

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 home, one of a number of homes operated by a charitable organisation, 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**.

One of the real strengths of the home is the warm and nurturing environment created by the manager and staff. This provides an exceptional experience that significantly improves the quality of life both for children and their families. Young people develop a strong sense of ownership and pride in the home. As a result, they make good progress across all areas of their development in relation to their starting points. This is confirmed in feedback from one relative who said, 'Thank you for all the support and care you have given my son. I feel he has grown in maturity and confidence and is becoming a lovely, kind, caring young man.'

Young people highly esteem the support and care they receive from the staff. As one young person enthused, 'I just wanted to say a massive thanks for all the hard work and effort that you all apply to your job. Also, regardless of what Ofsted say, we all love it here and I personally do not think I could be happier anywhere else. You all do an outstanding job and I am proud to say I live at this home.'

Staff work effectively with parents to successfully promote the personal growth and development of each young person. This is achieved through excellent relationships between staff and young people in conjunction with careful and considered target setting and incentives. Care planning is creative and personalised to meet the individual needs of young people.

Staff demonstrate a good understanding of safe working practice. They create clear expectations about group living so that young people feel safe in the home and are supported to deal with challenges within the wider community. Complex behaviours

are managed effectively with all the relevant agencies so that young people's safety is promoted. This is underpinned by strong leadership and management which serves to tackle weaknesses and secure improvements.

Nevertheless, there remain some areas for improvement in relation to several aspects of recording practice. This includes ensuring that formal pathway planning is in place for all relevant young people and the provision of training to meet the specific needs of the young people in the home. One requirement is made about staff signing to confirm that supervision has been held. This issue has been raised in the two previous inspections as a recommendation but has yet to be consistently addressed. However, none of these shortfalls impact negatively on the welfare or safety of young people and do not significantly undermine the otherwise excellent quality of 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
27 (2001)	ensure that all staff receive supervision, and sign the supervision record to confirm this. (Regulation 27 (4) (a))	25/06/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure that children's health is promoted in accordance with their placement plan, with specific regard to daily monitoring of diet and digestive issues where required (NMS 6.5)
- ensure that the home contributes to the pathway plan for 'eligible' care leavers, with particular regard to liaison with placing authorities to make sure such plans are in place (NMS 12.2)
- ensure that telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references, with particular regard to adequate recording to demonstrate this (NMS 16.1)
- ensure that staff are equipped with the skills required to meet the needs of the children, with particular regard to provision of child sexual exploitation training (NMS 18.1)
- ensure that all staff have their performance individually and formally appraised at least annually, and this appraisal takes into account any views of children the

service is providing for (NMS 19.6)

- ensure the manager regularly monitors, in line with regulations, all records kept by the home, with particular regard to evaluating all missing from home records. (NMS 21.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people report that they feel a strong sense of belonging in the home. It provides them with a secure base where they feel rooted and accepted. They enjoy a stable placement which enables them to sustain positive attachments to staff and establish social networks in the community. It provides a strong platform from which young people can develop emotional resilience and positive sense of self. As one young person confirmed, 'I love it, it's absolutely amazing – I'm not just saying this. It has changed my life so much. I never fitted in anywhere else. There's not the pressure of being in a family. I find it easier with staff changing. If I have a disagreement with staff when they go home I can reflect and then apologise to them in a meaningful way. It is my home. It's settled – I enjoy it.' As a result of this improved stability, resilience and sense of self, incidents of anti-social behaviour and offending have diminished and young people have positive aspirations for the future.

Young people have a good awareness of healthy lifestyles and, where appropriate, take responsibility for their own health appointments and medication. They are active in the management of their own health. They seek information and engage constructively with specialist services to further their understanding. They are able to build trusting relationships with a range of external helping professionals. This means that they know their rights and responsibilities in areas such as sexual health and respectful relationships. Some young people are still at an early stage of using this information to effect change in their risk taking behaviours. That said, interventions by the home and specialist services are beginning to have some success with young people in relation to their awareness of the risks around sexual exploitation. This work is underpinned through the coaching of staff by specialist professionals so that key messages are reinforced in the context of daily life in the home. As one external professional commented, 'Staff are so brilliant at reading situations. They join in with my work with the young people so I am confident that the work carries on when I'm not there. I know they are doing lots of work behind the scenes.'

Young people are encouraged to engage in activities within the home, the wider organisation and the local community. Preparing for theme nights and going out as a 'family' group engenders bonding through fun and creative opportunities. Some individuals attend local clubs and have successfully undertaken Duke of Edinburgh awards. This helps young people to integrate into their local community. It enables them to gain confidence, take advantage of new learning opportunities, and make friends.

Young people have the full attention of the manager and staff. The manager is clear

about the need to 'invest' in young people, to help them to develop positive attachments and better manage their challenging behaviours. These outcomes are integrated into young people's placement plans, along with clear objectives to improve health, education and other outcomes such as contact with family. Young people are enabled to actively participate in day to day and more complex decisions about their lives. Where appropriate, they are helped to use children's rights services so that their voices are heard in care planning forums. This encourages their ownership of important decisions about their lives.

Young people report that their experience in the home has been useful in preparing them for future adult life, such as learning to take responsibility, to share with others, to consider others, and to do practical tasks like looking after their belongings and environment. This helps them to be well prepared for the next steps in independence in accordance with their level of maturity and emotional readiness. However, not all relevant young people are supported in this independence work by formal pathway planning with placing authorities. This means that the work being undertaken by staff with young people is insufficiently linked to external services and support to maximise their independence.

The educational achievement of young people is good taking into account their attainment and progress from their starting point at the time of the placement. In addition, young people enjoy a wide range of activities and opportunities which stimulate their learning outside the school environment. For example, they take part in fund raising events and are active in the wider organisation's young people's forum. This promotes improvement in a range of areas such as organisation, negotiation and communication skills.

Quality of care

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

Staff have consistently high expectations for all the young people in the home. They genuinely place the well-being of individual young people at the heart of what they do, irrespective of the challenges they present. Consequently, young people enjoy high quality care in a home that closely replicates a nurturing family situation. Accommodation and facilities are of an extremely high standard and provide an environment designed to develop young people and meet their needs. As one external professional confirmed, 'This unit is about as homely as you can get. I've observed staff setting firm but loving boundaries. They come across as actually caring about the young people and have expectations of them as if they were their own children. It's really refreshing as so many children's homes don't have this feeling.' This observation is echoed by comments by the young people themselves, 'I think this is a good place. Staff really care about the kids and are all nice.'

Staff demonstrate respect and understanding about young people who occasionally display extreme challenging behaviours. They take account of the underlying distress as well as ensuring a prompt response to the immediate consequences of such behaviour. Staff are knowledgeable and able to address issues on an ongoing basis.

They get involved in individual sessions with young people alongside specialist workers. This helps to build their knowledge and skills. They value training and learning and are very sensitive to issues of attachment, loss and relationship-building. This means that staff are able to relate to why young people behave as they do, and thus gain an understanding of the whole picture for each young person and how their history impacts on their daily presentation. As one safeguarding professional said, 'This children's home is about the best you get in terms of the stability, commitment and skills of staff, and the quality of the management here. Staff have a genuine interest and desire to understand the young people and to promote a difference.'

Staff are clearly aware of young people's assessed needs. Consistently well-written placement plans outline how these will be met. This means young people receive a highly individualised service that is designed to meet their specific needs. There is one minor shortfall in consistency of recording in relation to health needs, however, this has not impacted adversely on the welfare or well-being of young people.

Staff demonstrate a very clear understanding of young people's identity and cultural needs. This includes enabling them to discuss sensitive issues such as sexuality, with referral to relevant support groups as appropriate. They are adept at helping young people to feel good about themselves, accepting and valuing them for who they are. This reinforces a positive sense of identity in individual young people, and promotes acceptance within the wider group. Staff also develop young people's awareness of different cultures by organising themed evenings and taking them to local festivals and cultural events. This helps to encourage tolerance and social cohesion.

Consultation and participation is a particular strength of the home, and the opinions of young people make a real difference. For example, young people play a very active part in the design and decoration of their home. This helps them to feel valued and promotes their self-esteem. There is frequent dialogue between young people and staff by formal and informal means, and young people say they feel that what they say is taken seriously. Young people trust the complaints system and know how to use it. The smallest achievements are celebrated, giving young people a strong sense of personal development and fulfilment. Similarly, birthdays, gaining qualifications and obtaining awards are all celebrated to ensure important events and achievements are not forgotten.

Staff are successful in challenging barriers to education so that young people are able to participate fully in school, in their community and wider society. For example, one young person has been helped to go back to school on a full time basis after an extended period of absence when in a previous placement. This was confirmed by one social work manager who said, 'Staff have worked very well with her school by maintaining close liaison so she was able to get back into school successfully.'

It is evident from the unequivocally positive feedback from a range of external professionals that staff are able to build exceptionally effective partnerships with different agencies. That feedback consistently referred to staff's dedication and professionalism in going the extra mile to secure the best possible support for the

young people. As police officers said, 'Staff are very cooperative with the police. They are very quick to share information. It's a supportive care home. They keep tabs on the young people, give them good parameters and are very fair with them. This home is one of the better ones in terms of handling sexual exploitation. Staff are very clued-up and know what they're doing. There's a good free flow of information. They manage their children brilliantly.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people report a strong sense of safety in the home. As one young person said, 'I have my issues going outside – here I feel totally secure. I trust staff to keep me safe outside. I feel vulnerable as a woman but I am getting help with this.' The validity of that sense of security has been closely examined by relevant external agencies in recent months in the context of concerns about sexual exploitation, and some distressed behaviour by young people that has resulted in allegations against staff. Careful scrutiny of these concerns during the inspection confirms that the home is consistently fair, transparent and professional in managing those risks, while effectively supporting the young people concerned. As one external professional commented, 'I'm aware that there has been close and effective working together between the home, the social worker and the police about managing the sexual exploitation risks. I am absolutely confident that the staff deal effectively with those risks. They are in charge and hold the young people safely.'

All staff attend training in safeguarding and receive regular refresher training. Consequently, staff maintain their understanding of how to identify the signs and symptoms of abuse and how to manage and report child protection concerns. That said, some staff have not received specific training in child sexual exploitation. In practice though, this is not a significant shortfall as they are able to demonstrate a sound working knowledge of this issue, and relevant external professionals have confidence in staff practice in relation to these concerns.

Allegations management is demonstrably robust, and on all occasions has been responded to in a timely manner. It is clear that practice is sensitive to the need to effectively safeguard young people, while also supporting staff who are subject of allegations. This is endorsed by feedback from the local authority designated officer: 'I deal with the care home a lot as they deal with a lot of very challenging young people. I've always found them to be very professional. They are quick to contact me. They understand why young people make allegations and take a balanced approach. The Registered Manager and the assistant manager are very professional.' This means that an appropriate focus is maintained both on young people's safety, and on helping them to understand the impact of their behaviour on others.

Young people participate in completing their own risk assessments, in accordance with their age and understanding. This enables them to begin to take responsibility for their behaviours. As a result young people modify their responses and think about the impact of the choices they make. On the relatively rare occasions when young

people go missing from the home staff are proactive in trying to find them, respond positively to them on their return, and take action in response to the reasons why they ran away. This has helped to encourage a recent reduction in the frequency of these incidents. However, records of missing from home events do not always have managerial oversight. This means that opportunities to improve practice further are missed.

Young people enjoy warm relationships with staff and respond positively to the calm, measured responses of the manager and staff. They benefit from incentives which recognise sustained positive interaction. Sanctions are rarely imposed as young people are amenable to dialogue and discussion. When sanctions are imposed, they reflect the principles of reparation and restitution. This helps to influence young people's behaviour positively. Negotiation and de-escalation skills are used competently to prevent situations escalating. As a result there is minimum need for restraint.

Effective systems such as comprehensive risk assessment and consistent care practice ensure young people's welfare and safety is prioritised at all times. There are clear plans to address young people's individual risky behaviours, and these are regularly monitored and reviewed. Staff have a good understanding of young people's vulnerabilities and the risks they may face. They effectively manage these risks and encourage young people to keep themselves safe.

Recruitment processes are mostly robust enough to deter unsuitable individuals from having the opportunity to harm young people in the home. More thorough recording is required though to demonstrate that telephone enquiries are made of all written references in line with safer recruitment practice.

Leadership and management

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

The home benefits from an experienced Registered Manager who is suitably qualified. She is passionate about creating a nurturing environment that supports all the young people so they feel cared for, and achieve the best possible outcomes. She is ably supported by a strong first line manager, and by the leadership provided by the organisation as a whole. This is confirmed by feedback from young people, 'The home has the best manager – I love her and the staff team. They all have different qualities. Staff support me and help with LAC reviews – they are difficult and emotional because of the things we talk about but staff support me.' It is also endorsed by external professionals and by staff, 'In the organisation, we get to meet with other people from other units when we can share experiences. This provides peer and management support. Higher managers visit and make themselves known to all the staff in the unit. People are aware we are here and we are not just in our own little bubble. The organisation provides a sense of belonging and is supportive. I feel confident I could speak about any concern including whistleblowing if I needed to.' This creates a firm impression of committed and effective leadership which is effective at promoting improved outcomes

The manager is compassionate, enthusiastic and direct in her style. This inspires trust and confidence in both the young people and the staff. It helps staff to practice in a clearly defined, goal-orientated manner. Staff have a real sense of purpose in their role and take on specific areas of responsibility. This helps to sustain motivation and develop expertise. Practice concerns are addressed robustly on an individual and team basis by additional training, senior manager oversight and individual performance plans. This approach has been instrumental in improving the staff team's administration of medication.

Staff are supported by regular supervision of a good quality. Supervision records demonstrate close attention to staff development and communicate high expectations about sustaining improvement. However, the records again lack staff signatures to confirm that they have received the supervision. This has been an area for improvement in the last two inspections so is now raised to a requirement. Staff's individual training needs are identified and met, though, as previously stated, all staff require child sexual exploitation training in light of the specific needs of the young people they care for. Appraisals are mostly completed on an annual basis but lack the benefit of formal involvement of young people. This means that important opportunities for the manager to use feedback to help staff reflect even more thoroughly about their performance and effectiveness are missed.

The manager makes good use of a range of tools to monitor young people's progress and focus on improving their outcomes. She is assisted in this by effective quality assurance processes in relation to oversight of the quality of care in the home. She has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the service and has a development plan in place which tackles the improvement agenda by building on areas of strength. Targets for the development of the home are realistic and challenging. There is good evidence that the service has improved in terms of standards of care and the development of excellent working relationships with external agencies. The manager has still to act on the two recommendations from the last inspection, although this has not impacted adversely on young people's welfare.

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.