

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stella Lovie
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This independent home provides care and accommodation for up to six children and young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties and learning disabilities.

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**.

The home can demonstrate a strong capacity for continuing improvement based on its track record, performance since the previous inspection and clear evidence of the positive impact of improvements. There have been some challenging times in recent months, but the Registered Manager and her team have pulled together to ensure that young people's behaviour and outcomes are consistently getting better. Consequently, young people make good progress in relation to their starting points across all aspects of their welfare and development.

Staff provide effective, high quality support, and ensure that young people's care and placement planning meets their individual and diverse needs. Staff are clear about boundaries and expectations in relation to group living. As a result young people feel safe, well cared for and have positive and trusting relationships with the staff. As one young person wrote: 'This is the best damn children's home there ever was!'

Staff demonstrate a good understanding of safe working practice. Use of effective positive behaviour strategies means that risk-taking and challenging behaviours by young people are reducing in frequency. There is a minor shortfall in relation to demonstrating that young people are encouraged to have their views recorded after disciplinary measures or restraint are used.

Leadership and management arrangements are strong. The Registered Manager is effective at tackling weaknesses and securing improvement. Staff morale is much higher and staff report that they feel well supported to undertake their roles. There are however occasions when formal supervision is not regularly held and supervision records are insufficiently completed. Similarly, some staff appraisals have not been

held within timescales. Nevertheless, managers ensure that staff are enabled to provide confident and consistent care.

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 where any sanctions, disciplinary measures or restraint are used, children are encouraged to have their views recorded in the records kept by the home (NMS 3.18)
- ensure that staff are provided with regular supervision (NMS 19.4)
- ensure that the written or electronic supervision record is signed by the supervisor and the member of staff at the end of the supervision (NMS 19.5)
- ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually. (NMS 19.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

After some recent months of challenging behaviour, young people have started to make good progress in developing a positive view about themselves. This includes understanding their behaviour better so that they make more constructive relationships with peers, adults and with their family. As one social worker commented: '[The young person] has made good progress here in understanding consequences and learning that he can't manipulate all adults. He's better at expressing himself and is beginning to mature.' This helps young people to come to terms with issues from their past, and to move forward with increased levels of resilience.

Young people demonstrate clear knowledge about healthy lifestyles. They choose not to smoke or misuse substances, and are regularly involved in exercise. Where appropriate, they take responsibility for their own health. This includes making their own appointments and cooperating with the specialist psychological support on offer. As a result, their physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted.

Young people enjoy active participation in the daily running of the home. They are encouraged to undertake small tasks such as gardening, or setting and clearing the table. These activities provide young people with a sense of achievement on completion, and increase their sense of belonging in the home. Young people are also empowered to get involved in the more complex decisions about their lives. For example, some young people have been supported by children's rights officers to challenge care planning decisions, made by their placing authorities, which they do

not agree with. This ensures that they learn how to express their views constructively and encourages ownership of their care plans.

Young people attend school regularly and make good progress educationally from their starting points. They have access in the home to a range of educational resources to support their learning. This means that they are helped to achieve their academic potential. In addition, young people are involved in meaningful activities so that independence skills are developed in line with individual abilities. Some of the young people have significant involvement in child care forums and fund-raising. This gives them the opportunity to practice useful negotiation skills, as well as experience exciting events such as abseiling.

Young people are able to spend time with family and friends with whom they enjoy caring and loving relationships. This ensures that important attachments are maintained and promotes their sense of well-being.

Quality of care

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

All the young people report that they enjoy positive relationships with staff. They feel that staff really care about them and want them to do well. As one young person said: 'It's a chilled relaxed place and the staff are lovely.' This is testament to the trusting relationships developed between staff and young people over time.

Staff are adept in the use of individualised positive behaviour strategies to support young people in developing skills in managing conflict. This has been a journey of learning with the young people as there were significant levels of conflict earlier in the year. Currently, the young people are much more settled, to the extent that one relative commented: 'This home is a gold star place. The staff are very child-centred. They put in good routines and structure that work, and are very fair.' This is further endorsed by feedback from a social worker: 'Staff have managed [the young person] well. They've been very clear and consistent with him, and recognise when a behaviour management strategy isn't working and change to something that does.' This demonstrates that young people are beginning to develop responsibility and reduce negative behaviours.

Good use is made of tools such as strengths and difficulties questionnaires and specific counselling. This helps young people to understand past experiences and develop some insight into their circumstances. As a result, they are able to successfully overcome adversity and positively develop their emotional resilience, confidence and self-esteem. There are good collaborative links with health professionals and other agencies. This allows helpful guidance and support to be provided when young people are most in need.

Staff ensure that young people have access to independent advice and support to be able to express their views and influence decision-making. They know how to make a complaint and are confident that they will be listened to and taken seriously. Young

people contribute to the development of the home because staff provide good opportunities for them to present their views at group and individual meetings. This means that their rights to inclusion and participation are central to how the home operates and this promotes effective communication within the home.

Young people benefit from individualised placement plans that are subject to regular review and update. Staff work closely with them to ensure that their weekly plans are followed and their targets met. Young people are involved in the development of their plans and are clear about their goals. They are aware of their wider care plans and are supported by staff to be involved in meetings held about them. As a result, young people feel part of their future planning and have confidence that their voice will be heard.

Staff are proactive in supporting young people's education and patiently encourage them every step of the way. Learning doesn't stop at the school gates: staff provide support in the home for young people to continue their learning. For example, they help with literacy and revision needs to promote young people's confidence in the school environment. Consequently, they have every opportunity to achieve their educational potential.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

There has been a significant level of disruptive and negative behaviours within the home in recent past months. This impacted adversely on some young people's sense of well-being and safety. However, staff have responded with robust and effective behaviour management strategies so that bullying and aggressive behaviour is significantly reducing. The young people all report that they now feel safe in the home. As one parent commented: 'I think he feels safe here. He has pushed the boundaries without limit on numerous occasions and trusts the staff response to him. Staff show great patience and give a lot of time to help [the young person] to understand.' All the young people understand the many forms that bullying can take and are equally clear about what to do if they have concerns about it.

Staff are proactive in recognising the particular vulnerabilities relating to the diverse needs of the young people in their care. Interventions are creative, thoughtful and underpinned by clear risk assessment. This includes careful environmental risk assessments and action to address any shortfalls to ensure that young people live in a home that is safe and free from hazards.

Young people enjoy positive, friendly but professional relationships with staff. These are underpinned by tailored behaviour management strategies based on praise, incentives and realistic individual targets. This results in fewer physical restraints and only minimal and appropriate use of sanctions. As one young person said: 'It is not often that I get restrained but when I do, staff go about this in a calm, cool and legal manner.' However, the staff are not consistent in encouraging young people to have their views recorded in the behaviour management records kept by the home.

Staff are effective in helping young people to find constructive ways of coping with their distress or anxiety rather than running away. They work with the young people to ensure they feel safe and to support them to find other means of expressing their distress. As a result, the frequency with which young people go missing is minimised and has reduced over time. This is further supported by strong and proactive relationships with the police. For example, the home's linked police officer has referred young people for specialist anger management. This promotes their safety and well-being.

Staff are trained in all aspects of safeguarding children, are alert to children's vulnerabilities and risks of harm, and are knowledgeable about how to implement safeguarding children procedures. Recruitment processes are robust and deter unsuitable individuals from having access to the young people. As one parent said: 'I think the home has picked the staff really well as they are all very fair and enthusiastic and really know their stuff!' Investigations into allegations are handled fairly, quickly and consistently. This ensures effective protection for young people and at the same time supports the person who is subject of the allegation.

Leadership and management

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

The Registered Manager provides strong leadership. She has an inclusive, open style which staff value and reflect in their practice with young people. She has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the home, learns from monitoring and inspection activities, and improves practice accordingly. She is considerably assisted in this by the high quality reports produced by the independent visitor. This means that quality assurance is challenging and effective, and that the recommendation from the previous inspection has been acted upon. A development plan is in place which enables young people to continue to enjoy good standards and quality of care. This is further supported by the home's constructive partnerships with the relatives and other agencies involved with the young people.

Although some formal staff supervisions and appraisals have been deferred or missed in recent months, staff feel they receive good support and are valued in the role that they play. For example, some staff have mentoring in relation to their specific development needs, and all staff value the approachability of managers and the informal supervision they provide. The manager achieves a working consensus within the staff team where goals are shared and staff are equally motivated. Staff morale is high and there is good 'buy-in' to the improvement agenda. This serves to promote better outcomes for the young people.

Young people are cared for in a consistent manner by staff who enjoy their work and provide young people with a continuity of care. This helps vulnerable young people develop trust in the responses that they receive and reduces their anxieties. The manager ensures that staff have appropriate development opportunities. As a result, staff feel energised and confident in their practice. It also encourages awareness of

practice issues beyond the boundary of the home.

Despite some recent history of significant damage to the home, the environment is comfortable and nurturing. Repairs are attended to quickly and the manager has a strong commitment to maintaining a high standard of decoration and furnishings. This helps the young people to feel valued and cherished.

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.