

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Russell Shackford
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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 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* (March 2011) and the evaluation schedule for children's homes.

The inspection judgements and what they mean

Outstanding: a service that significantly exceeds minimum requirements

Good: a service that exceeds minimum requirements

Satisfactory: a service that only meets minimum requirements

Inadequate: a service that does not meet minimum requirements

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 either sex between the ages of 15 and 17 years with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The home provides medium to long-term care for young people getting ready for independence.

Overall effectiveness

The overall effectiveness is judged to be **good**.

Young people living in this home benefit greatly from an experienced staff group who enthusiastically demonstrate their commitment to addressing their welfare issues. The staff team are persevering and supportive, creating opportunities for young people to reach their full potential. Young people confirm that their views are genuinely sought and acted upon. The staff encourage them to make decisions about their lives and influence the way that the home is run.

Staff are particularly good at making sure that young people are looked after in a way that is specific to how they are and want to be. The young people benefit greatly from the staff's efforts to promote the value of good health, personal safety, education, and employment. The staff work closely with other services to meet the range of young people's needs. Placement planning is good and it is satisfactorily recorded. The facilitating of contact is good. Good support is in place now to help young people learn skills that they will need for later in life.

Good risk assessing and satisfactory fire safety practices help to keep young people safe. Staff are experienced, well trained and competent. Young people clearly benefit from the good leadership provided by the manager to a cohesive and adaptable team. There is good monitoring to maintain and improve the quality of care in the home.

There are some recommendations for improvement. These are about the quality of the records about children and training updates for staff.

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 the requirements of the placement plan are implemented in the day-to-day care of the child. For example, that action taken by the staff is clear

in daily records and one-to-one records (NMS 25.2)

- ensure staff receive high quality training. In particular, up-to-date fire prevention (NMS 18)
- ensure that information about the child is recorded clearly and in a way which will be helpful to the child when they access their files, and also to staff. (NMS 22)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for children and young people are **good**.

The staff support young people well, using talking and stimulating interactive activities to build relationships with the young people. One staff said that they are, 'proactive, seeking to establish some structure and the foundations for providing information and support'. Another staff member described the, 'nurturing effect' of the staff engaging in lots of interaction with young people, talking and supporting tasks. As a result, young people gain good knowledge and understanding of their own background; they adapt well to new situations and their view of themselves is positive. Young people's progress at the home is good because great value is placed upon them fulfilling their potential.

Young people enjoy good health because their health needs are effectively identified and services are provided to meet them. They are encouraged and supported to attend routine appointments with dentists, doctors and opticians. Some young people are supported to take some responsibility for managing their own health needs such as safely storing and taking their prescribed medication. The young people's health is closely monitored and record keeping is good, enabling staff to change their ways of working or inform medical professionals of health progress. Specialist health workers are involved where appropriate to promote good health and discourage unhealthy behaviours such as smoking and drug use. Healthy activities take place including gym, street dance and leisure centre activities. Staff encourage young people to eat healthy foods and snacks and a visiting dietician helps to ensure that the food eaten is both healthy and nutritious. Matters arising from diversity are managed well. One young person reinforced this, stating, 'the staff talk all the time about healthy eating'. Young people confirm that they are involved in planning, shopping for and cooking meals.

Young people are making good progress in attendance and achievement in their further education or employment. The staff have worked in a determined manner to ensure that appropriate placements are sourced quickly and as a result, young people's progress is disrupted as little as possible. This helps to ensure that they can continue to attend and achieve. Contact between the home and college or placements is frequent and effective, enabling staff to support young people successfully. This includes the use of homework sheets, teaching road safety, reading support and a crafts coordinator. Young people say, 'we are proud when staff make a fuss and celebrate our achievements'. Staff say that the young people's attitude to education and work has changed as a result of their good experiences of

learning, achieving and socialising.

Young people confirm that they are helped to keep in touch with people that are important to them, and that they enjoy having friends and family come to visit them. This is supported by staff who encourage contact and facilitate visits very well. This is done safely and sensitively to protect young people's welfare. Staff encourage regular phone contact to ensure that young people can convey positive messages about their progress and achievements in education or employment.

Pathway plans are in place for all of the young people. They learn life skills by taking part in individually tailored activities such as: social skills role play, curriculum vitae writing, home safety, DIY, food safety, laundry, cooking skills; budgeting; road safety; clothing care and shopping. These activities are supported by staff at the home and other agencies such as arson reduction officers or the Connexions team at or away from the home. One young person said, 'we get lots of information and support to be able to live more independently'. Therefore young people receive care which prepares them well for adulthood.

Quality of care

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

Young people living in this home benefit greatly from an experienced staff group who enthusiastically demonstrate their commitment to addressing young people's care and safety needs. Young people confirm this saying that, 'staff are always there to talk to and they support you in the things you need to do to become independent.' The staff team are persevering and supportive, innovatively creating opportunities for young people to reach their full potential. Staff say that they are, 'proud of their young people and their achievements'. Young people enjoy warm relationships with staff in the home and there is good rapport between them. Staff discuss difficult issues with young people and challenge inappropriate behaviours consistently and sensitively. One member of staff reinforced this, stating, 'I can't think of one young person who has not been able to talk to the staff'. One young person described relationships with the staff as, 'good and supportive', while another described them as very good.

Young people confirm that their views are genuinely sought and acted upon. The staff are innovative in the way that they help young people to make decisions about their lives and influence the way that the home is run. Staff provide opportunities for daily group and one-to-one discussion, key worker sessions and visits from independent advocacy services. There are also regular young people's meetings. Quality assurance monitoring by the manager includes opportunities for past and present young people to comment upon the quality of care at the home. Examples of young people's choices acted upon include: activities, personalising bedrooms and future placement planning. Any cases where it is not possible to act upon young people's wishes are carefully explained to them. Young people confirm this saying that, 'staff are honest and fair', highlighting examples such as smoking in the home and staying out overnight.

The staff handle complaints well. They ensure that the young people know how to complain if they wish by explaining what to do. There is also good, clear information in the children's guide about how to complain. The staff assist young people in making complaints if necessary and they understand their role as advocate. Young people confirm that staff make it clear to them that they can tell people outside of the home if they are unhappy and provide information and contact details of independent advocate services. A grumbles book is used for young people to highlight day-to-day niggles. All complaints are clearly recorded to reflect the action taken by the staff and the outcomes.

Admissions to the home are always planned and the young person and their family, where appropriate, are involved in that planning. They can visit the home before they move in to meet people and get information about the home. Young people have their needs assessed well and good quality written placement plans outline how these needs will be met. Their placement plans are very well recorded with good detail to inform the staff what they need to do to meet the identified needs of individuals. Staff find out about young people's differences, routines, strengths and areas for development and use different agencies and resources to help them to meet the young people's needs. Effective incentive schemes are used where appropriate. Focused one-to-one work also provides young people with guidance, advice and support. However, the daily records and one-to-one records do not always reflect the content of the care plan and show the full extent of the action taken by the staff to meet the identified needs of the young person.

Young people's needs and development are reviewed regularly in the light of their care and progress at the home. Following reviews, placement plans are updated in a timely fashion. The reviewing system includes participation in the statutory reviews, internal reviews of the placement plan and discussions with the young person in key worker sessions. Key workers monitor the placement plans and produce monthly summary reports. Statutory case reviews take place within the required timescales to inform those working at the home and others of progress made by young people.

The staff appreciate that the individual young people may have needs arising from diversity. The young people receive very good individualised care. The staff commission individual support services involved in the health, care and education of the young people. The home has links with a wide range of helping agencies, and very good practice has helped to quickly provide services to fit each individual young person. Young people confirm that staff provide care and support to them in a way that is particular to them. Staff are aided in providing good quality health care by external professionals in physical and emotional health. They provide advice directly to young people and indirectly by advice supplied to the staff team, to aid positive outcomes for the young people. Examples include support for emotional health and discussion with the specialist nurse for looked after children. Good policies and practice around the storage, handling, administration and disposal of medication safeguards young people's welfare.

Young people's education and employment is a very high priority and it is vigorously

promoted. Staff see it as valuable in itself and as part of the young people's preparation for adulthood. The staff work closely with education and Connexions staff to secure good quality education or work placements. Staff make a lot of effort to encourage good attendance and young people are well prepared for the day. A notable area of strength is the staff's close communication and support of other professionals working in education or work placements to sustain and increase the young people's time in the provision. They achieve this through establishing close working relationships and communicating regularly about progress and individual targets. Staff provide transport and class support if needed. Achievements are communicated to parents to ensure that young people's positive behaviour is highlighted to them. Staff promote the additional benefits of being in education or work, such as socialising. There are space, resources and facilities at the home to enable the completion of homework or structured home-study programmes. A computer is available for the young people to use for educational purposes and well-monitored internet access is available.

Young people are able to pursue their particular interests and are enthusiastically supported and encouraged by staff to engage in leisure activities. Staff attempt to enable young people to socialise and to build their esteem and confidence by supporting their individual choices. The staff have established very good links and relationships with community based activity providers. Examples of organised activities include: arts and crafts; cultural cooking; henna decorating; pumpkin carving; gym and street dance. There is also a good range of books, DVDs and games available for education and entertainment.

The young people live in a home that is very well located near to shops, leisure, education and employment opportunities. It is on the main bus route to the nearby town centre. The interior and exterior of the home are in a good state of structural and decorative repair. There is a satisfactory maintenance and repair programme for the building, furniture and equipment, and any damage is repaired promptly. The garden is well maintained and safe. The home is clean and there are homely touches throughout.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people confirm that they learn how to keep themselves safe and learn about risks. Where particular risks are identified, consistently well-written risk assessments help the staff understand how to minimise the identified risks. In addition, the manager has established good links with the local safeguarding service from whom she can seek advice if necessary. The manager considers what local resources may further support young people: for example, arson reduction officers and community police officers.

A notable area of strength is the staff's ability to talk through young people's concerns to develop their own understanding. As a result, young people's risk-taking behaviours reduce and they feel cared for and protected. Young people confirm this

with examples such as, 'staff talk to me about keeping safe and we agree about having phones switched on, saying where I am and coming in times'. The manager has established strong links with the local safeguarding children team. An information display area has details of local agencies that young people can access for advice and information. Staff use team meetings and regular internal placement plan reviews to ensure that everyone is up-to-date about how to promote and protect the young people's safety.

The provider has very good safeguarding systems and procedures in the event of any allegation or suspicion of abuse. The manager and staff have received child protection training which includes elements of child exploitation and on-line protection. Staff demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the safeguarding procedures to promote and protect young people's safety. Anti-bullying messages are displayed and the subject is regularly discussed at young people's meetings. One young person said that staff are, 'very good at making sure new admissions know that there is no bullying accepted here'. There is good written guidance for staff to follow in the event of unauthorised absence and this is supported by individualised risk assessment records. The manager secures good multi-agency working, for example, liaising with the local child exploitation officer to ensure a holistic approach to safeguarding. This ensures all agencies are vigilant and work to current plans to offer protection for young people.

Individualised behaviour management plans advise staff about approaches to managing young people's behaviour. Any sanctions are relevant and reflect the age and understanding of the young people. They are reviewed regularly for effectiveness. Physical restraint is very rarely used to manage behaviour. Staff are trained in the provider's policy and authorised techniques. Record keeping is good and there is evidence that it is monitored well to identify patterns or trends that can be used to support young people further.

All staff working at the home have fire safety training to enable them to minimise the risks to young people in the event of a fire at the home. However, the policy about staff refresher training is not clear and the system for ensuring that staff receive it at suitable intervals is not sufficiently robust to ensure that all staff have up-to-date training. Regular fire safety checks are carried out to help ensure that young people's physical safety from fire in the home is well protected. Good checks and maintenance arrangements ensure the home is physically safe. All staff have been appropriately recruited and undergone suitable Criminal Records Bureau checks to ensure that they are suitable to work with young people.

Leadership and management

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

A Statement of Purpose is available to inform professionals and members of the public about how care is provided at the home. There is a good children's guide to the statement which is appropriate to the age and understanding of the children accommodated. Young people receive a copy of it before they come to live at the

home so that they know what to expect if they go to live there.

There is a consistent staff team which has been added to recently to broaden the range of skills and experience among its members. New members of staff receive very good quality induction training before commencing work with the young people. Staff refer to written guidance frequently during discussion and give examples of how it is implemented in practice. Staff describe the value of regular team meetings and internal managers meetings saying, 'we are organic and progressive, we like to keep things fresh and we communicate well'. Management support and supervision are described as, 'really good' by staff who clearly value the beneficial contributions of the manager. The young people are receiving care from competent staff who are experienced and appropriately trained in a wide variety of safety and childcare subjects. An ongoing programme of regular refresher training covers a range of subjects to enhance the staff team's competency to meet the needs of the young people.

The manager has an effective system to monitor, report and evaluate the administration systems of the home and any areas of weakness identified are promptly acted upon. This is supported by regular unannounced visits from the provider to monitor and improve the quality of care at the home. Young people's case file records, and other written documentation, are of a good standard. This facilitates good communication with other professionals as well as ensuring young people have a permanent and secure record of their history. Good cross referencing of all documentation enables the management team and staff to evaluate and monitor young people's progress. However, young people's individual case files and planning documents are not arranged in a manner that makes them easily useable by newer staff or easily accessible to young people.

Staff are particularly good at making sure that young people are looked after in a way that is particular to how they are and want to be. This is particularly evident around life skills activities, health and education. All staff have received equality and diversity training and they demonstrate a good understanding of the subject and how they promote it in practice. Young people's cultural and religious needs are taken into account during the care planning and review process. Staff have a good understanding of individual young people's needs and ensure that these are met on a practical level. Staff also demonstrate good practice around equality and diversity through their attitude towards it and by giving examples of this in practice, such as the value of education and physical and emotional health. Young people have access to a team that is balanced in terms of race, age, background and gender, and have access to a variety of services in the local and wider community.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.