

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Stella Henderson
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The children's home is provided by a local authority. It is registered to provide care for up to five young people of either gender, who may have emotional or 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**.

Young people are provided with good standards of care, support and guidance which enable them to make positive progress. They benefit from good relationships with staff who help them to gain an understanding about their own problems and behaviour and move forward with their lives.

The home keeps the young people safe. Staff respond appropriately to negative behaviour and look to promote positive behaviour. Young people say they feel 'safe' and 'looked after'. They have good attendance at school and college and are motivated to do well in their education.

Young people clearly influence the day-to-day running of the home. Organisational change has been managed well and has not impacted negatively on young people's day-to-day lives. In this the manager and deputy manager have provided strong leadership to ensure young people's needs continue to have central focus.

The implementation of new documentation is not quite up to speed, however. Although this has no direct impact on young people, a requirement and recommendations are set to assist the provider to improve the quality of recording, consultation and monitoring of the home's performance.

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
34 (2001)	develop the system for improving the quality of care provided in the children's home. Ensure that the system referred to in paragraph (1) shall provide for consultation with children accommodated at the home, their parents and placing authorities (Regulation 34)(1)(b)(3)	01/10/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that all children communicate their views on all aspects of their care and support (NMS 1.3)
- ensure that records are clear, up to date, stored securely and contribute to an understanding of the child's life (NMS 28)
- improve the quality and each child's placement plan and ensure it 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 young people are **good**.

Young people prosper at the home, achieving good outcomes across all aspects of their welfare and development. Young people feel that living at the home has brought about improvement in their lives. They feel that staff want them to get the best out of life and provide many opportunities for them to do so. Parents also feel that their children have benefitted greatly from being at the home.

All young people under the age of 16 are in full time compulsory education, and those over that age are pursuing further learning and development. Young people have excellent records of attendance and are motivated to do well at school, meeting and sometimes exceeding their predicted grades.

Behaviour is managed well and enables young people to live in a safe, harmonious environment. A social worker noted that the home, 'has managed to stabilise some previous behaviours displayed and support the young person to achieve high standards in education.'

Young people are generally fit and healthy. The majority are actively involved in sports such as swimming, running and horse-riding. They eat well and sleep well and have no significant health concerns. Young people who are nearing independence make their own lifestyle choices. They have access, should they require it, to good advice on sexual health matters and problems such as smoking and substance misuse. Young people also benefit from ready access to a looked after children's nurse and in-house support to address any emotional and psychological needs.

Positive self-worth is promoted and young people like to make the best of themselves. They benefit in this respect from the nurturing aspects of 'pamper' evenings. Along with the general supportive ethos of the home this helps to bolster their self-esteem. One social worker noted that staff had 'supported emotionally and practically (a young person) through some difficult periods which has meant a great deal to them and improved their well-being overall.'

Having contact with family, friends and other people is important to young people. Parents say that they are made to feel particularly welcome at the home, and friends, boyfriends and girlfriends visit regularly. This helps to normalise young people's lives as well as helping them to maintain a sense of identity and develop social networks.

Young people who are approaching independence receive suitable support through formal pathway planning. One social worker noted that the home, 'do a lot to prepare them for independence, such as looking for properties and going shopping for household items, which doesn't necessarily fall to them, but there is no hesitation to undertake this work.'

All young people learn about taking responsibility and acquire skills for independence through the normal day-to-day running of the home. For example, each young person has certain household tasks to undertake on a rota basis and they take turns to cook meals. Young people also learn how to make best use of their spare time, by doing things such as baking, helping to decorate the home or go out for a walk.

Quality of care

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

Young people are able to achieve good outcomes because of the support and actions of the manager and staff. One parent stated that, 'I cannot praise staff at the home enough. They give 110 per cent, and nothing is too much trouble for them.'

Young people say they feel valued and that their opinions are taken seriously. For example, their views were influential in recent organisational changes. A social worker commented: 'staff have continued to provide reassurance and support to my young person through this transition stage. Their views were listened to and negotiation was made so that some staff, including one key worker, was maintained.'

Young people participate in setting questions for and the interview of prospective employees at the home, their feedback contributes to the manager's decision about appointment. They have a strong influence on the running of the home via, the independent visitor, regulation 33 visitor, local councillors and the Children in Care Council.

Young people also have direct contact with senior management via e-mail and personal meetings. In addition the voice and influence strategy provides young people with the opportunity to develop citizenship skills and engagement in the wider community.

Young people's behaviour is closely monitored through observation and effective communication with young people, their parents, social workers and other professionals. This enables staff to deal promptly with challenging behaviours and as a result staff use few sanctions and have no need to use physical restraint.

Young people benefit from living in a home which is homely and well maintained. They are encouraged to be involved in helping to make the home a nice place to live. This enables them to invest in and take ownership of their environment.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people say they feel safe at the home. They choose not to go missing and return home safely after school and activities. On those rare occasions where there may be unauthorised absences, they let staff know where they are. As with any good parent, staff assess the suitability of young people's friendships and visit households when necessary to reassure themselves that these are appropriate.

Young people say they feel supported, cared for and protected in the home. They feel that they can share any fears or anxieties with the staff and that these will be treated seriously and if needed acted upon. They are protected by staff having a keen understanding of their vulnerabilities and there is a high level of vigilance. Staffing levels provide young people with close supervision so there are no issues with bullying.

Effective management of young people's behaviour is a strong aspect of the home. Situations are dealt with through discussion, negotiation and compromise. Young people feel that the rules in the home are fair and they understand their purpose.

The home is maintained in a safe condition. There are clear risk assessments in place to ensure hazards are identified and wherever possible eliminated.

Leadership and management

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

Young people enjoy positive outcomes. This is because they live in a home where strong management and clear leadership is provided by the highly competent manager and deputy manager. Young people, their parents and placing social workers feel that the quality of care provided is good.

The difference and impact that the home has made for young people is apparent. A placing social worker noted, 'I have found this to be one of the most organised of the homes in terms of knowing what needs doing, and what has been done with young people. I believe the information sharing among the staff team is definitely of a high standard.'

Organisational change has been managed in a way that has kept young people's needs central to proceedings. It has not disrupted the pattern of their lives and they continue to make good progress.

The staff team is highly experienced, qualified and skilled although the majority are new to the home. Nevertheless they have committed to new working arrangements and ensured that young people are not worse off as a result of these changes.

Effective independent monitoring, which often includes local councillors, assists the manager in improving the quality of care in the home. The manager has a very clear understanding of the home's strengths and areas for development and acts to remedy any shortfalls. The regulation 34 report does not fully reflect this good practice however and neglects to incorporate the views of others.

During this period of organisational change the priority has been to reduce the impact of this on young people, build relationships with staff and continue their day-to-day lives without disruption. In this the manager has been successful, but consistency in recording has been affected and staff are coming to grips with new documentation which is being introduced.

For example, young people's views on their placement plans are not always captured and these plans sometimes lack clear objectives. Staff are very aware of young people's current needs but updated written assessments are not always to hand. These minor shortfalls have not detracted from the quality of care being provided to the young people or impacted negatively upon their safety and they continue to make good progress.

The provider has complied with the two requirements made at the last inspection to notify Ofsted of significant events and responding to young people's complaints. A recommendation to amend the Statement of Purpose is work in progress until the conclusion of organisational change.

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* and the evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes.