

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Michael McCleave
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Service information

Brief description of the service

This children's home is operated by a local authority. It provides care and accommodation for five young people of with emotional and 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 **good**.

This is a well managed children's home that provides the young people with a safe caring environment. The staff have a positive commitment to their work and there is a clear vision for improving outcomes for the young people. The culture prevailing at the home is one of listening to young people and to strongly encourage their participation in the day-to-day life of the home.

The relationships between the young people and staff are good. Young people speak positively about their life at the home and they feel that this is a safe place to live.

Care planning is sound and each young person has an individual case record that charts their progress. However, some risk assessments do not always indicate when these have been reviewed.

A strong feature at the home is the positive commitment of the staff team to develop their skills and competences. Training and the development of staff is given a high priority and this ensures they are kept up-to-date with professional practice. The low staff turnover is a reflection of the stability of the staff team and this provides the children with a consistent level of care.

The educational progress of all the children is good with full attendance at school having been achieved. This compares very well compared to their low starting points before they moved to this home. A positive partnership has been established between the home and the schools attended by the young people.

The management of the home's operations are good and there is a clear awareness of the strengths and areas requiring improvement .

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 children who are absent from the home without consent but whose whereabouts are known or thought to be known by staff are protected in line with the home's written procedures (NMS 5.4)
- ensure risk assessments of the whole children's home environment are carried out, to identify any potential sources of harm to the children are recorded in writing and regularly reviewed. NMS 10.8)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people learn how to improve confidence in themselves. Some young people previously self-harmed and could not sustain relationships with their peers or adults. Through the support and care from the staff these young people now demonstrate an improved self-awareness and have formed excellent trusting relationships with the staff and other young people. For example, one young person said, 'I was a wreck before I moved here and they gave me the care and love needed, they gave me self-respect and helped me to care about myself.' Another said, 'I have become a better person.'

The staff encourage the young people to lead a healthy lifestyle. All the young people currently living at the children's home enjoy good health. This has improved over time and none of the young people smoke or take illegal substances. The staff work actively to help young people to understand the importance of taking responsibility for their health. The staff describe how some young people who previously failed to take good care of their personal health have made significant improvements following support and encouragement.

Young people achieve educationally and all are currently attending a full time educational provision. This is much improved from their starting points before their admission to the children's home. They benefit from a stable home environment that actively supports and encourages them to appreciate the value of a good education. The staff have established strong links with the schools and this enables them to respond effectively and swiftly any issues raised by teachers before these develop into more serious situations. This proactive approach promotes the education of the young people and ensures stability in terms of continuing school attendance.

Most young people have made a marked improvement in anti-social behaviour. Some of the young people still demonstrate poor judgements in making racist comments against staff from minority cultures. These incidents are actively challenged using the restorative approach and the outcome is a much reduced incidence of these inappropriate comments. As one member of staff pointed out, 'our aim is to produce good members of society when they leave us.'

Young people make good progress in their journey towards independent living through the support and encouragement of the staff. One young person who has recently moved into semi-independent living accommodation said, 'I was terrible to the staff but they never gave up on me, I will always be grateful for their faith in me.'

Quality of care

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

Young people are provided with a stable and homely environment where they have been able to develop social skills and learn how to live in a communal setting. This promotes a greater understanding of how to behave and teaches young people how to form good relationships with their peers. There is an emphasis on respect and an appreciation of individual differences.

Young people are encouraged by the staff to take an active role in the day-to-day life at the home. This is demonstrated through choices of meals, trips out to places of interest, decoration in the home and participating in important decisions about the appointment of new staff. All the young people have a placement plan and they are encouraged to be involved in all discussions about their care. This approach promotes responsibility and provides the young people with the skills to make decisions that affect their lives at the home. Young people comment favourably about their situation. They said, 'I enjoy being here there is a lot to do' and 'I have visited new places I haven't been to before such as the airport and visits to the countryside.'

Staff are very proactive at being advocates for the young people when required. For example, in negotiating with teachers when a young person is at risk of losing their place at a school as a result of inappropriate behaviour. Where any weakness is identified staff will seek extra help in order to ensure young people are not disadvantaged educationally. This supports them in overcoming any barriers that prevent them from achieving their educational potential.

A strong feature is the way equality and diversity is promoted at this children's home. Young people are challenged when racist comments are made. They are actively encouraged to respect differences and to learn tolerance. For example, staff take the young people to the annual Caribbean carnival in the city, themed meals are regularly held and the young people are encouraged to research the culture of the country where a particular meal originates. These measures help promote a better understanding of different cultures. A further example of equality and diversity is the

encouragement of the young people to take a full and active part in all care planning activities. Some young people have written their own care plan.

The home is located in a residential area with good proximity to public transport. This enables the young people to travel into the city centre where they can access all amenities. The home is pleasantly decorated and comfortably furnished throughout. The young people have use of a computer with internet access that has appropriate safety measures installed to prevent access to inappropriate websites.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

This home maintains a safe living environment for the young people. Care plans clearly identify the risk factors that could affect the safety of each young person. There are good systems in place to ensure the safety of the young people. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding, and they are fully aware of the procedures to follow. There are robust procedures and risk assessments in place to guide staff on the actions to follow. Young people going missing is much reduced. This is as a result of the positive culture at the home, with an emphasis on respect, and the establishment of good relationships between staff and young people. Some young people are absent without consent but their whereabouts are known to their social worker and staff. The situation is monitored by the manager and regular discussion takes place between the young person and staff at the home.

Although staff are trained in physical restraint, this is rarely used. They base their approach to behaviour management on de-escalation of confrontational situations through calm dialogue with the young people. Staff are very clear that restraint is a last resort in order to prevent harm to the young people.

Young people's safety is enhanced by the robust recruitment and selection procedures in place. Staff are appointed following a rigorous procedure that is intended to prevent unsuitable adults from being appointed. Staff demonstrate a sound understanding of their child protection responsibilities and all have been appropriately trained in safeguarding.

The building is a safe environment that has the appropriate safety measures in place. All electrical, gas and domestic appliances have been checked by contractors. Fire safety checks and full evacuation procedures are completed as required. Some safety records have not been regularly reviewed by the management. This means that these records may be out of date and compromise safety.

The young people feel safe at this home. One young person said, 'I feel very safe living here.'

Leadership and management

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

The home is appropriately managed and there is a commitment to improvement. At the last inspection one recommendation was made to improve the school attendance of the young people. The home has successfully achieved this and currently all young

people are attending school or are in higher education. This demonstrates a capacity to change.

The Statement of Purpose describes the services available and staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities.

The day-to-day operation of the service is monitored by the manager supported by two seniors. This management team provide an oversight of the service. There is a positive culture that values staff comments on the way the service is managed. Staff said 'the manager leads from the front and listens to us if we have any concerns or improvements that are needed.' This demonstrates a learning service.

In order to ensure consistency and high standards staff receive appropriate supervision and appraisal. The manager is clear about the strengths and areas for development at the home. The day-to-day operations and professional practice are regularly monitored for quality by the management team. These measures ensure that high standards are maintained.

A feature of the home is the positive commitment of the staff team to develop their skills and competences. Training and the development of staff is given a high priority and this ensures they are kept up-to-date with professional practice information.

Staff development is complemented through formal monthly supervision by a manager. The development of staff is regularly monitored by the manager and any shortfalls in standards of practice are addressed through supervision meetings. This is further enhanced by regular external monitoring in line with the regulations.

Records are kept in secure conditions ensuring that only those authorised have access to these, and to children's' case files. Some records do not indicate clearly if these have been reviewed. This could mean that information is not up-to-date. The approach to confidentiality is sound, and the staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities to maintain accurate records of their work with the young people.

These records are an important contribution to an understanding of the young persons' life. The young people's case records are well maintained containing detailed information showing progress made against the care plans. The home encourages young people to read their case records and to add their own comments on how they are being cared for. This is a good demonstration of equality and diversity.

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.