

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is owned and operated by a local authority. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for six young people who experience behavioural and emotional 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**.

The management team provides strong and clear leadership. This has been instrumental in raising standards in the home from the judgement of inadequate progress at the last inspection.

The Registered Manager has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the service. He has realistic plans in place to continue the journey of improvement. He is assisted in this by effective quality assurance processes. Changes to practice and processes are not yet sufficiently embedded, however, to fully impact on overall effectiveness, outcomes and safeguarding which are judged as adequate.

Nevertheless, there are a number of positive aspects to the home. Young people are cared for in line with their individual plans and, given their starting points on admission to the home, experience some improved outcomes. They feel that they have positive relationships with most staff and can recognise the progress they have made.

The manager has successfully addressed all the requirements and recommendations from the last inspection. Some further recommendations are raised in order to focus improvement where planning for independence is concerned, strengthen aspects of consultation and better capture the opinions of young people and others. Good practice recommendations are also set to continue to promote educational achievement and address a safety issue within the home.

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 all children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support. This is with specific reference to reflecting their views in placement and leaving care plans (NMS 1.3)
- ensure the wishes, feelings and views of children and those significant to them are taken into account in monitoring staff and in developing the home (NMS 1.7)
- continue to support children to attend school, college or alternative provision (NMS 8.4)
- ensure that avoidable hazards within the home are removed. This is with specific reference to addressing young people's concerns about door locks and use of the master key (NMS 10.3)
- ensure that children are supported to develop the practical skills required for independence. This is with specific reference to points (d) to (g) of this standard. (NMS 12.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **adequate**.

Young people are encouraged to develop a positive self-view. This is achieved through individualised care planning, including focused key working, reinforcement of identity and access to services to help with long-standing emotional and psychological issues.

Young people live in an environment that promotes their physical health. Good individual health outcomes are maintained. Smoking and substance misuse remains problematic for some young people but they are afforded every opportunity to address these addictive behaviours.

Young people's education and learning is promoted and supported. All young people are engaged in some form of education or training and some have recently taken examinations. Young people are inconsistent in their commitment to acquiring further learning and skills however. They continue to need considerable encouragement from staff to maintain attendance and achieve to the best of their capabilities.

Discussions with the independent visitor, young people's meetings and visits from senior management provide young people with opportunities to share their opinions, wishes and concerns. Young people have a lot to say for themselves, but their views are not sufficiently represented in their placement and pathway plans. This may result in some of their needs not being fully addressed.

Young people say they feel quite capable of looking after themselves in many respects. For example, they are all of an age where they make their own decisions about contact arrangements with their families. Young people say they can cook meals for themselves and undertake basic household tasks. However they would appreciate further opportunities to acquire more independence skills, such as managing their own food budgets so they can prepare the meals that they want.

Currently young people have chance to practise such skills just before they leave care. This does not give them enough time to take responsibility for these matters and gain the confidence they need to manage on their own.

Quality of care

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

Young people benefit from effective collaborative links between staff and professionals from other agencies, such as psychological health services, looked after children nurses and education. This allows helpful guidance and support to be provided when young people are most in need. Arrangements for dealing with medication are safe and effective. These measures mean that young people's physical, emotional and psychological health is promoted.

Young people's diverse needs are clearly articulated in placement plans and objectives regularly addressed in key working events. Staff undertake work with young people which helps them to develop positive relationship skills with their peers in the home and while in the community. Behaviour management strategies help young people develop socially acceptable behaviour with some success. As a result incidents of physical restraint have reduced.

Young people report that they have good relationships with the majority of staff who they are able to have conversations with and trust. When they have felt the need they have used the complaints procedure and have received prompt responses from senior management.

The views of young people on the running of the home are taken into account. They have had input, for example, in buying equipment for the home and some aspects of refurbishment and decoration. Young people live in a much improved home which provides a comfortable and homely environment. There is a commitment to maintaining the home at a good level of decoration and to undertaking repairs as quickly as possible. This helps to promote young people's positive sense of well-being.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people state that they generally feel safe at the home. However they say that

the locks on the bathroom and bedroom doors are not always secure. They also report that staff do not always check that they are opening the correct bedroom door with the master key. This compromises their feeling of safety and well-being.

Young people are of an age where they make their own decisions and choices. As a result they sometimes put themselves at risk. Staff make every effort therefore to enable young people to be protected by a range of measures. These include implementing safeguarding procedures and individual work to ensure they are aware of the dangers of substance misuse, exploitation and bullying. A social worker noted that, 'staff have been available to work with me to devise appropriate risk assessments and strategy risk reduction plans aimed at safeguarding the young person.'

Young people develop skills to manage their behaviours which are often very challenging and originate in very complex needs. They are helped by staff to think carefully about the choices they make now which will affect their quality of life in the future. As a result, some risk-taking behaviours such as going missing from the home are declining.

The home has clear practices and agreed arrangements with the local police that support effective action when young people do go missing. This helps to ensure that they are protected as far as possible and responded to positively on their return.

Leadership and management

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

Leadership and management is now strength of the home. The home was judged to be making inadequate progress at the last interim inspection. Since then a new Registered Manager has been appointed. A monitoring visit found that he had successfully addressed the action in the compliance notice to promote children's welfare. This included making proper provision for the care, education and supervision of children accommodated there.

Other requirements raised at the interim inspection related to the Statement of Purpose, education, notifications, quality assurance and the condition of the home. Two recommendations were also set concerning consultation with children and recording their views, particularly about sanctions. The Registered Manager has implemented a number of improvements, resulting in all of the remaining requirements and recommendations being met. This demonstrates capacity for improvement.

Young people are looked after by staff who are appropriately supervised. Poor performance is addressed and staff are supported by regular training updates. Social workers report favourably on the 'good quality contact and communication with the staff team'. Colleagues, such as looked after nurses, also report positively on the home's management of the health needs of young people. Inter-agency working is therefore effective.

The manager is supported by strong senior management leadership and a clear structured action plan. This and the manager's approach are aimed, among other things, at changing the culture and practice at the home. This is being successfully implemented. In addition there is highly effective monitoring by the independent visitor who frequently consults with young people and their parents.

This provides the manager with a clear indication of the home's strengths and areas for development which are promptly responded to. Compliments, feedback and suggestions from young people and others do not always find their way into internal quality assurance processes however which means some issues may be overlooked.

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.