

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	David Putnam
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Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	21/02/2012
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This privately run children's home provides medium to long-term care through permanent placements for up to four children and young people. An additional short breaks service provides placements for up to three children and young people.

The home is registered to care for children and young people who may have emotional and behavioural difficulties, learning disabilities and physical disabilities. However, the building is not fully accessible or adapted, meaning that placement of children and young people with significant mobility problems would not be 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 **inadequate**.

This inspection identified that there are significant breaches of regulations and failures to meet national minimum standards which negatively impact upon the welfare and safety of children and young people. These shortfalls have resulted in wide-ranging requirements and recommendations being made. Strict timescales have been set to ensure that all matters are addressed promptly, to improve the quality of care for all children and young people using this service.

Safeguarding practice is inadequate; in particular, recruitment practices fall well short of statutory requirements and national minimum standards. Urgent action is required to address these shortfalls. Leadership and management are also inadequate.

However, it is acknowledged that children and young people demonstrate, through their demeanour, that they feel safe. They are comfortable and relaxed in the calm environment created by staff. Parents and placing social workers are positive about the care that children and young people receive. They say that staff know the children and young people well, understand their communications and are sensitive to their needs.

Outside agencies identify positive outcomes for individual children and young people. However, the quality of records kept by the home makes it difficult to attribute improvements solely to the care provided.

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
4 (2001)	compile in relation to the children's home a written statement (in these Regulations referred to as 'the statement of purpose') which shall consist of a statement as to the matters listed in Schedule 1 (Regulation 4(1))	28/09/2012
4 (2001)	produce a guide to the children's home (in these Regulations referred to as 'the children's guide') in a form appropriate to the age, understanding and communication needs of the children to be accommodated in the home (Regulation 4(3) and (4))	28/09/2012
11 (2001)	ensure that the children's home is conducted so as to promote and make proper provision for the welfare of children accommodated there (Regulation 11(1))	31/08/2012
12A (2001)	ensure that in the case of a child who is looked after by a local authority the registered person must co-operate with the child's placing authority in agreeing and signing the plan for the child's placement, in particular being clear if the child is being looked after permanently or for short breaks (Regulation 12A(1))	14/09/2012
16 (2001)	prepare and implement a written policy which is intended to safeguard children accommodated in the children's home from abuse and neglect; and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect (Regulation 16(1)(a) and (b))	28/09/2012
17B (2001)	prepare 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 in the children's home; and the means whereby appropriate behaviour is to be promoted in the home (Regulation 17A(1)(a) and (b))	28/09/2012
18 (2001)	ensure that children accommodated in the home are encouraged to develop and pursue appropriate leisure interests and are provided with appropriate leisure facilities and activities (Regulation 18(2)(a) and (b))	14/09/2012
23 (2001)	ensure that any activities in which children participate are so far as reasonably practicable free from avoidable risks	31/08/2012

	(Regulation 23(b))	
25 (2001)	ensure that there is at all times a sufficient number of suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working at the children's home (Regulation 25(1))	31/08/2012
26 (2001)	ensure that no person is employed to work at the children's home unless that person is fit to work at a children's home, in particular that full and satisfactory information is available in relation to him in respect of each of the matters specified in Schedule 2 (Regulation 26(1)(a) and (3)(d))	26/07/2012
27 (2001)	ensure that all persons employed in the children's home received appropriate training, supervision and appraisal (Regulation 27(4))	28/09/2012
28 (2001)	maintain in respect of each child who is accommodated in the children's home a record in permanent form which includes the information, documents and records specified in Schedule 3 relating to that child and keep that information up to date (Regulation 28(1)(a) and (b))	14/09/2012
30 (2001)	ensure that if any of the events listed in column 1 of the table in Schedule 5 takes place, the registered person shall without delay notify the persons indicated in respect of the event in column 2 of the table (Regulation 30(1))	31/08/2012
31 (2001)	ensure that all parts of the children's home used by children are kept clean and maintained (Regulation 31(2)(e))	31/08/2012
33 (2001)	ensure that the person carrying out the visit under this regulation shall interview, with their consent and in private, such of the children accommodated there, their parents, relatives and persons working at the home as appears necessary in order to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home (Regulation 33(4)(a))	31/08/2012
34 (2001)	ensure that there is a system in place for monitoring matters set out in Schedule 6 at appropriate intervals and improving the quality of care provided in the children's home. Supply to Ofsted a report of any such review. (Regulation 34 (1)(a), (b) and (2))	14/09/2012

Recommendations

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

- ensure that there is careful selection and vetting of staff and volunteers working with children in the home, and monitoring of such people to help prevent unsuitable people from having the opportunity to harm children (NMS 16 (16.1 to 16.8))
- ensure that there is a written development plan, reviewed annually, for the future of the home, either identifying any planned changes in the operation or resources of the service, or confirming the continuation of the home's current

operation and resource. (NMS 15.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people make progress to develop a positive self view. They demonstrate by their demeanour and attitude that they are happy and content to be in this home. Children and young people staying on short breaks are confident and comfortable with staff. This helps them to manage change, have new experiences and cope with unfamiliar situations.

Children and young people who live in the home all the time have full attendance at school and regular attendance at an after school club. School reports highlight progress they make in extending the range of communication they use. This enables them to express themselves more and indicate their needs better. The physical health needs of these children and young people are addressed through registration with appropriate health professionals.

Social workers say that children and young people settle into the home quickly, adding that staff know the children and young people well and understand their communication. Staff support children and young people to make simple choices using different communication methods to assist them. This allows children and young people to directly influence their own individual experience while staying in the home.

Children and young people benefit from positive interaction with each other within the home and socialise with others through activities in the local community, such as trips to the local park. The independence of children and young people is promoted through inclusion in activities, such as trips on public transport. Social workers say that staff have been responsive to their suggestions in this area.

When appropriate, staff promote contact for children and young people placed permanently. Consequently children and young people maintain links with extended family members and others who are important to them. Children and young people on short breaks also benefit from contact visits from nominated close relatives or friends when parents are away for longer periods.

Quality of care

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

Children and young people enjoy sound relationships with staff and each other. Staff promote a settled atmosphere in the home and model a calm and gentle approach to the children and young people. Shared use of some communal areas enables children and young people who live in the home to interact with those on short breaks when this is appropriate. However, if necessary the two parts of the home can be separated through simply closing a door that links them. This promotes

privacy for all children and young people if required.

The children's home has recently been redecorated throughout, giving it a fresh appearance. Carpets have been replaced and other soft furnishings have been renewed or refurbished. Cleanliness is generally maintained to an adequate standard, but the behaviours of some children and young people require constant monitoring and rigorous cleaning regimes. Attention to detail in this respect is not always maintained, resulting in children and young people occasionally experiencing circumstances when hygiene standards are not acceptable.

Systems exist for staff to highlight maintenance issues as they arise. When necessary, matters are addressed urgently when there are implications for the safety of children and young people. However, at times children and young people are affected by significant delays of non-urgent work due to the approval processes adopted by managers.

Children and young people do not significantly influence the running of the home overall, but they are able to express themselves, make choices and influence their own experience. For example, most children and young people are not able to conceptualise making a complaint, but they are able to communicate when they are dissatisfied or unhappy. Staff respond quickly and sensitively to address the expressed need of any child or young person.

All children and young people benefit from having placement plans or short break plans from their placing authorities. However, plans produced by staff in the home do not clearly identify how they will meet the individual needs of children and young people. The limits of short break placements are not always recognised. When placements exceed these limits managers do not ensure that plans are adapted to fully address the expected national minimum standards.

The staff group reflects a wide representation of the cultural diversity within the area where the home is located and the children and young people using the service. Some parents assist staff by producing specific culturally sensitive food they know their children will eat. Staff are not proactive in asking parents how to make these dishes themselves. Social workers say they would like to see staff take the time to support children and young people to be more involved in the preparation of their food to expand their experience.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

The demeanour of children and young people suggests that they do feel safe. Social workers give positive feedback about the service and state that parents are also happy with the care their children receive. However, the inspection identified a range of issues and concluded that the welfare of children and young people has not been appropriately safeguarded.

Staff recruitment practices and the information held regarding staff employed in the children's home are inadequate. The inspector found numerous examples on the staff files that were examined. The Registered Manager agreed to review all staff files and take urgent action to address these matters.

Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks are not in place for all staff currently employed. Photocopies of checks from previous employers are sometimes relied upon instead. When CRB checks are made, staff are allowed to begin work before checks are returned. Written references are not requested for all staff. When written references are requested, referees are not asked to provide a reason why previous employment with vulnerable children or adults ended. No records of telephone references or checks are made. Gaps in employment history are not explained. Proof of identity is not held on file for all staff. Where photocopies of documents are on file, there is nothing to indicate that an original has been seen. Restrictions on rights to work in the UK are not recorded or properly understood by managers. Where staff have lived outside the UK, checks in addition to a CRB are not evidenced. No records of interviews are retained. No documentary evidence of qualifications obtained outside the UK is kept on file. Where checks are made, it is not clear when they were completed or who carried them out.

The newest staff have not received safeguarding training. The Registered Manager explained that he has addressed safeguarding in supervision with these staff, but no record is made of this discussion. Furthermore, the Registered Manager's own safeguarding training is out of date, having last been updated in 2007. The home's safeguarding policy is also out of date, having last been reviewed 11 years ago. Changes in practice, procedure and approach are not reflected in the policy currently in use. Consequently, managers and staff do not have up to date guidance to ensure they respond fairly, quickly and consistently to any allegations or suspicions of harm.

Children, young people and their families receive a confused message about the use of restraint within the home. The Registered Manager is clear that restraint is not used. Consequently no staff are trained in the use of restraint or methods to de-escalate a situation to avoid the use of restraint. However, the children's guide makes reference to restraint being used in circumstances limited by the Children's Homes Regulations. Furthermore there is a restraint policy which reflects the approach set out in the children's guide. Children and young people are affected by this lack of clarity as staff and managers do not fully understand the potential risks caused by their vulnerability.

Children and young people rarely go missing from the home, but incidents have occurred since the last inspection. However, no protocol exists with local police to ensure a prompt and effective response should this happen again in the future. The particular vulnerabilities of children and young people in this regard are not fully understood by managers and staff. The Registered Manager sees children and young people going missing only in the light of them deliberately leaving the home. Consideration is not given to other possibilities, such as a child or young person getting lost when out on an activity.

Children and young people's personal information is not kept secure. Individual members of staff occasionally share information via text messages to parents from their personal mobile phones. This inappropriate contact also blurs the boundaries between professional and personal contact and is not recorded or logged in formal records kept in the home.

Leadership and management

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

The inspector found that this home fails to meet the requirements for an adequate judgement. There are failures to comply with requirements made at the last inspection. As a result, the welfare of children and young people is not safeguarded.

The home's strengths and areas for improvement are not fully understood by managers. One requirement was made at the last inspection for the registered person to review the quality of care, identify ways to improve it and forward a copy of their review report to Ofsted. No such report was received prior to this inspection. The Registered Manager does routinely check certain matters each month, but this is ineffective in improving the quality of care. Children, young people, their parents and placing authorities are not consulted as part of the review and all matters required by the Children's Homes Regulations are not addressed.

Monthly monitoring visits are carried out by the registered provider and reports of these visits are routinely submitted to Ofsted. However, these reports include limited, repeated information. Reports rarely include the views of children, parents or other interested people. The visitor does not offer an opinion as to the standard of care provided to children and young people. Consequently reports are not robust and lack challenge or recommendations to improve the service.

The Statement of Purpose lacks detail and clarity as it does not properly address 16 of the 25 matters required under the Children's Homes Regulations. This means that parents and placing authorities cannot be clear about the services the home provides. Attempts have not been made to communicate key information about the service to children and young people. The children's guide is not produced in a format that is appropriate to their understanding or communication needs. The current document is over-long and far too complex. No development plan exists for the service.

Health and safety checks of the premises are adequately addressed. However, potential risks to individual children and young people are not assessed. For example, plans are not made to address possible risks and hazards prior to undertaking activities with children and young people. This adds to their vulnerability.

There are indications that there are insufficient staff employed to meet the needs of children and young people. At times, particularly when the short breaks unit is busy,

staff are required to work long hours, with limited time off. Staff who undertake waking night duties are also called upon to work shifts during the day. The service children and young people receive can therefore be affected by the alertness of staff who are caring for them.

Children and young people are not cared for by staff who are appropriately supported. The supervision of staff is addressed within a supervision policy which suggests that ideally staff will be supervised once a fortnight. Records demonstrate that this frequency has never been met and there is significant discrepancy between staff. Records show that some staff do receive monthly supervision. However, supervision of the newest staff is considerably less frequent than that.

The development of individual staff and the improvement of their ability to care for children and young people are not addressed through annual appraisals. The Registered Manager stated that although some appraisals were completed, the staff concerned have since left. He confirmed that no appraisals have taken place for any of the current staff group. The absence of coherent training records or a training matrix makes it difficult for managers to evidence that all staff have received up-to-date core training.

Children and young people are cared for in line with policies that are out of date. The required policies are in place. However, where policies are dated it is clear they are in need of review. It has been more than a decade since most were written.

Files relating to children and young people are disorganised, making it difficult to find the basic information which staff need to care for children and young people. Some required information is not recorded. Written records made by staff lack detail and do not contribute to an understanding of the lives of children and young people.

It is not clear that all notifications are made to the relevant bodies. For example, the appropriate record book showed three incidents of one young person going missing since the last inspection. The records indicate that the placing authority was only informed on one occasion. The Registered Manager had not signed off or commented upon any of these records. If notifications are not made consistently it is impossible for outside agencies to monitor any matters of concern. If managers do not monitor records, trends or patterns of behaviour will not be highlighted.

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.