

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC025695
Inspection date	02/06/2011
Inspector	Tola Akinde-Hummel
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Date of last inspection	06/01/2011
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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

The provider is a registered childcare charity and housing association. Its motto is being passionate about positive outcomes. The home offers periods of planned care to up to eight children and young people from 12 to 16 years old. The placements last between three and 18 months, depending on individual needs. The home also caters for emergency admissions for children and young people from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. It aims to create a caring, structured and stimulating environment that is responsive to the individual needs of children and young people. The home focuses on meeting the individual needs of young people within a positive group living experience.

This is an inner city service. It is situated close to many recreational and leisure facilities, local youth clubs, libraries and various places of worship, all within a community of diverse cultures.

Overall effectiveness

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

The new manager is working hard to stabilise the staff team and the way in which they work to increase effectiveness. Good progress has already been made to address areas that require improvement and the manager recognises the shortfalls within the service. This process takes time to implement, adjust to, and in some cases measure.

The manager and deputy are committed to providing a consistent approach to the care of young people. Some areas of good practice include school attendance, attention to safeguarding and the quality of individual support staff provide to young people. The areas for improvement include regular supervision for staff, review of sanctions and increased meaningful consultation with children and young people.

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
27 (2001)	ensure that all persons employed in the home receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal (Regulation 27	04/07/2011

	(4a))	
29 (2001)	maintain in the children's home the records specified in schedule 4 and ensure they are kept up to date with specific reference to records of fire drills and checks (Regulation 29, Schedule 4, 6)	04/07/2011
17 (2001)	ensure that the imposition of a financial penalty other than a requirement for the payment of a reasonable sum by way of reparations is not used (Regulation 17(g))	04/07/2011
34 (2001)	shall provide for regular and meaningful consultation with children accommodated in the home. (Regulation 34 (3))	04/07/2011

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people are able to use the skill of staff, in particular their key worker, to help them understand their situation. Young people are taught to recognise their own abilities and resources to achieve success. Young people contribute to decisions made about their future and know that staff will advocate for them where necessary. Young people can access children's rights and independent listeners if they wish.

Young people benefit from the home's positive relationship with the looked after children's nurse. All health issues are addressed by the nurse who will visit young people in the home and provide individual advice on a number of topics such as sexual health, medication, healthy eating, drugs and alcohol. The looked after children's nurse stated, 'Staff manage the young people's health needs well. They are good at identifying their problems and asking for help.' The home promotes healthy eating by reducing sugary snacks and drinks ensuring a balanced menu is provided and encouraging young people to eat vegetables at every meal. Young people have fruit available to eat at all times.

Young people attend school regularly. This is expected and encouraged by staff. Young people understand the value of a good education in order to improve future prospects. Staff have good communication with schools and colleges and make sure young people are encouraged to study and complete homework. Rewards are given for good attendance at school and college. The home facilitated input from the community police to assist young people's project school work. One social worker stated, 'The young person is on track with their education.' The home has computer access in a quiet room available to young people and a selection of books to choose from to support the young people in their education.

Young people have good contact with family and friends. Staff also have regular telephone contact with some family members. Young people can invite family and friends to visit them in the home and remain in the communal areas. The home is spacious enough to ensure other young people's privacy is not compromised. This helps the young people to develop positive relationships with those who are important to them.

Young people are assisted to prepare for independent living. This is achieved through clear pathway planning and the 51 steps programme. Young people can learn to cook, understand how to access various services in the community and learn practical skills about living in a semi-independent environment such as painting and decorating, paying bills and budgeting.

Quality of care

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

Young people enter a home that is changing and improving now that a permanent manager has been appointed. The period of instability had an effect on young people's behaviour and staff morale. The staff maintained positive relationships with young people during this time and continued to respond to them with care. The staff team are able to support young people who function at various levels. Staff take time to get to know young people through discussion and observation. Young people are not made to feel different to others in the home.

The new manager has introduced new strategies to manage behaviour and the focus is on rewarding good behaviour. This is work in progress. The record of sanctions show that financial penalties are being imposed on young people for misdemeanours other than reparation. For example, young people smoking in the house and entering each others' bedrooms incurs a fine. Records also show that the home uses a small number of sanctions with little effect. Team meeting minutes show that the staff have identified inconsistencies in the application of sanctions and the limited number available to help manage behaviour and so help the young people to take responsibility for themselves.

Young people have limited input into the way into which the home is run. The house meeting minutes show that consultation is limited to menus, activities and some colour schemes for communal areas in the home. The meetings are not well attended or regular as young people choose not to attend. Meetings tend to be used for staff to give information or young people to ask for things. There is little evidence that young people are engaged in discussing matters affecting the home or its development in a wider sense. This means the home are not utilising any thoughts and ideas young people may have to improve the experience of living there.

This is a large home for young people. There are a number of repairs in the bathrooms and lounge that the management are dealing with. These do not compromise the comfort for young people. Bedrooms are comfortably furnished. Young people can furnish their rooms to their taste. Young people have recently had new bedding provided. Bathrooms afford privacy and the dining area allows young people to eat meals together. This enables the young people to live in a homely environment and supports their individuality. The home has a large garden with badminton net and a small table and chairs enabling the young people to engage in some recreational activities in the home.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people feel safe in the home. The home has recently installed extra security in the building. This does not compromise privacy but minimises the risk of intruders and increases the feeling of safety for young people inside the home.

Young people have key workers and other members of the staff team that they can speak to. The team are proactive in providing protection for the young people living there. This is done through discussing concerns young people have and finding practical measures to address this and ensuring young people understand how their behaviour may contribute to feeling unsafe. Good quality risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated by staff. This enables staff to understand the young people they are supporting and their vulnerabilities. Social work professionals stated, 'The staff are good at communicating with me, the emergency duty team and other professionals about what is going on with the young person. They keep to the care plan and give good advice and support.' Staff are trained to identify signs of abuse and act to safeguard children and young people. Safeguarding matters are reported to the relevant agency without delay. A period of reflection and debriefing follows for staff to ensure they act appropriately at all times.

Staff receive training in physical intervention and use this only as a last resort. The home endured a high level of disruption for a period of time. This resulted in increased notifications to Ofsted and increased staffing particularly at night to try and manage young people's behaviour. Records and young people report that physical intervention is rare and is not used as a measure of control.

Young people are encouraged not to go missing from the home. This is not always successful. Young people know that staff will make every effort to locate them and encourage them to return home. Young people also understand that they will be reported missing and their return will be followed up by a visit from the police with whom the home has developed a good relationship with. This means that young people who do go missing are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return.

The staff make clear that bullying is not tolerated. Young people know this and staff are vigilant. Staff monitor relationships and interactions between young people to satisfy themselves that they are appropriate. Young people are reminded about the home's attitude to bullying through the children's guide and posters and pictures around the building.

Leadership and management

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

The home has had three managers in a nine month period. The present manager is experienced and due to be registered with Ofsted as the permanent manager. The high turnover of managers has been due to organisational changes. This has had an impact on the continual development and direction of the home. The management changes have prevented the staff team settling and fully working together. However the present manager is focused, professional and committed to improving the service for young people.

The home has a staff team made up of individuals from various cultures and background. Staff demonstrate that they have a good understanding of the racial, religious and cultural needs of children and young people. Staff are sensitive to young people's limitations and levels of understanding and try to support them accordingly. Staff are clear that they will not tolerate any discriminatory practice within the home and the children's guide reinforces this.

The home has had additional challenges from a demanding group of young people and a number of staff vacancies. This has resulted in permanent staff covering additional shifts and agency staff covering the remainder to maintain familiarity and consistency for young people. Where possible, the home uses agency staff who have worked in the home before. On occasions, agency staff have not meet the level of expectation the home has of them and this had had an impact on the smooth running of a shift. This adds to the pressure on staff to try and maintain a homely environment.

Permanent staff receive sufficient training relevant to the role and find this valuable. Other training increases staff knowledge and raises awareness about gang culture, sexual health and understanding young people's behaviours. This allows them to better support young people.

The home has developed relationships with the community police and called upon the fire service to meet with young people to increase their understanding of their role in society and teach them about fire risks and hazards. A number of external agencies visit young people in the home and encourage attendance at groups to discuss issues about drugs, sexual health, going missing and the risks associated with offending behaviour.

The records indicating that staff supervisions take place could not be examined in detail. However the log book of supervisions suggests that these do not always happen regularly. This was confirmed by staff, citing the pressures of work as the major reason for the lapses. Staff have an opportunity to discuss their feelings at the beginning of every team meeting. However this is not private, does not support confidentiality, and the time to address issues is limited.

The staff keep records of all health and safety checks undertaken. These records are not maintained in one place or in order, causing confusion and the lack of a satisfactory audit trail to support the monitoring of the home. Regular and thorough Regulation 33 visits take place to assist the home identify shortfalls and improve provision.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.