This ensures that young people continue to feel cared for and are not unsettled by sudden or unexpected change.

Quality of care

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

Children benefit from extremely positive relationships with caring and motivated staff. Children clearly express that they like the staff and enjoy spending time with them. Independent reviewing officers and parents comment positively upon the quality of these relationships. The small, but committed staff team provide children with consistency and continuity. Staff highlight that there is very little sickness amongst the team. However, when this does occur they provide cover for each other to ensure the children are not unsettled by different staff coming into the home.

Comprehensive, individualised placement plans are in place for each child. These documents clearly identify strengths and positives as well as potential difficulties. Managers and staff ensure that plans produced within the home link directly with the plans of placing authorities. Actions proposed to meet areas of need are clearly set out alongside specific aims or targets to be achieved. In addition, each child benefits from documents that describe individualised daily management routines. Children are encouraged and enabled to contribute to their plans when appropriate. All documentation is regularly reviewed. Children benefit from the consistent approach of all staff that follows on from these documents.

Monthly house meetings focus on particular themes, for example bullying is addressed by considering what makes a good friend. Meetings are led by staff in the

home or external professionals who bring specific expertise, such as sexual health and wellbeing. Consultation with children is undertaken informally. Staff engender a family environment, which results in a natural progression to children being involved in discussion and decision making.

Staff encourage children to explore their own identity. Religious festivals are not only celebrated but explained to children. Staff provide access to local newspapers and other media from the home areas of children. This helps children to stay in touch with stories and events in the places they come from.

Staff develop and maintain constructive relationships with other professionals to support positive outcomes for children. For example, staff ensure there is open communication between themselves and staff in each child's school. This enables them to provide the necessary support to encourage the educational achievements of children. Children confirm that staff help them with their homework.

Each child has their own activity schedule. Children take part in a wide range of activities both in and out of the home. As a result children develop an attitude of wanting to try new things. Communal group activities are also arranged, especially during weekends. Special excursions are used to celebrate events or reward the achievements of children. An annual summer holiday is organised with a focus on providing children with fun activities and new experiences.

The safety of children is enhanced by robust procedures for the administration of medicines. These are systematically adhered to by staff. All prescribed and homely medications are logged in and out. Accurate and clear records of administration and disposal of medications are maintained.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children articulate clearly that they feel safe saying, 'The staff keep me safe.' Managers and staff demonstrate sound understanding of child protection procedures and processes, and follow these efficiently when required to do so. When necessary, managers take prompt action to institute change to safeguard children. For example, following a recent incident a door alarm system was introduced to enable the movements of children to be monitored more effectively at night. Discussion took place with children and consent from placing authorities and parents was appropriately sought prior to the implementation of this system.

On the rare occasions when bullying has occurred, children are confident to speak out and tell an adult whom they trust. Managers ensure there is a prompt and strong response which clearly communicates that bullying is not tolerated within the home. This safeguards children and helps them to be confident that their concerns are heard and addressed.

It is extremely rare that children go missing. No incidents have occurred since the

last inspection. However, managers and staff remain vigilant to the possibility that this could happen. Consequently, strong and effective relationships with local police are maintained. Senior managers within the organisation share information and meet regularly with specialist officers. A signed protocol is agreed between the provider and the police to ensure prompt and effective action is taken to safeguard children, should they go missing in the future.

Staff manage difficult or challenging behaviour effectively and proportionately. All staff are trained in appropriate techniques to de-escalate situations and restrain children if absolutely necessary. There has been no incident of restraint since the last inspection. A small number of sanctions are recorded. These are split evenly amongst all children living in the home since the last inspection. Records demonstrate that these sanctions are considered and fair.

Individual assessments are prepared for each child, which identify potential risk. These documents are reviewed regularly to ensure that they continue to identify strategies to reduce potential risk or the likelihood of children being harmed. Staff involve children in this process when appropriate. Children sign or add their comments to demonstrate that staff have discussed matters with them. Staff also sign these documents to demonstrate that they have read and understood them.

Staff adhere to robust organisational procedures to ensure that all health and safety matters are addressed consistently. The effectiveness of these processes is regularly monitored to ensure the health and wellbeing of children is promoted.

Managers within the home and the parent organisation follow comprehensive recruitment procedures on the occasions when new staff are employed. This helps to prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children. In reality the staff team has remained constant over a prolonged period, providing consistency and continuity for children. While not all recruitment records are kept within the home, the organisation's head office is only a short distance away meaning that personnel files are accessible if required.

Leadership and management

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

Managers convey a genuine passion for providing a quality service for children. In turn, staff communicate positive aspirations for the children in their care which is reflected in the quality of relationships between children and staff. Managers and staff get to know children extremely well. Consequently they recognise when children make genuine progress and are able to reflect upon this. Managers and staff track individual change anecdotally, rather than through any systematic or formally documented process.

No requirements or recommendations were set at the last inspection. However, managers continue to focus on developments to improve the service. Monthly monitoring visits are undertaken by an independent person. Detailed reports

produced following these visits identify potential improvements in the service. Action planning ensures that recommendations are followed up. The Registered Manager also reviews the quality of care on a quarterly basis. Reports of this review process do not reflect that consultation with children, parents or placing authorities takes place. All monitoring reports are routinely submitted to Ofsted. This ensures that the regulatory body is able to monitor the service.

Staff value the monthly supervision they receive and describe the Registered Manager as 'helpful and supportive.' A new appraisal system introduced by the parent organisation now provides a more detailed exploration of individual strengths and areas for development. Staff explain that they are encouraged to undertake an extensive self-assessment. Managers use this information to prepare individual personal development plans and agree specific targets with staff. Information is collated centrally to inform training programmes and development strategies.

The Registered Manager maintains a positive working relationship with their line manager and benefits from regular and focused supervision. Frequent meetings with managers of other homes in the organisation provide the opportunity to share good practice and explore changes within the sector. The Registered Manager continues to work towards achieving her formal management qualification. This remains within the expected timescales. However, this inspection highlighted that not all current staff are qualified to the standard stipulated in the national minimum standards.

The home is well maintained by a team employed by the parent organisation. Established processes ensure that specific tasks are prioritised. Longer term developments are planned into a schedule of works. At the time of this inspection the large kitchen and dining room was being completely refurbished to improve the children's living environment.

The home enjoys good relationships with neighbours in the local community. Complaints are rare but when they do occur they are addressed promptly. A manager from the parent organisation communicates regularly with immediate neighbours to proactively identify and tackle any developing problems or difficulties.

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.