

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Sandra Jacobs-Walls
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is privately owned. It is a family business with a majority of family members employed within it. The home is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children and young people who have emotional or behavioural difficulties.

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 **adequate**.

Overall the service performs adequately in meeting the identified needs of young people in placement. Staff provide individualised care and young people feel staff care about their well-being. The staff group encourage young people to take responsibility for their lives and are keen for them to make good progress while in placement.

The quality of the relationship between staff and young people is good. Staff enjoy working with young people and promote their safety. Young people feel well protected by the service.

Young people generally live healthy lifestyles. However, their educational outcomes are variable. They participate in recreational activities that are of their choosing and have opportunities to develop practical life skills. They enjoy safe access to family members and friends and the premises are comfortable and secure.

Shortfalls are noted; most significantly in the home's leadership and management which is inadequate. Areas identified for improvement include the home's monitoring systems; the appropriate vetting of staff, providing high quality training to staff and the appropriate supervision of the Registered Manager. The service is yet to establish an effective working partnership with the local police, the home's development plan is inadequate and the service does not devise individual behaviour management plans for 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
33 (2001)	ensure that the home has visits in accordance with Regulation 33 (Regulation 33 (1)(3)(4)&(5))	02/12/2013
34 (2001)	establish and maintain a system for improving the quality of care in the children's home (Regulation 34(1)(b))	01/01/2014
27 (2001)	ensure that the Registered Manager receives appropriate supervision. (Regulation 27 (a))	02/12/2013

Recommendations

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

- devise individual behavioural management plans for young people, to support positive behaviour and consistently address unacceptable behaviour (NMS 3.2)
- meet with the local police team to develop missing person's protocols for individual young people who regularly abscond from the home. Such protocols comply with procedures maintained and managed by the police (NMS 5.6)
- ensure that telephone enquiries are made as well as obtaining written references (NMS 16.1)
- devise a written development plan that clearly identifies plans to improve the quality of the service (NMS 15.2)
- develop a good quality learning and development programme for staff. (NMS18.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Outcomes for young people are adequate. Young people are very happy living in the home and feel that their needs are met. Relationships with staff are positive and young people are able to talk openly about concerns. Young people have opportunities to share their views and opinions, particularly during key work sessions and attendance at the weekly residents' meetings.

All young people have educational placements, with some attending regularly and making good educational progress. For others however, this is not the case; school attendance is poor and so opportunities to achieve academically are limited. These particular young people have a history of non-school attendance, prior to their arrival at the home. Some have made minor improvement to their school attendance since their placement at the home.

Young people have opportunities to participate in recreational activities that are of their liking. The home is equipped with Cable television, DVD's, board and computer games for young people's use. Most young people appear to prefer to part take in activities that occur within the home, such as the popular 'movie night'. Most access the community only when they are with their friends. Some young people however do access the wider community for activities such as horse riding.

Young people enjoy appropriate contact with their family in accordance with local authority care plans when it is safe for them to do so. Young people know that family members and friends are welcome to visit them at the home, and many do.

Young people generally live healthy lifestyles. They have good access to primary health care services and generally make use of these services. Young people are encouraged to attend annual Looked After Children's (LAC) medicals which help monitor their general development. They benefit from access to specialist services which include sexual health advice and support, smoking cessation programmes and counselling services. Young people eat healthy, well balanced meals which are to their liking and are culturally appropriate.

Young people's individual identity needs are appropriately met. Issues of gender, sexuality and ethnicity in particular are managed well by the service. For example, some young people regularly attend places of worship and other young people have accessed external support and advice to help them safely explore their sexuality. Young people receive good support in promoting a positive self-image which acts to enhance their self-confidence. Young people have a good understanding of their background and routinely participate in life story work activities.

Young people have opportunities to develop independent living skills. Most participate in the home's life skills programme, which offers practical advice and skills for everyday living. Young people develop skills in cooking, shopping, keeping their private space clean and attending to personal hygiene issues. This helps young people to independently care for themselves in preparation for adulthood.

Quality of care

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

Staff are caring and provide individualised care to young people. The staff group enjoy and share positive and constructive relationships with young people. One young person comments, 'This is more like a real family. Everyone is nice to everyone, there's no disruption in the house. All the staff here are very nice'. A staff

member comments about the home and her job, 'I love seeing young people come here, disruptive and not engaging and us turn things around. I've seen that happen. The dynamics and ethos of the home is a family feel and that makes a difference.'

Young people are cared for in line with their individual placement plans. Staff ensure that comprehensive information is obtained from social workers in order to confirm that the home can meet young people's needs. Placement planning meetings are consistently convened to help establish placement objectives. Involved professionals are satisfied with progress being made by young people. A social worker says of the home, 'I think the service is quite good. Communication is really good and I'm kept well informed. The staff are supportive of young people and they are interested in their welfare - even when the young people have been kicking off.'

Young people are generally well behaved and critical incidents are not a regular occurrence in the home. Care plans are appropriately detailed and highlight individual needs and how the service is to meet these needs. Staff devise individualised risk assessments which alert staff to known and anticipated risk factors. These outline how the home intends to eliminate and/or minimise identified risks. Staff have access to clear behaviour management policies. However, young people's case files do not include individual behavioural management plans to assist staff manage unacceptable behaviour. This is to provide staff a consistent approach to addressing poor behaviour. Staff routinely provide young people with incentives and praise when acceptable behaviour is demonstrated. This approach is largely effective and contributes to young people's sustained positive behaviour.

Staff provide young people opportunities to share their views and wishes. Most young people take good advantage of such opportunities and, for example, regularly attend scheduled key work sessions and weekly residents' meetings. Typically, issues discussed in this forum are meal planning, leisure activity choice and the cleanliness of the home. Young people have some influence on the running of the home. In recent months they have contributed to decision-making about the decoration and furnishing of the home and their bedrooms and the purchase of electronic games and cable TV packages. Not all young people take advantage of the home's consultation efforts. Despite staff efforts, some choose not to engage with the service and so their opportunity to share their feelings and issues are limited.

The service has a clear and comprehensive complaints procedure in place. Young people are aware of the home's complaints procedures as they are routinely reminded of these at the end of each key work session. Young people generally feel their views are taken seriously and staff are interested in what they have to say. Since the last inspection, four complaints have been received; all have been resolved promptly and appropriately.

Staff pay good attention to the identity needs of young people. These are highlighted in individual placement plans and staff routinely explore relevant issues in key work sessions. The service embraces and promotes differences and address young people's needs in relation to sexuality, gender, culture and religion. For example in recent months staff have researched and supported young people's attendance at a

community based gay and lesbian group and linked individual young people with appropriate mentors.

Young people's educational achievement is variable. Prior to living at the home, some young people had not been engaged in any form of education for a significant length of time. Some continue to refuse to engage with professionals and so their educational success is limited. Currently, all young people have been assigned some form of educational provision, including home tuition. Staff support young people's learning by setting and monitoring homework. Young people's educational objectives are well highlighted in care plans and staff regularly address with young people their individual learning needs. Staff work in partnership with educational professionals to try to meet the educational needs of young people.

Staff promote a healthy environment and health outcomes for young people are generally satisfactory. Young people's case files evidence individual health care issues and how these are to be resolved. Staff ensure LAC medicals are scheduled to monitor existing and emerging health care issues. All young people have easy access to primary care services and some make good use of these services. However, not all young people work with staff to ensure their health care needs are met and as a consequence their health care outcomes are not positive.

Staff ensure young people have access to any required specialised service. This includes, for example, mental health services. Many of the current young people living at the home are smokers. Staff encourage them to reduce or stop, and facilitate young people's access to smoking cessation programmes. Similarly, for those young people known to drink alcohol or misuse substances, staff ensure they receive appropriate information and advice about associated health hazards and that they have access to relevant support services. Some young people indicate this support has had a positive influence on them and has resulted in the reduction of alcohol and substance misuse. Staff have completed training in first aid. This is important to ensure appropriate emergency medical treatment is available if required.

Staff promote young people's independence by encouraging their participation with the home's life skills programme. This enhances their daily living skills and experiences in preparation for when they leave care. The home is appropriately located and designed.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people feel safe and are kept safe by the service. Young people share trusting relationships with the staff group and this contributes to their feelings of safety. One young person comments, 'Do I feel safe? Yes. Staff understand, I can go to any of the staff, they are protective.'

Staff receive regular training in child protection from the host local authority and

there are clear policies and procedures in place to support staff's practices. This helps keep young people safe from abuse and harm. The Registered Manager has received training to train others in child protection. Managers ensure that general safeguarding issues are routinely discussed in staff meetings. This promotes staff's awareness of safeguarding protocols and action to be taken in the event of incidents or allegations of a child protection nature. Staff demonstrate a good working knowledge of these procedures. There have been no allegations made against the service since the last inspection.

The home has a high incident of unauthorised absences but this trend is reducing. The nature and reason for these absences are well understood within the network of professionals involved with the young people this relates to. This issue is regularly explored by staff with young people, the placing authority and other involved agencies. However, the home is yet to effectively liaise with the local police to draw up protocols for all young people who regularly abscond from the home. The police are therefore not advised in advance of any specific vulnerabilities of some young people and are unable to take effective action to safeguard them when they are absent from the home without permission.

In recent months staff have taken a more proactive stance in managing young people who are missing. Staff now routinely travel to places known to the young person in an attempt to find them. Young people appreciate this effort. A young person comments 'When I'm away, staff call me every 10 minutes. I always answer, it would be disrespectful not to and I know they worry.'

Young people share trusting relationships with staff and each other and they are generally well behaved. Young people report that bullying does not happen. Staff have access to behaviour management policies which promote praise and reward for positive behaviour as opposed to reprimanding unacceptable behaviour. Where young people exhibit challenging or aggressive behaviour sanctions are appropriately imposed. The last inspection highlighted the need for managers to evaluate the effectiveness of imposed sanctions. Since this time, managers have developed a new recording tool which outlines the impact sanctions have had on the offending behaviour. There have been no incidents of young people being restrained.

The home has clear staff recruitment and selection policies and procedures in place to inform safe recruitment practices. Staff personnel files evidence key documentation such as CRB disclosures, written references and identity checks. However staff files do not consistently evidence telephone enquiries have been made to referees, to ensure that unsuitable personnel are not employed to work at the home.

The home's premises is appropriately secure and staff maintain the building safely. There are no health and safety concerns.

Leadership and management

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

Young people indicate that they feel the management of the home is effective and that the home is well run. A young person asked to rate the quality of the home comments, 'I'd give it nine point five out of ten'. Another young person gave the home an overall rating of eight out of ten. Young people clearly feel very positive about their experiences while at the home. Similarly, social workers responsible for young people in placement share this view.

The requirement for improvement made at the last inspection has been successfully resolved and the home appropriately forwards required notifications. The service is financially viable. The home's Registered Manager holds appropriate formal qualifications and has extensive residential child care and management experience. Senior staff of the service demonstrates a genuine commitment to improving the home's service provision however, how this is to be achieved is very unclear. The home's development plan is very basic and lacks ambitious planning to enhance service improvement. Managers lack insight to what action is required to drive forward the quality of service provision.

This situation is compounded by the lack of effective monitoring systems. Until very recently, the home had failed to secure someone to monitor the conduct of the home in line with Regulation 33 visitor; as a consequence there are gaps in these monitoring visits being completed. The home's own Regulation 34 quality of care report is not comprehensive and so, for example does not assist manager's action plan for undesired trends such as the high frequency of absences.

The home's Statement of Purpose document outlines well the aims and objectives of the service and is compliant with the requirements of the Children's Homes Regulations. The children's guide is a useful, age appropriately written document. It contains a good summary of the services and facilities provided by the home.

The service employs a sufficient number of staff to meet the needs of young people. The home's staff group are appropriately experienced and qualified. The staff team have access to relevant training opportunities, but courses are somewhat basic and do not significantly enhance staff's existing knowledge and skill base. This does not support the home's efforts to improve the quality of care provided or improve outcomes for young people.

Staff feel very well supported by the home's management team. They receive regular and meaningful formal supervision and other forums, such as staff meetings, offer other opportunities for peer support. There are gaps however in the frequency of the Registered Manager's supervision. This has been created by the departure of the home's former consultant. The lack of consistent supervision does not ensure the Registered Manager receives good guidance and support in shaping the development of the service.

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.