

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 home. It provides young people with a supportive and caring environment where they can develop social and practical skills as they move on the journey towards independence. The staff are appropriately trained to carry out their duties, and they demonstrate a strong professional commitment towards their role and responsibilities.

Young people feel safe living at this home. Some young people are, however, placing themselves at risk of harm due to their regular absences. The protocol with the police is not fully effective in all instances when young people are missing. This is being appropriately addressed by the manager.

There is a warm friendly atmosphere within the home. Young people are encouraged to express their views on any aspects of life in the home and they are confident that staff listen to them. The emphasis on outcomes for young people is clearly evident, and the detailed information about each young person is appropriately set out in case files. Some young people however, refuse to engage fully with the staff and their progress is therefore limited. This is due, in large part, to the negative influence of family members who actively undermine the work of the staff team.

Equality and diversity is a positive feature at this setting. Staff ensure that the views of young people help shape life within the home. There is a culture of respect for differences in people and this is celebrated positively through staff engaging with the young people to improve their understanding of diversity.

The staff work proactively and support young people to achieve their potential both

socially and educationally. There is a positive emphasis on supporting young people in preparation for the time when they move towards independence and take full responsibility for themselves.

The management and staff at this home work effectively together, with the aim of supporting the young people to achieve their aspirations. There is an enthusiasm among the staff to aim high for all young people. This is a sound management team who have the skills and capacity to bring about change in the effectiveness of the home and in the lives of young people.

Areas for improvement

Recommendations

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

- ensure where a child is absent from the home and their whereabouts is not known, the home's procedures are compatible with and have regard to Runaway and Missing from Home and Care (RMFHC) protocols and procedures maintained and managed by the police. (NMS 5.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Staff place a strong emphasis and positive focus on helping young people achieve good outcomes during their time at the home. They demonstrate a strong commitment to supporting and encouraging success in whatever form this may take. Staff take their responsibilities seriously. They also have a realistic approach to their relationships with the young people which are based on trust and respect. They are able to deal with their emotional and personal issues with support from the staff and this enables the young people become more confident as they prepare for life beyond the children's home. Staff attach importance to young people being happy and settled at the home in order to gain confidence in their abilities. Young people learn how to carry out day-to-day tasks such as going shopping, crossing the main road, going to the local library. For some young people this is a significant achievement.

Staff ensure that young people have access to appropriate services to help them with personal, emotional and other health related matters. These are key considerations for most young people when they initially move into the home. Their health care needs are appropriately met and the looked after nurse (LAC nurse), is available to offer advice and guidance on any health related matters. Where appropriate, young people take responsibility for their own medications. Staff ensure that any health resources are readily accessed. For example, mental health, sexual health, drugs advice and giving up smoking

Young people who attend school are making significant progress. This is an impressive achievement when compared to their previous experience. One young person has clearly gained in self confidence, from a low attendance starting point, and proudly stated, 'I now like going to school and it's fun.'

Staff encourage the young people to take an interest in the life of the home. The young people's meetings provide a forum where they can make a contribution to decisions affecting the home. For example, planning trips out to places of interest, deciding the menu for types of meals and holiday activities. The manager is currently planning to involve the young people in the selection of candidates for work at the home. This promotes their sense of ownership in decision making and improves their self confidence. It is additionally a demonstration of a commitment to equality and diversity.

The young people are able to maintain contact with their families as part of their care plan. This is strongly supported by staff who often take an active role in these events. For some young people however, due to the often negative attitude of their family, contact is difficult to manage. These situations are addressed appropriately by staff and social workers.

In preparation for independence young people are given an extensive leaving care pack of important information that will be very useful to them when they leave the home. This pack has been thoughtfully put together and is a good example of the positive way staff are continually improving resources for the young people.

Quality of care

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

The staff team are dedicated to ensuring that the young people are cared for in a safe and nurturing environment. There is a commitment to making the home a friendly place to live. Relationships between the young people and staff are good. There is a positive, friendly atmosphere at this home. It is clearly evident that young people are comfortable when staff are around. The young people generally behave appropriately. Where tensions arise, staff manage these situations well. Restraint is rarely used at this home. This reflects positively on the staff who are skilled in de-escalation methods with an emphasis on attempting to reduce tensions.

The young people are cared for in line with their care plans. These are updated by staff as each individual young person's situation changes. The monthly reports indicate the progress made by young people against the plans. The quality of reports is generally good and they give an informative account of the work undertaken with each young person. Some reports are however, more descriptive than evaluative.

The input of quality time to each young person is a positive feature of this setting. There is a focus on providing high standards of care and support. Staff encourage young people to be involved in the preparation of any reports concerning them and they are always asked to make a contribution to their reviews. However, not all

young people avail themselves of this opportunity. This limits their influence on the decisions made about them.

Staff demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring that young people are supported to do well educationally. They provide positive support and help young people to appreciate the value of having an education in preparation for the world of work or further education. Staff have developed good working contacts with the schools. This partnership approach helps promote trust among the professionals concerned. This is particularly the case when having to deal with issues that arise in the school setting but also enables staff to challenge any misunderstandings and to share information about young people in the spirit of co-operation. This approach means that young people benefit from the support that is available from their school. The manager expressed the view that, 'staff will always go the extra mile for the young people.'

The promotion of respect for each other and towards others is a core ethos at this home. The staff take a positive approach to diversity. The culturally mixed staff team, is an good example of this. Young people are actively supported to practice their religious or cultural needs. Staff have been trained in equality and diversity and they challenge any disrespectful comments or offensive actions from young people. Staff spend quality time with young people discussing topics relating to culture, religion, respect for differences and tolerance. A significant feature is the way staff from minority communities use cultural events to teach the young people about aspects of life in those countries. This promotes the understanding of, and a greater awareness, among young people about differences in a multicultural community.

Young people enjoy high standards of care and this is appropriately summarised by a young person who said, 'all the staff are nice and take good care of me, I enjoy living at this home and I love having my own bedroom.' An ex-resident said, 'coming to this home changed my attitude to my life, I cannot thank the staff here enough for giving me a chance.'

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people have confidence in the staff to keep them safe and protected from harm. They are aware of how to invoke the complaints procedure and are satisfied that any complaint will be investigated appropriately. This is a reflection of the trust that young people have in the staff. One young person said, 'all staff here are ok I have no worries about anyone.'

Staff are trained in safeguarding as part of a mandatory programme that aims to ensure that they are competent to deal with any safeguarding concerns. Staff are aware of the vulnerability of each young person and the risks to their welfare and safety. Appropriate strategies are identified in each risk assessment to manage and minimise the risk situation. The majority of young people show a reduction in risk taking activities since coming to the home. There are systems in place to ensure that the appropriate services are notified about any safeguarding concern including young

people who go missing.

The use of physical restraint to manage tensions or difficult situations is not a feature at the home. Indeed, staff prefer non-confrontational approaches based on dialogue when such situations occur. This is a positive reflection on the professional approach taken by staff to their work with the young people.

Staff are aware that bullying can occur. However, this is currently not an issue at the home. Staff maintain a close observation on interactions among the young people in order to manage any concerns in a speedy and appropriate manner.

The recruitment and selection of staff is subject to the robust procedures in place and it is clear that no appointments are confirmed until all appropriate checks are completed. Through this process, the manager takes all the required actions to prevent unsuitable adults from working with the young people. There is an awareness of the vulnerabilities of the young people to sexual exploitation by adults. Training is currently being organised to equip staff with the skills and knowledge to recognise and manage these situations.

The safety of the young people is enhanced with secure locking mechanisms on all windows and doors preventing entry by unauthorised individuals from the community. All visitors are required to be seen by a member of staff before entering the home.

Leadership and management

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

The home is very well managed and staff are provided with effective leadership and support. Formal supervision ensures that staff performance is regularly monitored and where required, appropriate action is taken to address any shortfalls. A small minority of staff do not however, feel that their personal professional development is being enhanced through supervision. However, training to equip staff with the core competencies to work with young people is well established.

The management and staff team are united in aiming high for the young people. They work together in an open and trusting way for the benefit of the young people. There is a commitment among the management team for all staff to enhance their professional skills through the training programme available across the organisation. This is a positive approach and promotes the safety and wellbeing of the young people with staff who are trained and competent to work in this complex environment. This is clearly evident in positive the way staff approach their work.

The manager regularly monitors the progress staff are making with the young people to ensure that the targets set are being met and outcomes achieved. For most of the young people currently at the home there is evidence of improvement, based on their starting points when initially admitted to the home. Where the efforts of staff are not indicating any realistic outcomes the manager will follow this is up with the

appropriate social worker and reviewing officer. This is good practice and ensures that drift is not permitted to occur where the home is not having a positive impact on the young person concerned.

The staff work hard to maintain friendly relationships with the local neighbourhood. A testimony to this is reflected in the decision of an ex-resident live to live nearby, in order to keep contact with staff who provided such a positive experience when as a troubled young person they lived at the home. This person has successfully integrated into the community.

The records are well maintained and these contribute to an understanding of a young person's experience of living at the home. The administrative system in operation is sound and enables easy access to records. The one recommendation made at the last inspection, concerning the quality of the information recorded, has been addressed by the manager. This demonstrates a capacity to improve systems in operation at the home.

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.