

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Putnam
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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 is a privately owned children's home that is registered for up to three children or young people.

Overall effectiveness

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

This judgement is significantly affected by the fact that the post of Registered Manager has been vacant for more than four years. At the time of this inspection, the post remains vacant. Furthermore, some key policies require updating.

The current acting manager was brought in to re-open the home after a brief closure last year. This was a gradual process, enabling the individual needs of young people to be identified and clear plans put in place to meet those needs. Social workers are positive about the service provided and the changes young people have made. A small, but committed group of staff has been built up. Young people benefit from the consistency and continuity this provides.

Health needs of young people are met through appropriate support from within the parent organisation and by external registered health professionals. Positive messages are given to young people about the importance of education. As a consequence, improvements in the attendance and behaviour of young people are noted. Staff keep good quality records, but young people are not fully aware that they can see these if they wish.

Young people are positive about the quality of care. They rate the home highly and speak positively about the relationships they have with staff. Staff are respectful of young people and engender a calm, relaxed atmosphere within the home. Positive behaviour of young people is also promoted through a rewards system. None of the young people currently living in the home have been restrained by staff. There have been sanctions imposed, but young people describe these as 'fair'. Occasions when young people go missing are rare and have reduced over time. However, a positive relationship still exists with local police.

Young people live in a comfortable, well-maintained home. The home is indistinguishable from any other in the street, meaning that young people are able to feel part of the wider community. The views of young people are important to staff. When they express concerns, these are dealt with promptly and effectively. This contributes to young people being safe and feeling safe 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
7 (2001)	ensure where the registered provider appoints a person to manage the children's home, he shall forthwith give notice to the HMCI of the name of the person so appointed and the date on which the appointment is to take effect (Regulation 7 (2)(a) and (b))	16/02/2012
16 (2001)	update and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse and neglect (Regulation 16 (1)(a))	01/03/2012
16 (2001)	update and implement a written policy for the prevention of bullying within the children's home (Regulation 16(4)(a))	01/03/2012
17B (2001)	update and implement a written policy (in this regulation referred to as the 'behaviour management policy') which sets out the measures of control, restraint and discipline which may be used within the children's home and the means whereby appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the home. (Regulation 17B (1)(a) and (b))	01/03/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure young people understand the nature of records maintained and how to access them. (NMS 22.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people make good progress to develop a positive view of themselves. Staff support this through the provision of individualised care that builds trust and confidence over time. Placing social workers recognise the progress young people make. The achievements of young people are celebrated through the display of certificates and awards in communal areas.

Young people are supported to enjoy healthy lifestyles through the food they eat and activities they take part in. Healthy activities are undertaken as part of their education provision and through the home. Young people show an interest in the food they eat and informally learn skills by helping staff prepare meals at times. All

young people are registered with relevant medical professionals. In a relatively short time, staff have ensured that for each young person specific health checks and necessary vaccinations are now up to date.

The children and young people's guide clearly sets out the expectation that all young people will attend education. This expectation is met by all young people in the home. Placing social workers comment that young people want to go to school. Staff in the home recognise the difficulties young people have in getting up in the mornings and tailor incentives to reward positive behaviour in this respect. Attendance in education is only missed due to illness or as a result of poor behaviour requiring young people to be collected by staff from the home. Placing social workers report that the frequency of incidents of difficult behaviour in education has reduced. As a consequence, young people benefit from more extensive learning opportunities.

Staff identify and encourage particular hobbies, interests and skills of young people. These are included in weekly activity schedules. Although young people say they would like to go out more frequently, staff have helped them understand that there are limits to what can be afforded. Consequently, young people also find ways to entertain themselves together in the home. The home provides safe access to the internet, modern games consoles and satellite television. However, young people also enjoy playing traditional board games.

Young people benefit from contact with significant family members and friends who are important to them. Contacts are facilitated by staff who actively support arrangements agreed by placing local authorities. Alternatively, young people are given the freedom to travel to see friends within a reasonable distance of the home. This helps build confidence, trust and independence.

Preparation for independence is also linked to day-to-day activities, such as shopping, cooking, washing and ironing. There is currently no formal expectation that young people complete these tasks, but they are encouraged to contribute. Staff recognise that initially young people need to be welcomed, nurtured and cared for before addressing more detailed transition plans in the future.

Quality of care

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

Young people rate the home highly, giving it 8 or 9 out of 10. When asked, they have difficulty identifying what would make it even better. Young people speak positively about the relationships they have with staff. Staff approach the care of young people, calmly and consistently in a way that clearly demonstrates positive aspirations for young people in their care. As a result, young people feel valued and make genuine progress in reducing negative behaviours that have caused difficulties in the past.

The views of young people are actively sought by staff. Formal processes such as residents' meetings exist, but informal interaction between staff and young people

means there is an ongoing conversation that encourages young people to express their thoughts and ideas. Staff and managers take these seriously and incorporate them into their day-to-day work and future planning. For example, young people help choose menus and activities. They also personalise the décor in their rooms and are asked how they would like shared spaces in the home decorated or utilised best. Young people feel confident to express concerns or complaints. Staff respond promptly and effectively when this happens.

Staff plan young people's care well. Detailed referral forms provide information that helps identify if the home will be suitable for individual young people. Staff consider each young person as an individual. However, the home's Statement of Purpose is clear about specific areas of need that could not be considered. Once in placement staff continue to work together with young people themselves, placing authorities and other professionals to identify action plans to meet the specific needs of each young person. Plans recognise and consider the cultural background of young people, their individual identity and their different experiences. These plans are active documents that are understood by all staff. Key workers take the lead in updating all aspects of placement plans every month. Staff in the home reflect the diversity of the community in which the home is located, providing positive role models for young people.

All young people attend education. Where this is not in mainstream provision a placement is found in a school provided by the parent organisation. Clear expectations are communicated to young people regarding the importance and value of education. As a result, both attendance and behaviour have significantly improved over time. This is reflected in reports provided by education settings. Young people benefit from consistency because of good channels of communication between education staff and staff within the home.

All aspects of young people's health are addressed with the help and support of a designated nurse employed by the parent organisation and external health professionals where appropriate. Each young person has the option of a range of therapeutic interventions available to them from staff within the parent organisation, but independent of the home. Young people are encouraged to be directly involved in decisions about their individual care. They now consistently attend review meetings. Placing social workers confirm this did not previously happen and recognise improvements in young people's willingness to express their views.

Young people live in a home that is decorated and maintained to a good standard. Placing social workers speak of the warm, homely atmosphere within the home, which is augmented by the relatively small staff group that brings familiarity and continuity. All necessary safety equipment and notices are in place but these do not impinge on the overall impression that, as young people say, this is a good home.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people benefit from continuity of care provided by a small, but committed group of staff who have all been recruited through a robust selection and vetting procedure. Young people feel safe and comfortable within the home. They demonstrate this through their demeanour and their ability to express concerns to staff they trust when these arise.

Allegations made by young people are dealt with swiftly and effectively by managers in the home and the parent organisation. This provides protection and reassurance for the young people concerned. Well-defined practice also ensures support for those subject to allegations.

Positive behaviour of young people is encouraged through the quality of individual relationships between staff and young people. Staff promote a calm atmosphere within the home, built on respect. Young people are encouraged to find ways of communicating their feelings without having to swear. As a result, staff report that incidences of bad language and challenging behaviour have reduced over time. Young people interact with each other positively, engaging in activities together in the home. Equally, they have the space and opportunity for privacy in the home at any time.

Positive behaviour is also promoted through a reward system that young people understand and accept. There has been no use of restraint since the home re-opened last September. Young people say their pocket money is only reduced to pay for damage they have caused. They see such sanctions as fair.

Young people rarely go missing from the home. When this does happen they return quickly. A positive working relationship exists between the home and the police. The missing children's officer from the local station confirms the low incidence of young people going missing. However, despite this the home still provides risk and vulnerability assessments for each young person as well as a regular update of all young people in placement.

Young people live in a home that is maintained to a good standard. Effective systems are in place to quickly highlight and resolve general maintenance issues as they arise. Any issue that could potentially affect the safety of young people is given priority.

Leadership and management

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

The appointment of a Registered Manager is a statutory requirement. Records held by Ofsted show that the post of Registered Manager within this home has been vacant since 20 August 2007. An acting manager was appointed when the home re-opened in September 2011 after being closed for a short period last year. It is understood that they are in the process of making an application for Registered Manager. However, Ofsted had not received an application at the time of this inspection.

The acting manager has built a good service in a relatively short period. With the assistance of key senior staff, an approach to working with young people has been implemented. This consistently sees young people as individuals with particular needs. Time is taken to get to know each young person and identify their needs and the best way to meet them. Sound documentation supports this work. Each young person has a detailed placement plan, highlighting key issues and identifying actions to be taken. These plans are updated each month. Staff keep other records relating to young people up to date and write them in a way that clearly, but concisely details important aspects of young people's lives. However, not all young people are aware they can access their own records.

The home uses policies and procedures prepared by the parent organisation. Work is underway to update several policies and make them more accessible to staff through an intranet site. This work is not complete. Consequently, staffs' work with young people relating to safeguarding, behaviour management and bullying is currently informed by policies that have not been reviewed for several years.

The home employs sufficient staff to meet the needs of young people in the home at present. However, the Statement of Purpose says that the full compliment of staff is one more than the number currently employed. Young people are not significantly affected by this as the manager ensures cover is provided in a way that delivers consistency. In other aspects, the home meets the aims and objectives of the Statement of Purpose.

New staff receive an initial induction within the organisation and the home. This is supported by regular supervision. Young people benefit from arrangements that ensure new staff always work together with more experienced staff. In time, young people will benefit from all staff being appropriately qualified. All staff complete the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) induction standards before being confirmed in post. At this point they register for the Level 3 CWDC Diploma. An ongoing programme of internal courses relevant to the specialised care of young people is available to all staff.

The health and safety of young people are promoted through effective regular checks undertaken by the manager. Avoidable hazards are removed and risks are minimized but young people still enjoy a homely atmosphere. Risk assessments relating to individual young people are also in place. Staff utilise these documents to identify potential problems while ensuring that opportunities for young people are not diminished.

Young people are routinely spoken to during regular monitoring visits. Reports of these visits provide an independent perspective and offer constructive challenge to the manager. Recommendations to improve the service for young people are made and followed up. Reports are consistently submitted to Ofsted. A comprehensive system of weekly and monthly checks informs the manager's review of the quality of care provided to young people. Detailed reports are completed regularly addressing all required elements.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.