

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Mandy Williams
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home is owned and operated by a private organisation. It is registered to provide care and accommodation for up to four children and young people. The children and young people may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties, including attachment problems.

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 good home where young people are happy living and where they feel safe. Young people make good progress when they live at the home, both socially and educationally, despite their often chaotic and complex previous experiences. Young people feel that they are treated fairly and staff are open and honest with them.

Young people enjoy positive and respectful relationships with staff, who demonstrate a commitment to improving outcomes for them. Staff also provide a very consistent approach to their care, so that young people are able to predict what will happen over the day ahead. They have gained in confidence as a result. This is of particular significance for children and young people with attachment difficulties.

The Registered Manager has worked in the home for a number of years and is supported by a mainly stable staff team. She has a good understanding of the issues in the home and continues to strive for high standards of care. This enables her and the team to meet the needs of the children and young people placed here.

Children and young people are treated as individuals and their needs met accordingly. They benefit from individualised placement plans which are clear and detailed. Young people's individuality is promoted and they are able to engage in a range of activities in the community. Young people's views are important to staff and they work hard to make this a fun place to live. However, the home does not currently seek the views of children and young people to inform the appraisals of staff.

The standard of décor in the home is good and there is a warm and friendly atmosphere in the home. Although appropriate environmental safety systems are in place, there have been no fire drills in night-time conditions for some time. Other issues raised at this inspection include training for senior staff who are required to undertake a supervisory role and the review and update of young people's incentive plans.

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 staff meet children's individual needs as set out in the child's placement plan; particularly the need to review and revise incentive plans, so that children are able to reach achievable targets within realistic timescales (NMS 2.3)
- ensure there is an emergency escape plan that all staff and young people are familiar with and have practised so they know what to do in an emergency; this relates to the undertaking of fire drills in night-time conditions (NMS 10.9)
- ensure that staff are provided with regular supervision by appropriately qualified and experienced staff; in particular that those undertaking the task have received appropriate training (NMS 19.4)
- ensure that staff appraisal takes into account the views of children the service is providing for. (NMS 19.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

Children and young people living in the home experience good outcomes in terms of their health, education and emotional well-being. Although, the majority of children placed in the home are of primary school age they have often experienced inconsistencies in care in their early years. Consequently, they have complex needs, including attachment difficulties. Staff value the individuality of each young person and are sensitive to the particular needs of each of them. They ensure that they provide a consistency of approach, so that children and young people can become confident in the response they will receive from those caring for them. This is essential in order for them to learn to trust adults and develop their emotional resilience.

Children and young people are registered with a range of health care practitioners, which ensures that their health care needs are met. Health care plans clearly outline

their needs and how these should be met in the home. Young people are encouraged to eat a healthy diet and be involved in menu planning and cooking in the home.

All children and young people currently attend the organisation's school. Their attendance at school is excellent and they are all making good progress in terms of their educational attainment. Communication between the home and school is good and both parties make good use of communication sheets, ensuring that each is kept abreast of any issues that may be affecting the young person.

Children and young people have weekly access to the organisation's therapeutic team. They are particularly skilled at working with children and young people with attachment difficulties. They are able to help address unresolved issues from their past, as well as equip young people with the skills required to deal with challenges they may face in the future. Staff also receive a monthly consultation, so that they are best prepared to respond to the needs of the young people in a unified manner. Social workers report that this facility ensures that young people's therapeutic needs are addressed and a 'therapeutic environment' is fostered.

Children and young people are supported to maintain contact with those important to them; such as family members and friends. Staff appreciate the significance of these relationships and are prepared to travel some considerable distance so that young people can maintain these contacts. This is appreciated both by social workers and family members. It also ensures that young people are able to sustain these relationships; maintaining appropriate links with their past and also with their area of origin.

Quality of care

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

The staff team work cohesively and provide children and young people with consistent messages. Staff act as positive role models and ensure that the home is a nurturing environment. Staff set clear and consistent boundaries and young people are familiar with these. This ensures that young people receive predictable care and learn to feel safe in their home environment. Children and young people demonstrate positive relationships with staff and enjoy spending time with them. One young person commented, 'I really like the adults who look after me. It is really nice here and I get to do activities that I enjoy.'

Young people's views are actively sought and they influence the running of the home. Young people's meetings are held weekly, where consultation takes place on issues such as menu planning for the week ahead, changes in the home and activities. The organisation is also keen to promote the participation of children and young people in its development and the home has a representative on this children's forum. This ensures that the views of young people are brought to the attention of senior managers in the organisation, influencing its development.

However, there is no system in the home currently for the views of young people to be taken into account when undertaking staff appraisal.

Children and young people understand how to make a complaint and have done so on occasion. The home has developed a clear guide for young people that outlines the process for them. The home also has an arrangement with the local advocacy service and the allocated advocate visits the home on a monthly basis. This ensures that children and young people are familiar with them and would be confident to ask them to pursue any issues on their behalf. Young people have accessed this service as a result. Clear records are kept of any complaints made, the progress of any investigation and young people provided with an outcome in a timely way.

Children and young people benefit from individualised placement plans, with which staff are familiar. Hence, they are able to provide a consistency of approach. However, young people's incentive plans that are designed to target and address particular pertinent issues for each child are not being regularly reviewed and revised.

All young people benefit from daily routines that support their attendance at school. Staff ensure that young people are well presented and arrive at school on time. They also support young people with their homework, ensuring that it is completed. Staff maintain regular contact with the school, so that they are able to address any issues as they arise. This ensures that young people are able to take full advantage of their learning opportunities.

Children and young people are encouraged to engage in activities in the local community, which in turn help to develop their personal and social skills. These currently include, horse riding, trampolining, swimming and ice-skating. The staff and children are also keen to engage in any local activities arranged in the neighbourhood and have recently been involved in street parties to celebrate both the royal wedding and the Queens Jubilee. This ensures that young people are aware of the community in which they live and helps in the development of neighbourly relationships.

The home is good at celebrating difference and providing children and young people with a forum for open discussion. In particular, young people's individual heritages are recognised whenever possible, by the marking of a saints' day or cultural festival. The children and young people recently engaged in their own 'come dine with me'. Each young person was involved in designing and cooking, with the assistance of staff, their own themed menu for the evening, many choosing to research and cook meals specific to their areas of origin. This helps to remind young people about their heritage and also helps them develop an understanding and appreciation of diversity.

The home is located in a quiet residential area and is furnished to a good standard. It has the atmosphere of a family home and at the time of the inspection was in the process of being re-decorated. Children and young people are able to personalise their bedrooms by choosing their own bedding, colour schemes and by putting posters and certificates of achievement on their walls. This helps them feel that they

belong in the home.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Children and young people demonstrate that they feel safe living in the home. Staff undertake safeguarding training as part of their induction to working in the home and a refresher training programme is in place. The Registered Manager has also developed a 'keeping safe' training programme especially for the children and young people. This ensures that they know what is appropriate and what action to take should they feel uneasy about a situation or individual. Young people are keen to take part as they receive a certificate for completion and these are displayed prominently in the home. This ensures that young people are provided with the skills required to protect themselves and seek help if the need were to arise.

The organisation has a bullying policy and any incidents that do occur are recorded in the home's records. However, staffing levels are good and so opportunities for bullying are reduced and potential conflicts quickly resolved. One social worker commented, 'there is a strong culture of anti-bullying in the home which is evident upon walking into the home.' Young people are encouraged to get along together and any irritations between them are addressed at young people's meetings.

Staff are trained in behaviour management. This includes the use of physical restraint, which they have had to implement on occasions. However, the number of incidents for young people has reduced since admission to the home. The organisation has recently introduced a comprehensive system for recording these in a bound volume. These incidents are reviewed by the Registered Manager and alternative suggestions to dealing with similar situations suggested for the future. This evaluation of the homes strategies ensures that staff regularly review their responses and an environment for learning is fostered. Young people also receive help to understand why they may respond in a particular manner and are encouraged to manage their own behaviours in a more productive way.

Staff also employ the use of sanctions and rewards to promote good behaviour and help young people understand that there are implications to the actions that they take. Sanctions are usually restorative in nature. Examples include helping adults clean the floor when food was thrown, or not being permitted to play outside for a short period, when previously swearing whilst playing here. The use of positive consequences outweighs the use of negative ones and includes, choosing a magazine, or having breakfast in bed for ignoring the disruptive behaviour of others early in the morning. However mainly, rewards consist of positive praise or a certificate of achievement. Young people report that any sanctions imposed are generally fair.

Staff recruitment processes followed by the organisation are thorough, with staff being suitably vetted prior to starting work in the home. The records kept in the

home contain the required information. Visitors to the home are required to produce identification and are appropriately supervised whilst on the premises. This ensures that measures are in place to protect children and young people from those who may pose them harm.

Children and young people live in an environment that is physically safe, as regular environmental safety checks are undertaken. Daytime fire drills take place on a regular basis and young people are able to explain the procedure to follow in an emergency. However, fire drills have not been taking place in night-time conditions. This is important so that young people and staff are confident about the procedure, if such an evacuation were required.

Leadership and management

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

The home has a competent and experienced manager that is well respected by staff, young people and social workers who are involved with the home. Staff report that their strength is working well together as a team and in providing consistent messages for young people.

The home meets the aims and objectives of its Statement of Purpose and those accessing the service are clear about these. Similarly, the children's guide is an attractive and user friendly document that contains the required information. Children and young people receive this guide prior to admission to the home along with a number of other guides produced by the home. These include how to make a complaint, bullying, the use of restraint and consequences. These help young people form a picture of what life is like in the home and develop an understanding about why certain actions may need to be taken.

There were no requirements or recommendations made at the last inspection. However, the Registered Manager is committed to the continuing development of the home. There is a comprehensive development plan in place and both the internal and external monitoring of the home is undertaken robustly. Both are forwarded to Ofsted routinely. Action plans are developed and reviewed appropriately.

Staff report that they enjoy working in the home and feel supported by the management and the organisation. The home is well resourced in relation to staff numbers and some staff have worked in the home for a number of years. Staff meetings take place regularly, where issues can be shared and updates on young people discussed. A system is in place for staff to acknowledge issues discussed, so that the Registered Manager is assured that they are all kept up-to-date with any changes. The Registered Manager has also introduced a system for 'de-briefing' at the end of each shift, so that she can review what has worked well that day or if any issues need to be addressed.

Staff receive formal supervision on a regular basis and report that they find this

valuable. However, senior staff in the home who undertake this role have not completed any specific training to assist them in the completion of this task confidently. The organisation is generally committed to providing training opportunities for staff and the Registered Manager has a comprehensive training matrix to assist with the monitoring of this. This receives regular update, and helps to ensure that staff remain confident in their skills and are best able to meet the demands of caring for young people.

Records in the home are appropriately maintained and stored securely in the home. Staff keep detailed records of their work with young people and their progress is clearly monitored. Keyworkers produce monthly summaries on the progress of young people that is forwarded to their social worker, demonstrating a clear picture of the challenges and achievements over that period. These are valued by social workers, who report that these, along with regular incident reports, keep them fully updated with the issues pertinent to the young person placed here.

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.