

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Jacqueline Malcolm
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Service information

Brief description of the service

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. The home supports young people to learn the skills required and develop the emotional resilience needed for transition to independent living and adult life.

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 **inadequate**.

Young people benefit from a good quality of care from a strong, stable, confident and experienced staff team that values and respects them. Young people have formed positive attachments with staff and all make good progress from their starting points. Staff are good at supporting young people to prepare for independence and develop life skills that will help them in the future.

Young people say that they feel safe. They can identify adults to approach with any concerns or complaints about any aspect of their care, safety and welfare. However, there are weaknesses in the home's safeguarding policy and protocol. This impacts on young people's welfare when allegations are made. The manager and staff lack understanding of the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). Young people do not present major behaviour management challenges. Staff reward good behaviour; in particular, they recognise young people's diverse achievements.

All young people are involved in education, employment and training. They have very good social lives and are well integrated into the community. The staff's ability to meet young people's cultural and personal identity needs is a strong feature of childcare practice at this home.

The home continues to operate without a suitable Registered Manager and the provider has not appointed a new manager within the required timescales. This significantly impacts on the leadership, management, and accountability in the home. Regulation 33 reports, although completed, have not been forwarded to Her

Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) since December 2011. These previous requirements are repeated. Not all staff have completed training in sexual exploitation and pathway planning. The missing from home protocol has not been updated and implemented. Sanctions are not recorded in line with regulations. Pathway planning issues are not fully resolved to ensure that eligible young people receive a prompt service. These weaknesses undermine the areas of strong practice that young people experience and do not adequately safeguard young people's welfare.

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
7 (2001)	ensure that the registered provider shall appoint an individual to manage the children's home (Regulation 7(1))	31/10/2012
17B (2001)	the registered person must ensure that within 24 hours of the use of any measure of control, restraint or discipline in a children's home, a written record is made in a volume kept for the purpose of which shall include all of the requirements identified in the Regulation (Regulation (3)(a to i))	31/08/2012
11 (2001)	promote and make proper provision for the welfare of children accommodated there. In particular, ensure eligible young people have a pathway plan and working practices are collaborative with young people's social workers or personal advisors to implement the plan (Regulation 11)	28/09/2012
16 (2001)	ensure that the registered person shall prepare and implement written policy which is intended to safeguard children from abuse and neglect; and sets out the procedure to be followed in the event of any allegation of abuse or neglect. In particular ensure clear and robust protocols with respect to peer abuse and police involvement (Regulation 16(1)(a)(b))	28/09/2012
16 (2001)	ensure with particular reference to the regulation above that the procedure under paragraph (1)(b) shall in particular provide for all of the listed items under this regulation. In particular ensure that safeguarding training incorporates all aspects and informs staff about the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) (Regulation 2 (a to g))	28/09/2012
27 (2001)	demonstrate how all persons employed receive appropriate training, supervision and appraisal. In particular, training in sexual exploitation and pathway planning (Regulation 27(4)(a))	31/10/2012
33 (2001)	ensure that the person carrying out the visit shall prepare a written report on the conduct of the home, and the registered provider shall supply a copy of the report to HMCI and to the	31/08/2012

	Registered Manager of the children's home (Regulation 33(a)(b))	
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Recommendations

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

- ensure risk assessments of the whole children's home environment are carried out , to identify any potential sources of harm to the children are recorded in writing and regularly reviewed. In particular, review the fire risk assessment to identify how risks arising from smoking in bedrooms will be minimised (NMS 10.8)
- If a child is absent from the home and their whereabouts is not known (i.e. the child is missing), 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 or by the local authority for the area where the home is located. (NMS 5.6)

Outcomes for children and young people

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

All young people are making sufficient progress to improve their life chances. Young people develop confidence, emotional resilience, specific skills and coping mechanisms that will help to sustain them in the future. However, some young people's emotional well-being has been significantly challenged by the safeguarding process. This lacks a clear and robust protocol and does not promote good outcomes for young people.

Young people's health needs are met to a good standard. They are actively encouraged to live a healthy lifestyle, including healthy eating and exercise. Young people are discouraged from smoking. Good access to the Looked After Children's nurse provides young people with information and guidance about smoking cessation. The nurse ensures that young people's assessed health needs are identified and staff ensure these are met. Young people attend their health appointments with their doctors, dentists and opticians. Young people who need specific emotional and psychological support engage with and benefit from these services. Young people are helped to make informed choices through good advice and support from staff and professionals.

All young people are involved in education, employment and training. They benefit from excellent attendance in education, work apprenticeships and paid employment. This is positive and demonstrates young people's strong work ethic, motivation and determination to succeed. Young people are confident about reaching their aims. They have achieved good exam results and have made good educational progress

from their starting points with some expressing a desire to further their learning. Young people's achievements are recognised, highly praised and celebrated.

Young people's social inclusion in the community is strong. Most young people are working in their local area, learning new skills and interacting with the public. They are involved in a range of community activities, such as learning how to drive, using the sports facilities, spending time with their families and socialising with their friends. Group activities are well featured, with planned trips and holidays away. Incidents of anti-social behaviour are minimised, because young people are occupied.

Young people benefit from appropriate contact with their families, friends and people who are important to them. Staff facilitate contact and these relationships promote young people's identity and sense of belonging.

Current pathway planning arrangements do not ensure that all young people receive a prompt service from the pathway team when they reach an eligible age. This means that some young people do not have a timely pathway plan or a suitably qualified pathways worker who can meet statutory requirements. The home proactively seeks this information from the placing authority and in the meantime, actively supports young people to develop their independence skills. Young people are supported to budget, shop, cook and launder their clothes and they are expected to maintain their rooms, ensuring a clean and tidy environment. Young people who need additional prompts are supported to ensure that they are not disadvantaged when they move into independence. Young people who move into independence continue to be supported by staff in the community.

Quality of care

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

Young people enjoy some excellent relationships with staff, promoting mutual respect, trust and appropriate attachments. Young people also relate well with each other most of the time. Staff are child-focussed. They are familiar with young people's personalities and work to their strengths. Young people discuss a range of matters with staff, particularly issues of concern. Staff act on any concerns. They represent positive adult role models and engage well with young people, providing support and guidance on issues that will enable them to make informed decisions. These relationships encourage appropriate, socially acceptable behaviours. One young person said that the staff are supportive, caring and are good to them.

Young people's views, wishes and feelings are actively sought and influence the running of the home. Young people contribute to their own meetings. Young people who have limited English have access to a familiar interpreter. This enables all young people to have their say. Agenda items include holidays and trips away, management arrangements and purchasing items for the home. A senior manager has attended the young people's meetings and has made himself accessible to them. Young people are involved in their statutory reviews and contribute to them. Some young people

have reached the stage where they chair their own reviews under the guidance of their independent reviewing officer. This promotes young people's confidence and self-determination. Key workers are compatible with the young people and take their role seriously, ensuring they support and monitor young people's progress.

No complaints have been made for some time. Young people know how to complain. However, they will usually resolve issues through discussion and negotiation. Young people benefit from good external contacts, such as their independent reviewing officers and a children's rights service.

Young people are cared for in line with their placement plans, which are regularly reviewed and monitored. One independent reviewing officer says that a young person at the home is making 'significant progress' and is excelling in some areas. Staff promote young people's personal identity and cultural needs very well. Young people are cared for in a manner which enables them to celebrate their individuality.

Good, effective behaviour management strategies and child-focussed practices support and reward positive behaviour. Sanctions are minimal. However, the records pertaining to sanctions are not fully compliant with the regulations. There is no negative impact on outcomes for young people.

Young people's physical, emotional and psychological health needs are well met. Young people have individual health plans. They attend their health appointments with staff support. Their health needs are monitored and reviewed. Young people who have sought asylum and who may have experienced trauma and loss, have good access to mental health services. The outcomes for young people engaged in these services have positively enhanced their lives. Young people are well informed about issues related to their health, such as sexual health, smoking and healthy eating.

Young people are very well supported to achieve their educational and employment goals. Staff have high aspirations of the young people. They work with other agencies and the local authority's virtual school to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged. The outcome for young people is they continue to make good educational progress.

Young people live in a homely environment which provides suitable accommodation for those who are preparing for independence. The home is furnished, decorated and maintained to a high standard, particularly the communal areas. Young people have keys to their rooms so that they can keep their belongings safe and be responsible for their possessions. Young people personalise their rooms to suit their individuality. Staff ensure that the home is well kept and involve the young people where possible. This teaches young people useful skills which may benefit them in the future.

Young people like their home and treat it with respect. The home is well established in the community. It provides a good base for young people to engage in activities and enables accessible travel to neighbouring towns and cities.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel safe. Some aspects of staff practice promote young people's safety and well-being. For example, staff talk to young people about keeping themselves safe and maintain contact with young people on their mobile phones when they are away from home. They monitor friendships to ensure that they are genuine, in particular with young people who are at risk of child sexual exploitation. Staff are good at monitoring safety without being overly intrusive. Positive relationships between young people, staff and people outside the home ensure that young people can express their concerns to an appropriate adult.

However, the home's safeguarding policy and protocol lacks depth. The guidance does not provide robust and sufficient protection to young people who make serious allegations against peers. The policy does not make clear what action must be taken when young people refuse to involve the police. Young people's wishes and feelings are given full weight against the duty of adults to protect their safety and welfare. This means that young people are not afforded the opportunity to make a full disclosure to appropriately trained independent professionals. Involving agencies, such as the police and independent reviewing officers in safeguarding decisions is not routinely considered so young people do not always benefit from a multi-professional approach to safeguarding concerns. Key professionals have not been promptly informed about delays or changes to safeguarding agreements, so they can make timely representation, if concerned. This is not good practice. It gives young people the impression that their allegations are not taken seriously and this undermines their self-esteem.

The home's safeguarding policy does not refer to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The role and responsibilities of the LADO are not known by the manager and staff members. Staff are not informed and aware of the LADO's role in the event of an allegation being made against them. This lack of clarity means that young people are not sufficiently protected.

Young people do not report bullying to be an issue at the home. Young people are supported to behave appropriately. Their behaviour does not warrant the need for restraint or physical intervention. Staff say that young people do not present a behaviour management issue. They comment fondly about young people and demonstrate practices which show that young people are valued. Young people present as well mannered, pleasant individuals who know how to behave in a range of social settings.

Visitors to the home are checked to ensure their positive identity, so that young people are protected from people who may pose a risk to them.

No young people have been reported missing from the home for some time. However, there is no up-to-date agreed protocol to promote the safety and welfare

of young people who go missing from care. Unauthorised absences are monitored. Young people say that if they return home late, staff do not tell them off, but remind them of their agreed coming in times. One young person said that they tend to return home because it reduces the burden of travel. Young people's positive engagement in education and employment activities has resulted in fewer unauthorised absences.

Regular health and safety checks on fire prevention equipment, gas, electricity checks, and regular health and safety audits promote a physically safe environment for young people to live in. Up-to-date risk assessments reflect young people's behaviour and the measures in place to minimise risk. Some young people continue to engage in risky behaviours, such as smoking in bedrooms and this presents a health and safety concern. The home is addressing this issue and it is included in individual risk assessments. However, it is not included in the fire risk assessment, which is out of date.

Leadership and management

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

There is no Registered Manager in post, which has been the case for over two years. This was identified as a weakness at the last inspection. No urgent action has been taken to recruit a suitable person. The manager's post continues to be covered by two experienced assistant managers, who work shifts over two weeks and cover day-to-day management duties for two weeks. A named person identified to manage the home is one of the assistant unit managers. Their details have been notified to HMCI, but no registered manager application has been received. The assistant managers attend meetings to ensure that they are kept up to date with management issues and are supported. Despite their commitment and support to the staff team, the arrangements do not promote safe and effective leadership, management and accountability as evidenced in the handling of a serious safeguarding issue. The management arrangements at the home are an area of concern.

The Statement of Purpose makes clear what services young people can expect to receive but is in need of a minor review to reflect the change of responsible individual. The assistant manager is addressing this issue.

Young people are cared for by an experienced staff team who are well trained, supported and regularly supervised. The service manager supervises the two assistant managers and is known to the staff and young people. The staff team have significant experience in caring for children and have good interpersonal skills. Young people's files provide a generally good audit of their daily care and progress.

All staff have a relevant childcare qualification. They are encouraged to develop their learning. Morale is good and the staff team is diverse, consisting of adults with whom that the young people can identify. Staff vacancies are covered by regular casual staff, with whom the young people have developed positive relationships.

Staff receive training to develop their learning and practice. However, they have not had all the training necessary to meet the needs of the young people living at the home. For example, staff have gaps in their knowledge relating to child sexual exploitation and responding to allegations or disclosures of abuse. This means that their responses to such matters are not always sufficiently robust to ensure young people's safety and welfare. Staff identified pathway planning as a training need to enable them to better understand the process and better assist young people preparing to leave care.

Arrangements are in place to ensure management oversight of the quality of care. The assistant managers are aware of the home's main strengths and areas for development. Attempts by the Regulation 33 visitor to consult with parents and relatives have been unsuccessful. The home is addressing this issue because the views of parents and relatives currently do not influence the running of the home. Regular monitoring of internal and external aspects of the premises ensures that it is maintained to a high standard.

The home has addressed some previous statutory requirements and all of the recommendations. These relate to sanctions, notifications, management monitoring, improving documents in relation to missing from home, having development plans and ensuring regular staff supervision. This has improved some aspects of management oversight and practice. However, not all of the requirements from the previous inspection have been addressed. Shortfalls include the lack of a Registered Manager and failure to submit Regulation 33 reports to HMCI since December 2011. These weaknesses undermine the home's capacity to improve.

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.