

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Monica Hargreaves
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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.

This report details the main strengths and any areas for improvement identified during the inspection. The judgements included in the report are made in relation to the outcome for children set out in the Children Act 2004 and relevant National Minimum Standards for the establishment.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding:	this aspect of the provision is of exceptionally high quality
Good:	this aspect of the provision is strong
Satisfactory:	this aspect of the provision is sound
Inadequate:	this aspect of the provision is not good enough

Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is owned and managed by a charitable organisation that has several homes in the area. It provides medium- to long-term care for up to three young people of either gender, aged from 11 to 17 years.

The house is a semi-detached property in a residential area. It has four bedrooms and a bathroom on the first floor and a lounge, dining room and kitchen on the ground floor. One of the four bedrooms is used by staff who sleep in. The staff office is in the basement and also doubles as a second staff sleep-in room. The home has parking facilities at the front and there is an enclosed garden to the rear.

There were three young people living at the home at the time of the visit, all of whom contributed to the inspection.

Summary

At this key unannounced inspection, all the key standards in all outcome areas were assessed. Recommendations from the last inspection were also checked.

This service provides a good standard of care and has some areas of real strength. Young people are fully involved in the assessment, care planning and reviewing process and receive an excellent level of individualised support. Their education and training is supported very well by staff and their health needs are met.

Safeguarding has a high priority in the home, so that young people are protected and kept safe. Challenging behaviour is managed very well by the staff and with the lowest level of intervention that is necessary to protect young people and staff. Staff have a very positive view of the young people in their care and relationships between staff and young people are good.

The service is well managed. The staff team is competent and well supported, through regular supervision and training, and there is good management oversight of the work of the home.

Minor shortfalls identified at this visit relate to staff qualifications, some aspects of the bullying risk assessment and the home's development plan. Some areas of decoration and repair in the home also require attention.

The overall quality rating is good.

This is an overview of what the inspector found during the inspection.

Improvements since the last inspection

Recommendations made at the last inspections are both met. Young people are fully involved in the development of all their plans and sign placement plans to confirm this. The manager is registered with Ofsted.

Helping children to be healthy

The provision is good.

The good health of young people is promoted because staff make sure they have clear information about the individual and specific health needs of young people and incorporate

this into their overall placement plan. This written information enables staff to ensure that young people have access to the services and support they need to keep them healthy. All information that is held on young people is reviewed and kept up to date to reflect their changing needs. Young people are registered with primary health care services and are supported at all health appointments. Staff have good links with services outside the home and refer young people for additional services if a need is identified.

Young people are encouraged to develop a healthy lifestyle. Young people say that staff give them good advice about health matters and avoiding things that might harm them, such as smoking, using drugs or drinking alcohol. Staff also encourage young people to exercise regularly and they are given good opportunities to be involved in activities that promote exercise, for example, swimming, horse riding and cycling. Staff provide them with a varied and healthy diet. Young people say that they like the meals at their home and they enjoy helping to plan for and cook their meals. This helps them to develop their independence skills and their knowledge of healthy eating. Staff and young people eat together and meal times are pleasant social occasions. Themed food nights, and trips out for meals to local restaurants and cafes, encourage young people to try foods from different countries and broaden their awareness of other cultures.

All staff are trained to store and deliver medication in a safe way and records confirm that the system is robust and effective in protecting young people. All staff are also trained in first aid, so that they know how to look after young people in an emergency.

Protecting children from harm or neglect and helping them stay safe

The provision is good.

There are good systems in place to make sure that the privacy, dignity and confidentiality of young people is respected. For example, young people have individual bedrooms which they can lock to keep their personal possessions safe and where they can spend time in private. They say that staff always knock on their bedroom door before entering and are confident that staff keep information confidential that is held about them. There is a dedicated phone that young people can use in private. Staff make sure that information about young people is stored in secure facilities in the office, to protect their right to confidentiality.

Young people know how to complain and say that they believe that staff deal with their grumbles and complaints properly, so that they understand their views are listened to. They are given good information about the complaints process and have easy access to complaints leaflets. They also have access to an independent children's rights service, if they want to make a complaint to someone outside the home. There are very few complaints from young people, or people outside the home. Those that are made are dealt with promptly and in line with the organisation's procedures.

The service has a clear safeguarding procedure and all staff are trained in child protection issues. These systems are effective in enabling staff to understand how to identify the signs and symptoms of abuse and how to take appropriate action to protect young people. Young people say that they feel safe in the home because staff look after them well and help them to learn how to keep themselves safe.

Bullying is not an issue in the home, although staff are aware that this can happen and appropriate action is taken to protect young people. For example, staff are trained to identify bullying and to support young people if an incident occurs. They also make sure that young

people are appropriately supervised in the home. There is a risk assessment in place that gives a clear definition of bullying and gives guidance to staff on the way they should protect young people. However, this assessment does not specifically consider the times and places within the home where the risk of bullying may be greatest and so does not fully meet the standard.

There are sound arrangements for managing unauthorised absences. The protocol is clear and staff work well with statutory agencies if a young person goes missing from the home to ensure their safe return. Individual risk assessments on young people identify specific concerns and staff put in place strategies to lessen the likelihood of young people going missing from the home. For example, staff supervise young people appropriately; they encourage them to let them know where they are going when they leave the home and keep in touch with them by mobile phone if they are away.

Staff have a very positive view of the young people in their care. They work well with young people and encourage and support them to behave in socially acceptable ways. Clear behaviour support plans identify specific areas of work that staff do with young people, to help them to learn to manage their own behaviour. Plans also record the strategies that staff themselves use to manage behaviour that is challenging. Staff are trained to respond positively to challenging behaviour, including in the use of physical restraint. There is good evidence that this is only ever used as a last resort and the very low incidence of physical intervention in the home confirms that young people respond well to the way that staff work with and care for them. Relationships between staff and young people are good and young people themselves say that they 'get on well' with the staff and that staff are 'fair'.

Detailed risk assessments enable staff to ensure that potential hazards in the home are minimised or eliminated. Regular checks on fire and electrical equipment and gas installations ensure that these are all kept safe. These systems are effective in protecting the welfare of young people.

The organisation's procedure for the recruitment of staff is robust and is followed in this home. This means that all staff are thoroughly vetted and assessed as suitable to work with young people, before they start work at the home. All visitors are checked before being allowed into the home and the home itself is kept appropriately secure to prevent unauthorised people gaining access. These practices protect young people from contact in the home with individuals who may pose a risk to them.

Helping children achieve well and enjoy what they do

The provision is outstanding.

Young people receive an excellent level of individual care and support from staff. Their needs are effectively assessed before they are admitted to the home and detailed plans are drawn up to ensure that all their needs are met. Young people have a designated key worker with whom they meet very regularly for specific key working sessions and a substantial amount of informal key working is also undertaken with all members of staff. This means that young people's care plans are effectively implemented. Staff have a very good understanding of the individual needs of the young people in their care. They have effective links with agencies outside the home, for example psychological services and agencies providing support with substance misuse issues, so that they can ensure young people receive any additional support they require to meet their needs.

Staff promote the value of education very well and create an ethos in the home that supports daily attendance at school, college or work. They are successful in helping young people to pursue their education and to be involved in training when they leave school. All of the young people in the home have an education or training placement that is appropriate to their needs and attend very regularly. Staff work closely with schools and training providers to help to resolve any difficulties young people may have. The home provides appropriate resources to support education, such as a computer and books and a quiet place to study. Staff make sure that young people complete any homework that they are given and support them with their studies. Young people comment that staff really help them with school and they know that staff are proud of their individual achievements.

Young people are able to pursue hobbies they are interested in and staff make resources available so that they can take part in a wide range of leisure activities, for example cycling, horse riding, swimming, visits to the cinema and local theme parks. The service also takes young people on weekend breaks and holidays away from the home. Young people benefit from the leisure activities in a number of ways. For example, some activities promote exercise and all activities help young people to develop their skills and interests, broaden their range of contacts outside the home and help them to learn to structure their own leisure time as they move towards independence. Young people say that they 'really like to be active' and that they do 'lots of things' outside the home.

Helping children make a positive contribution

The provision is outstanding.

Each young person has a comprehensive placement plan, that is drawn up from the detailed information that is gained about them before they come to the home. These plans are written under the Every Child Matters outcomes and present a holistic assessment of the young person's needs, including those that arise from their cultural and religious background. The plans enable staff to make sure that care is consistent and young people's needs are met. All plans are signed by the young person to confirm that these have been discussed and agreed with them. Plans are monitored in the home and regular updates are sent to social workers so that they can see how young people are progressing in the home.

The care of young people is regularly reviewed through the formal reviewing process and there are highly effective systems in place to ensure that the views of young people are properly represented at review meetings. Prior to the meeting, staff support young people to complete written consultation documents. These are colourful and presented in a format that is appropriate to the young person's needs. They enable young people to record their views, which can then be presented to the meeting. Key workers provide detailed reports of the young person's progress for reviews and they attend the meetings with the home's manager to discuss the progress of the young person and contribute to the planning process. These arrangements ensure that the placement is meeting the young person's needs and they are achieving positive outcomes.

There are effective arrangements in place to ensure that young people are able to maintain links with family and friends outside the home. All young people have contact plans, that are agreed with placing social workers. Staff have a good understanding of the importance of promoting positive contact with family and friends, when it is safe and in the best interests of young people to do so. They welcome families into the home and support young people with

contact visits away from the home. Young people say that their friends can visit them in the home and that they occasionally stay for tea. Staff keep good information about family and friends who have contact with young people, so that they can monitor the quality of all contacts. These arrangements enable young people to keep in touch with family and friends outside the home who are important to them, in a way that is safe. This enables young people to maintain a sense of their own identity.

Young people move into and leave the home in as planned a way as possible. All admissions to the home are agreed following a detailed assessment of the young person, to ensure that the home can meet their needs. Young people are able to visit the home and meet staff and other young people before they move in. They are given good written information about the home, so that they can see how young people are looked after. Young people also move on from the home in as planned a way as possible. Staff work hard with placing authorities and young people to ensure that there are appropriate plans in place so that young people are properly supported into an alternative placement or more independent living.

There is very regular consultation with young people and this is a real strength of the home. Young people are encouraged to contribute to all of their plans. There are formal opportunities for consultation, for example in key work sessions, reviews and house meetings and young people are able to talk informally to staff throughout the day. Young people say that they are able to help to choose menus and activities and have a choice about the decoration of the home. They talk about issues that are important to them in the house meetings and staff also raise issues for discussion in these meetings, for example if there are difficulties between young people, such as bullying. Young people also contribute fully to the care planning process. These systems give young people the chance to influence the running of the home and enable them to be fully involved in all the discussions that take place about their care and plans for their future.

Achieving economic wellbeing

The provision is good.

The daily life of the home enables young people to develop skills that will benefit them when they leave care and move on into independence. For example, they are encouraged to be involved in planning meals, shopping and cooking and some young people help staff with simple maintenance tasks around the home. They are also encouraged to learn how to budget and all young people have a bank account where they save money from their weekly allowances. Individual placement plans identify the work that is needed in preparation for young people's independence, and staff are looking to develop further this area of their work. Staff work with placing authorities to ensure that a pathway plan is put in place for each young person at an appropriate stage, so that young people are involved in the plans that are made for their move on from the service.

The house provides a homely environment for young people. It is comfortably furnished, kept clean and tidy and generally is satisfactorily maintained. There is a plan in place to ensure that the home is refurbished but this work has not started and, at present, some areas of carpet are worn and need replacement and there are some minor repairs and areas of decoration that require attention. This detracts from the overall presentation of the house. Young people themselves say that they really like their rooms and the house generally and that they have enough space to be together if they wish or to be private.

Organisation

The organisation is good.

The home's Statement of Purpose and young person's guide to the service are detailed documents that give young people, parents and placing social workers good information about how the home works and how young people are looked after. There is good information from this inspection that these documents accurately reflect the care and support that young people receive.

Young people benefit from being looked after by a sufficient number of staff. This means that young people are cared for safely and that staff are able to undertake individual work with them and to support them with things, such as their education, contact visits and activities. Staff are trained for their work, so that they have the knowledge and skills they need to care for young people well. The organisation requires all care staff to have a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) at Level 3, or an equivalent qualification, and the home has a programme in place to make sure that staff achieve this. However, there are not yet sufficient staff who have gained a qualification to ensure that young people are always cared for by qualified staff.

The home is well managed by an experienced and qualified manager and staff feel properly supported in their work. Management oversight of the home is good; there is a robust system in place which ensures that the work of the home is regularly monitored and that good standards of care are maintained. However, the service does not have an up-to-date development plan to confirm the operation of the home.

Clear and detailed records are kept on all the young people in the home. Information is kept in individual files that are stored safely and young people are encouraged to read and contribute to their files. Information from other documents, for example sanctions, complaints and restraints, is appropriately cross-referenced into young people's files. This ensures that there is one distinct record for each young person of their time in the placement that they can have access to. Files are in good order and easy to read.

The promotion of equality and diversity is good. Staff are given specific training in these areas and there are policies to guide their practice. They undertake work with young people, individually and in groups, to raise their awareness of cultural issues and challenge any issues of discrimination that arise. They demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that all young people are treated equally and encourage young people to treat one another with respect. Young people receive care that is specifically tailored to meet their individual needs.

What must be done to secure future improvement?

Statutory requirements

This section sets out the actions, which must be taken so that the registered person meets the Care Standards Act 2000, The Children's Homes Regulations 2001 and the National Minimum Standards. The Registered Provider must comply with the given timescales.

Standard	Action	Due date
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Recommendations

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

- update the bullying risk assessment to include the times, places and circumstances in which the risk of bullying is greatest (NMS 18.5)
- ensure that the home is maintained in a good state of decorative repair, in particular, that worn carpets are replaced and that areas of the home that require repair and redecoration are attended to (NMS 24.3)
- ensure that a minimum ratio of 80% of all care staff have an NVQ at Level 3 or an equivalent qualification (NMS 29.5)
- produce an up-to-date written development plan on the operation of the home. (NMS 33.5)