

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Nicholas Murphy
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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

The home provides care and accommodation for up to 5 young people of either gender who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. It is provided by a local authority.

Overall effectiveness

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

The home provides a good level of care to young people, which is individualised and based upon each young person's particular needs. Staff are attentive to young people's wishes and the home is organised around the needs of the young people and not for the convenience of staff.

Young people like living in the home very much. One young person simply said 'it's canny mint here'. The warmth and quality of the relationships between staff and young people is readily apparent. There is a deep, mutual respect between staff and young people which helps to ensure that, by and large, the home is settled and calm.

Young people are kept safe by good staff practice and the systems which are in place for working with other agencies. As a result, young people all say that they feel safe and well looked after.

All of the young people have made significant progress since coming to live at the home. They have developed maturity and insight into their difficulties whilst helping them to preserve their links with their backgrounds. One young person summed up the journey she had made by saying 'the staff have made me who I am now'.

The décor of the home is below standard. There are also some shortfalls in recording and monitoring practice which the Registered Manager needs to rectify to further improve practice in this home.

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
17B (2001)	ensure that within 24 hours of the use of any measure of control, discipline or restraint in a children's home, a written	12/11/2011

	record is made in a volume kept for the purpose which shall include the effectiveness and any consequences of the use of the measure (Regulation 17B(3)(f))	
33 (2001)	ensure that, as appears necessary, the person conducting the visits under this regulation, interviews with their consent and in private, the children's parents and relatives in order to form an opinion of the standard of care provided in the home. (Regulation 33(4)(a))	02/12/2011

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the home only carries out searches of a child's room in accordance with the home's guidance, specifically that the record shows that the child is informed of the search taking place (NMS 3.20)
- ensure that the home provides a comfortable and homely environment and is well maintained and decorated (NMS 10.3)
- ensure that the monitoring of the matters set out in Regulation 34 Schedule 6 is made available to staff working in the home (Volume 5, statutory guidance, paragraph 3.14)
- ensure that each child's placement plan is monitored by a key worker within the home who ensures that the requirements of the plan are implemented in the day-to-day care of that child. (NMS 25.2)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Young people have very good school attendance and are generally doing well. Some young people who have left school are attending college and progressing very well, making full use of the opportunities for different experiences, both academic and social. Other young people have chosen to seek employment, and although not always successful have made encouraging progress. For example, one young person reached a final shortlist of five from 180 applicants, and was unlucky not to be appointed.

Young people enjoy good health. They are knowledgeable about their own health needs and where to go for information. They are confident in attending health appointments on their own, although they know that staff are always willing to support them if necessary. The young people eat healthily and are able to choose the foods they want.

Young people have access to a wide range of activities. These include physical pursuits such as camping, horse-riding, football and basketball, as well as recreational activities like going to the cinema. Some of the young people were looking forward to a trip to a theme park which was planned later in the week.

The young people get on well as a group and live together as a community. As one young person said, 'it's the best home in the world, it's like one big family here'. All of the young people have insight into their behaviour and how it has improved for all of them since coming to live at the home. One young person said 'I've enjoyed it all the time I've been here. It's helped me a lot because I was in a lot of trouble in my previous placement and since being here I've settled down and become calmer'.

Staff encourage and promote contact between young people, their families and those important to them. When contact for some young people may be emotionally difficult, staff support and comfort the young person and help them to make sense of what is happening. This ensures that the young person's sense of identity is maintained without causing them unnecessary distress. The young people have also made friends with other young people of similar age in the local community, which helps to lessen the possible isolation that living in a children's home can create.

Some of the young people will be moving out of the home shortly as part of their transition to adult life. Whilst some young people see this as a positive move, others are fearful of the change. However, staff work well with young people, their parents, and placing social workers to ensure that the move to independence is managed sensitively and supportively.

Quality of care

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

Staff place the needs and wishes of the young people at the heart of what they do. Placement plans are clearly individualised and based on each young person's particular assessed needs. However, the organisation of planning information in the young people's case files is rather confusing and complicated. This means that it is not always easy to be sure that the young people's needs are being effectively met.

There are regular discussion sessions between each young person and their key worker which focus on the plan and how things are going. Suggestions by young people to change aspects of their plan are listened to and acted upon where possible. There are also regular young people's meetings, where suggestions which the young people make are followed up by staff. For example, some young people's bedtimes have been altered as a result of requests made in a recent meeting. This means that young people have a real sense that what they say matters, which increases their self-esteem and confidence.

Relationships between the staff and young people are excellent, with the result that the atmosphere within the home is warm, welcoming and positive. It is very evident that the young people feel happy and secure within the home, and trust the staff to

do the best for them. For example, they know that staff will advocate for them if there is some issue with their school, college or employment. If a young person feels that something is not right, whether within the home or in some other aspect of their care, they all know how to make a complaint.

Staff work well with parents, social workers, and other professionals. One social worker said 'the manager has a good team up there. They all work together in the interests of the young people'. This helps to ensure that plans for young people can be progressed quickly and effectively and that their needs can be attended to. The home also has good links with the local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service. The service not only works with individual young people but also provides general advice to the staff, such as different ways of managing behaviour. This means that young people's emotional and psychological health needs can be met more effectively.

Processes to manage young people coming into and leaving the home are well managed. Even though the prospect of transition out of the home into independent living creates anxiety for some young people, staff are highly supportive in this situation. This ensures that, when the time does come for the young person to leave, the preparation for the event is as good as it can possibly be.

Staff provide young people with a wholesome, varied diet and promote healthy lifestyles. Staff are trained in the dispensing of medication and the records relating to this are very well maintained. This means that young people receive the medication they need at the right times and are kept safe.

Although the home is generally comfortable and homely, the bathrooms look gloomy and some decoration is worn and shabby. This detracts from the overall welcoming feel of the home and lessens the sense of pride that the young people can feel in their surroundings.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people in the home feel safe and protected. All staff are aware of the risks for each individual young person and take appropriate action to safeguard them. Staff give the safety of young people a high priority, even when the young person is away from the home. For example, when a young person is away having contact, staff make sure that their mobile phone is topped up and make calls to parents to check that everything is alright.

The number of incidents of young people going missing has reduced significantly since the last inspection. When a young person does go missing, the home works very well with the police and other agencies to ensure that the young person is returned as quickly as possible. The home's particular process for doing this is being disseminated as a model of good practice throughout the provider's other children's homes.

Staff try to manage behaviour by the use of positive rewards rather than sanctions. However, where sanctions are used they are discussed with the young person first, who often suggests the type and level of sanction they think they should have applied to them. This means that young people can take responsibility for their behaviour and think about the consequences in a way which promotes better emotional resilience. This links with the home's use of restorative approaches, which encourages young people to reflect on the impact of their behaviour upon others. Encouraging young people to think in this way helps them to develop empathy and regard for other people and become well-rounded and responsible adults. The use of physical restraint within the home is minimal and in line with statutory requirements.

Young people say that there is no bullying in the home. Nevertheless, the staff are vigilant to the possibility of when and where bullying might occur and have strategies in place to manage it. This means that young people are protected from emotional and physical harm.

All staff are aware of what they need to do if they have concerns about the safety of a young person. Staff working in the home have appropriate clearances, which means that unsuitable people who may pose a risk to young people do not have the opportunity to do so. The building is safe and free from hazards.

Leadership and management

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

One previous recommendation from the previous inspection, relating to the completion of the complaints record, has been actioned. This means that the record now provides full accountability for staff practice in handling complaints.

The home is generally well managed. Staff feel supported and the arrangements for supervision are satisfactory. Staff have access to a range of high-quality training which is refreshed as necessary. This means that staff have the right skills to work with young people, support them, and make sure that their needs are met.

There are sufficient staff on the rota to meet the needs of the young people. Although the majority of staff are male, there are measures in place to increase the availability of female staff if necessary to meet the particular needs of female young people.

The Registered Manager has a good system in place to monitor the operation of the home. This identifies patterns and trends and so enables any shortfalls in practice to be identified. However, this information is not readily available for the staff team, which lessens its effectiveness as a means to improve practice. The monthly monitoring of the home by the registered provider does not provide for regular consultation with parents. This means that the views of parents about the care the home provides cannot be taken into account and used to make the home better.

Files and records are generally well maintained. Staff have a very good awareness of the need for confidentiality, which upholds individual young people's human rights as well as keeping them safe. However, there are some shortfalls in recording practice. The record of sanctions does not always contain all the information it should, which means that the effectiveness of a particular sanction cannot be evaluated.

Additionally, the record of room searches does not always confirm whether a young person has been informed about the search taking place. This is contrary to what the policy of the home says. This means that the young person is denied the opportunity to comment on this breach of their privacy, even though it may have been necessary to keep them safe.

Equality and diversity practice is **good**.