

Inspection report for children's home

Unique reference number	SC034953
Inspector	Stella Henderson
Type of inspection	Full
Provision subtype	Children's home

Registered person	Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Registered person address	Northgate House Northgate Halifax West Yorkshire HX1 1UN
Responsible individual	Gary Pickles
Registered manager	Aaron McLoughlin
Date of last inspection	18/12/2013

Inspection date	08/08/2014
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Previous inspection	good progress
Enforcement action since last inspection	none

This inspection	
Overall effectiveness	good
Outcomes for children and young people	good
Quality of care	good
Keeping children and young people safe	good
Leadership and management	outstanding

Overall effectiveness

Judgement outcome	good
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Young people living in this home have the chance to turn their lives around. From unpromising starting points, they achieve good outcomes.

Young people receive very effective support from staff to understand and overcome their challenging life experiences. Staff persevere in helping young people to think through the choices they are making. They do not give up on young people when things go wrong.

Young people living at this home are older teenagers. All are over compulsory school age and on the cusp of adulthood. As such, they exercise their right to make the majority of their own decisions about their lives. Care planning is sensitive to this reality. It is tailored as far as possible around young people's expressed needs. However, staff act as responsible parents. They nurture young people, show affection and set clear boundaries and expectations. They provide young people with stability and a place of safety.

This approach works well. It affords young people the autonomy and independence they need, while providing them with strong and consistent support. As a result young people begin to make better decisions about their lives and take fewer risks. They start to take advantage of the opportunities presented to them. For these

reasons the home's overall effectiveness is judged to be good.

Leadership and management is strong, focused and forward-thinking. Although this has yet to fully impact on outcomes for young people, this area of practice is judged as outstanding. There is highly effective monitoring of the home, a clear agenda for further improvement and excellent partnership working.

A requirement is set to address a shortfall in the independent visitors report. A discrepancy was also noted in the disposal of medication. These are procedural matters that have no direct impact on young people's wellbeing.

Full report

Information about this children's home

This children's home is operated by the local authority. It provides care and accommodation for up to five young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Recent inspection history

Inspection date	Inspection type	Inspection judgement
18/12/2013	Interim	good progress
30/05/2013	Full	adequate
14/11/2012	Interim	satisfactory progress
14/08/2012	Full	inadequate

What does the children's home need to do to improve further?

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
33 (2001)	ensure that where the independent person becomes aware of a potential conflict of interest after a visit to the children's home, the independent person must include in the report details of the conflict of interest (Regulation 33)(6)(a)	08/09/2014

Recommendations

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

- ensure that records are clear and up to date. This is with specific reference to recording the disposal of medication. (NMS 22)

Inspection judgements

Outcomes for children and young people **good**

Young people have often experienced very challenging life events before coming to the home. They may have developed some elements of resilience, but not always in a positive way. Their life experiences may have compromised their ability to learn, and affected their emotional growth and development. Poor decision-making and risk taking behaviours may further limit their career, relationship and life opportunities.

When young people come to this home they are helped to recognise the impact of these experiences. They are supported to understand that although the past cannot be changed, they can have better futures. The overwhelming majority of young people respond positively to this and achieve good outcomes. They begin to manage their emotions better and respond to disappointment in more mature and acceptable ways. This is evident in the reduction in anti-social behaviour and in missing from home incidents.

Young people generally come to the home with poor educational experiences. However, taking into account their previous attainment, educational outcomes for young people are good. The majority of young people take advantage of wider learning opportunities in educational projects and voluntary work. This helps them to develop practical skills and increase their career potential. It gives young people the chance to feel good about themselves and their achievements.

Young people's general physical health improves during their time at the home. They get the medical help they need to maintain good eyesight, dental health and to catch up with immunisations. A professional confirmed that young people have 'regular contact with the looked after children's nurse, dental and general practitioner as appropriate'. The health of young people with specific conditions has greatly improved because they are now engaging with the specialist medical treatment they need.

Reducing the use of cannabis remains a challenge for staff. However, some young people are clearly stating that they no longer want to use this. Others are beginning to recognise the harm it does. This demonstrates that the work of staff and partner agencies is beginning to have some effect. It means that young people understand the impact of drug use on their health, particularly their emotional health and are starting to accept the help they need.

All young people at the home are now approaching adulthood and are at various stages of planning for independence. They are supported on this journey by opportunities to take increasing responsibility for finances, household chores and decision-making. When this does not go well staff act as any reasonable parent would by taking back responsibility until the young person is able to manage things better.

This includes allowing young people to return to the home when living independently has not proved successful. A professional commented that staff, 'supported the young person to make a transition to independent living and to return to the home when this transition was not successful.'

Young people are of an age where they make their own decisions about contact with family. They generally choose to do so but the impact on them and the family is kept under review by staff. Young people also choose to engage in many of the activities on offer for them, such as going out with staff on day trips and trying new physical sports such as climbing. This reflects positively on the quality of relationships between staff and young people.

Quality of care

good

Young people are provided with good quality care. This helps them make good progress across all aspects of their development. This view is shared by young people's family members and professionals involved with the home.

One parent commented that, 'they have done a fantastic job with my child'. A professional noted staff had 'helped to achieve good outcomes for my young person by taking time getting to know him, ensuring they do as much as possible to encourage and support him to make positive life choices in education, reducing criminal activities and healthy relationships.'

Outcomes for young people are improved through clear planning and review processes, effective partnership working and good communication. Young people take the lead on most aspects of their care planning. As a result plans are very reflective of their individual diverse needs. They get strong support and guidance from staff who develop caring, nurturing relationships with them.

Staff work very closely with families, often providing direct support to maintain contact and rehabilitation. A professional noted that, 'the home has offered excellent continuing support to this young person and to his mother.'

The home has frequent contact with other professionals in social care, education, health, police and youth justice services. This 'team around the child' approach keeps young people's needs at the centre of attention, helping to secure the support and resources they need.

The home's approach to behaviour management recognises that young people are approaching adulthood. Responses to poor behaviour are therefore appropriate to this upper age-range and in a way that respects their age and development.

Staff tailor their interventions in line with what young people identify as motivators

for poor or risky behaviours. This helps young people to develop some insight into the factors which negatively influence them. Some are starting to reflect on their behaviours and the impact this has on their opportunities. A professional complimented the home on the way in which 'staff allow young people the freedom and space to develop their own coping strategies.'

New ways of helping young people to manage their behaviours are being introduced such as the 'restorative justice' approach. This also recognises the need to draw in other agencies, such as the police and youth justice. This helps to divert young people from criminality and reduce anti-social behaviours.

Young people are vocal in their opinions about the decisions being made for them, what they want to get out of their time in care and what they would like to improve in their lives. This is done through involvement in house meetings, key work sessions and informal discussions. This provides a range of opportunities for young people to express themselves and achieve their goals. Wider consultation with young people is good and their views carry weight. For example, a new information leaflet on leaving care has been produced following a consultation exercise with young people.

Young people live in good accommodation that is well maintained. It is a friendly, homely environment with excellent standards in house-keeping. There are a lot of photographs of the activities that young people have been involved with. This helps to create a family-like atmosphere and reinforces the positive and fun times that have been enjoyed.

Arrangements for medication administration are safe and effective. However, an oversight has occurred in the disposal of some medication. This has no impact on the safety or wellbeing of young people as they have no access to the medicine cupboard.

Keeping children and young people safe good

Young people are safe at the home. Professionals, parents and family members are confident that young people are safely cared for. One professional commented that staff 'have an in-depth insight into the young person's needs and risks posed.' A family member said that staff 'consistently talk to my child about keeping himself safe'.

Staff are skilled at recognising the risk presented by young people's behaviours, inexperience and poor decision making. Risk assessments are regularly monitored and adapted to meet changing circumstances and needs. There is very close working with local police on safeguarding matters. A local police officer noted, 'I am kept updated on any developments with children living in the home. The home are clearly keen to work with partners including the police in order to manage their charges.'

This approach has seen a reduction in exposure to possible child sexual exploitation, missing from home incidents and criminal behaviour.

A professional noted that a young person 'feels safe and supported by a staff team who are always available for him.' They acknowledge the 'extra mile' that staff take in their efforts to keep young people safe in the home and community. Another professional commented positively on the 'work undertaken with parent and the young person and acting on safeguarding concerns in the parental home.'

Young people live in a property that is safe. Safety checks are periodically undertaken on equipment, fire safety measures and environmental hazards. This helps to promote their health and safety.

Leadership and management

outstanding

Leadership and management is strong, consistent and pro-active. Since his registration at the home in February 2013, the Registered Manager has taken the home from strength to strength, showing exemplary capacity for further improvement. He demonstrates clear commitment to delivering high standards of care and support for young people. This ethos sets the tone for the running of the home and is shared by the staff.

Fundamental improvements have taken place, most notably in the systematic monitoring of the performance of the home, and in partnership working.

There is very good analysis of the robust internal and independent checks undertaken on the home. This informs immediate, medium and long term improvement plans for the home. The opinions of young people, their parents and other professionals are a central part of this process, and include findings from 'exit interviews'. These views directly help to improve the quality of care provided.

The Registered Manager makes good use of research and guidance to inform practice at the home. This has recently included training on e-safety and restorative justice. The Registered Manager and Responsible Individual have also participated in regional improvement meetings with Ofsted and have taken account of suggestions and observations made by the regulator.

Strong partnership working is an area of exceptionally good practice, not only with partner agencies but with the local community. For example, the Registered Manager recognises that drug use in the home is likely to attract attention of the police and wider community. He has visited local neighbours and hand-delivered letters to them outlining the problem and welcoming contact with him if they are worried about the situation. He also seeks to engage the community in helping to tackle the drugs problem which is a locality-wide problem.

The Registered Manager has also been pro-active in adapting the model of 'delegated authority' that is used in the local authority's fostering services. This has made real improvement to the timeliness of decision-making processes for young people, as well as reducing the stigma that is sometimes associated with being in care.

Staff are highly skilled in their work. They are particularly effective in adapting their practice to meet the different needs of young people while still maintaining consistency in practice. They go the extra mile by working directly with families to reduce risk and increase the chances of successful rehabilitation.

Staff receive very effective support from the Registered Manager and deputy manager. All staff are suitably qualified and have regular supervision, appraisals, team meetings and training opportunities. This ensures their continued competence in providing good quality care to young people.

Professionals and family members were highly complimentary about staff practice and communication. One professional commented, 'communication has been excellent. It is regular and quick when there are any issues of significance. If they are unsure if I have seen an email they will chase me up.' A family member said that they were always kept 'in the loop' about how things were going.

Good records chart young people's progress and contribute to their personal histories. Significant events in their lives are well documented. Where required, notifiable events are forwarded promptly to relevant parties. This is a recommendation from the last inspection that has been met.

The Registered Manager has appropriate care and management qualifications. As well as successfully managing the home on a day to day basis, he also has a quality assurance role within the local authority. This has not detracted from his substantive post but has created a potential conflict of interest in relation to the independent scrutiny of the home. This does not impact on the safety or quality of care of young people but the conflict needs to be recorded in future reports.

What inspection judgements mean

Judgement	Description
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.

Information 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 framework of inspection for children's homes.