

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Tola Akinde-Hummel
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The provider is a registered childcare charity and housing association. They provide care and accommodation for up to eight children and young people from the London borough in which they are situated.

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 home has made significant improvements since the last full inspection. A clear structure is in place to promote consistent levels of support to young people with complex and varying needs. Young people know that staff genuinely care about them and have their best interests at the centre of what they do. One young person said, 'The manager is brilliant, she considers everything, she cares about me a lot.'

Young people are safe in the home and staff go to great lengths to create an environment that is safe, calm and friendly. Partnerships with other agencies are embedded as is the care practice in the home. This provides young people with security and a more holistic approach to care. Although some young people do not fully engage in their own development, this does not stop staff from continuously trying to reach them and help them. Their efforts are confirmed by all external agencies working with the young people. One senior education professional stated, 'The staff have a difficult job trying to engage young people who are not at the stage where their education is a priority. They work with them and help them to reach the stage where they can consider their future. Our team provides practical support every step of the way to identify young people's interests and find courses or training that suits them.'

Staff feel the manager and the deputy listen to them. They feel able to share ideas. The manager and the deputy are very hands on and involve themselves with the young people. One member of staff stated, 'We are a more settled staff team because of the way the home is being managed and the vision the manager has for the future. I am very happy here.'

Recommendations arising from this inspection focus on further enhancing good practice in the home, in particular with regard to improving clarity in areas of medication recording, sanctions and arrangements for waking night staff to attend and contribute to team meetings.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure that sanctions and rewards for behaviour are clear reasonable and fair and are understood by all children (NMS 3.8)
- ensure there is a clear record of all medication given to children and young people during their placement (NMS 6.10)
- ensure staff and volunteers are easily able to access the advice needed to provide a comprehensive service for children and young people (with specific reference to arrangements for waking night staff to attend team meetings). (NMS 19.7)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people receive consistent encouragement and support to develop and mature. This enables them to start to take the steps necessary to understand their past and think about their future. In the main, young people enjoy good health and are supported to evaluate how this may further improve by engaging with the range of services on offer. Not all young people have reached the point where they will take any support, but they know it is there when they are ready to make use of it. One young person said, 'I know they care about me and they want what's best for me.'

Young people are vocal; they say what they think about any aspect of how the home is run and are encouraged to do so in group or individual meetings with staff and the managers. They are involved in keeping their home looking nice, such as decorating their bedrooms and some communal areas of the home. Given that young people have a voice in the home, they often regulate each other's behaviour and try to set the appropriate standard of behaviour for themselves. Young people are supported to pursue their education. Most attend school regularly and apply themselves to education, recognising the benefits that a solid education can offer. Young people have an idea about what they want to do in the future and are able to ask for support to help them realise their aspirations.

One young person said, 'They really helped me with my education, I got a tutor before my exams that will help to increase my grade.' Another young person said,

'They try to get me to go to school and find courses that I want to do.'

Young people maintain contact with their family and friends as appropriate. This is encouraged within the home and in the community. They are assisted to re-establish fragile relationships and develop positive friendships outside the home.

Young people increase their independent living skills through planning meals and cooking with staff, managing their money as well as saving, and keeping the home tidy. They are advised about what areas of their life they will be expected to manage once they leave the home.

Quality of care

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

Young people have good relationships with the staff team. They are usually respectful and polite. All young people spoken to confirm that this is the case despite their reluctance at times to take advice and receive support. Young people are helped to understand their behaviour and are often asked for the best approach that staff can take to manage their behaviour when they are challenging. Young people are given ample opportunity to reflect on their behaviour. They are encouraged to explore the possible outcomes if they make choices that are not helpful to their own welfare and development. Clear strategies are in place and staff use these to create an atmosphere that is conducive to a harmonious living environment.

Staff approach all young people as individuals and ensure that 24-hour and in-house placement plans are available to help young people 'own' their presenting difficulties with strategies to manage them. All young people sign these plans and agree to work towards changing particular behaviour and improving key areas of their life. Key work sessions act as a way of monitoring this. The home uses particular tools to assess young people's level of trust in adults, their motivation to change and the progress they have made. Young people are keen to measure their own progress in specific areas and this helps to drive their own improvement and build self-esteem. While most young people actively engage in the process, some young people do not. One social worker said, 'They really try and encourage them with lots of positive reinforcement; they encourage school attendance, are empathetic when they are upset or angry and support them when they are confused. Although at times young people will not comply, the staff still continue to try.'

Care plans address young people's uniqueness; they demonstrate staff's understanding of the needs of the young people they support. This is evident in relation to their emotional needs, culture, race, identity and self-image. Staff recognise that young people are sensitive around different issues and are skilled at ensuring they all remain comfortable in order to make it possible to work with them more effectively.

Young people are encouraged to make a complaint if they are not happy about any

aspect of the home or the support they receive. Young people have done this in the past and resolutions have been reached. Young people complain about each other and any general lack of consideration for them within the home. For example, issues raised by young people include being considerate in the hallways late at night when other young people have to get up for school the next morning, or of some being intimidated by friends hanging around the front of the house. Staff facilitate discussions between young people to resolve issues before they fester. One young person said, 'You can talk to the staff in this home.'

Staff have developed good networks with outside agencies to support them to address additional needs that young people have. Primary and specialist health care is readily available. The home has an excellent working relationship with the looked after children's nurse who said, 'They have had some challenges with the young people. I have to commend them for their hard work. They persevere and encourage them and all staff are concerned about the young people's health. The young people come in initially very suspicious but eventually they know that the staff care about them. I have seen a lot of transformation in the young people.'

Staff support young people with their education through encouragement to go to school, established relationships with the schools to monitor behaviour and attendance and continued contact with school/home support officers. One education officer said, 'They do a lot to coax the young people to get to school, they are also keen to engender personal responsibility. I get the sense that they know the young people well.' The home has a room equipped to enable young people to complete homework. Staff assist with all aspects of school work including revision. Young people make use of the computer for some education-based activities.

The home manages the medication of young people adequately. Records show that young people sign when they have received their medication. Some records of medication are a little unclear. Some staff are recording when medication is not offered because the young person is not home and other staff are not. This means records become unclear. Young people state that they are consistently offered their medication when they are in the home.

Staff encourage young people to stay active. The staff participate in physical activities to encourage young people to take exercise and look after their health. Young people choose the activities that suit them. The recently introduced gardening club enables young people to be outdoors tending to plants. The local leisure centre is also available for staff and young people to attend gym, swimming and exercise sessions. Staff engage young people in games within the home; these include board games and the Wii.

The home is large and fairly well presented. The gardening project has added colour to the back garden, making it more attractive. Bedrooms are personalised and the lounge area is a relaxing and warm place for young people. Repairs are swiftly reported and acted upon. There is a plan in place to change some parts of the building, for example, repairs to some windows sashes, a ceiling following a leak and to replace the kitchen. While this plan of works will lift the décor of the home, the

present state of the home is satisfactory and young people are comfortable.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report that they feel safe in the home. Staff understand the vulnerabilities of young people and try to keep them safe outside the home. Young people always have staff members available to talk to and often take up this opportunity. Most importantly staff make themselves available to speak with young people.

Care plans highlight risks to young people. Staff have in place strategies to manage this and educate young people about the risks they face. For example the staff escort and keep further vigilance over young people if they are concerned that they are putting themselves in danger outside the home. Risk assessments and care plans are continually updated to reflect changes in levels of risk associated with young people. Safeguarding training, the home's policies and procedures and open communication within the staff team and external partners contribute to staff understanding their responsibilities to protect young people.

The home has established positive working relationships with the Safer Neighbourhood Team. Young people and staff know the police officers who visit and have been able to build relationships with them. One police constable stated, 'We have a good relationship with the home and the young people, they are networked to other teams in the police force and other emergency services. We visit at least once a month and staff do all they can to safeguard the young people.' Similar sentiments are echoed by a senior child protection officer who stated, 'The staff are proactive, assertive and share information to make sure young people's needs are being responded to.'

Staff receive training in behaviour management and de-escalation techniques. There have been two minor physical interventions since the interim inspection, both of which are appropriate. The staff use sanctions where they believe these are necessary. There has been a reduction in the number of sanctions imposed. However, young people say that sanctions can be applied inconsistently and this has caused them some confusion in relation to fairness and setting boundaries. For example, some young people will be told that they will be sanctioned and this does not materialise, while others will be sanctioned for a similar misdemeanour. One young person stated, 'I am told that I will be sanctioned but nothing ever happens.' Monitoring of sanctions is undertaken by the manager to ensure those given are appropriate. Young people are given an opportunity in certain circumstances to have their sanctions cancelled. This is achieved mainly by completing a house chore.

The incidence of young people going missing has dramatically reduced. Young people are much more settled in the home. They have developed trusting relationships with staff and are investing in their placements more. Those young people who do not make the best use of the support offered have also significantly

reduced their absence and say they feel settled in the home. This has resulted in a decrease in risky behaviour which has been noted by the home's external partners.

Robust arrangements are in place for the selection and employment of staff. All visitors are checked and escorted to communal areas of the building. This ensures that young people's privacy is not compromised.

The building is secure from intruders. Staff and young people are mindful of the home's location and the need to be vigilant about security. Regular health and safety checks take place and any maintenance is properly reported, assessed and repaired. Fire drills are undertaken regularly so that young people and staff are familiar with the home's evacuation procedure.

Leadership and management

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

There is strong leadership and management in the home. The home has had a period of instability with a number of incidents and changes to the staffing structure. These challenges have been managed well and staff have been given clear guidance and have developed more confidence in their role. This means that there is more structure and consistency in the care of young people.

Regular supervision, team meetings and relevant training enable staff to work effectively and collectively with young people. Although there are some contradictions in the area of sanctions, young people know that staff are mostly consistent in their approach to them. The home has waking night staff that provide support to the young people. They also receive training and supervision and use the young people's care plans to ensure the correct support is provided. At present waking night staff do not attend team meetings and are not present during important discussions the rest of the staff team have about managing the young people. This means that waking night staff do not always have the opportunity to personally share their views or experiences with day staff to enable the whole team to reach an agreement on how best to progress situations.

The home has a detailed development/ improvement plan in place which identifies the home's strengths and potential consequences if the plan is not delivered. The plan includes areas such as developing stronger attachments with young people, identifying peer mentors for them and developing closer links with the 16-plus team. This is monitored on a regular basis by the manager and the whole staff team in team meetings. This gives the team a sense of ownership and an insight into what has been achieved.

No requirements were made at the interim inspection and recommendations have been acted upon. The home's Statement of Purpose gives the placing authority, parents and carers a good understanding of what kind of support is on offer. The home's children's guide, produced in consultation with the young people, is easy to follow and gives information that young people need and would want to know.

Reports of monitoring on behalf of the provider are completed monthly and forwarded to Ofsted. Reports of monitoring by the manager are also made available. These give an overview of the homes monitoring and evaluation of the service. The home appropriately reports on significant events with clear action plans on how to support young people immediately and over time following an incident. Young people's records show that these plans are carried out.

Good records are kept of young people's time in the home. These are up to date and securely stored to protect young people's private information. Young people know which professionals have access to their files and sign to say they have understood this. Young people are fully included in their care planning, evaluation and decisions about their continued care and support. They are able to comment on any assessments and reports completed by the home assessments and are always encouraged to participate in the process.

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.