

Inspection report for children's home

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Inspector	Nicholas Murphy
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Service information

Brief description of the service

The home provides care and accommodation for six young people who may have emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. It is operated by a local authority. The particular remit of the home is to provide time-limited short break care with the objective of returning young people to their families on a permanent basis.

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**.

The home provides a good standard of individualised care which has a direct impact upon the progress made by young people. Staff are skilled and experienced in working with young people to bring about positive change within a short period. Staff also work well with families, enabling young people to rebuild their relationships with parents and live at home full time. One parent said, 'The work that staff have done with my child has been invaluable in changing their behaviour and attitude.' Another said, 'Without their help, I feel sure my child would not have made the progress they have. I cannot praise the home, its staff and the work they do, highly enough.'

Young people have a strong voice within the home. Staff fully involve them with decisions about daily living arrangements. Each young person is also fully aware of the objectives of their placement, which gives them ownership and control of the progress they make. Relationships within the home are good, resulting in an atmosphere which is warm and welcoming. Consequently, young people look forward to coming here and spending time with staff. Additionally, young people feel very safe. There is no bullying and, in general, young people do not engage in risky behaviour.

Everyday routines are well planned, giving young people security and predictability. However, some aspects of care and management fall short of good practice. These include: inconsistent quality of written placement plans and insufficient management oversight of these plans; some minor deficiencies in staffing records; gaps in some risk assessments; and an issue relating to fire safety. Nevertheless, these

weaknesses do not significantly affect the quality of care provided nor the experiences and progress of young people who stay here.

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
11 (2001)	promote and make proper provision for the welfare of children, specifically that each child has a detailed placement plan which is tailored to the individual child, focused on clear measurable outcomes, and fully involves the child (Regulation 11(1)(a))	20/12/2013
32 (2001)	take adequate precautions against the risk of fire, specifically to ensure that closers on fire doors are kept in working order. (Regulation 32(1)(a))	06/12/2013

Recommendations

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

- ensure that the home implements a proportionate approach to any risk assessment, in particular that the risk of child sexual exploitation is addressed in all risk assessments of young people (NMS 4.5)
- ensure that the home has a record of the recruitment and vetting checks which have been carried out on those working for the home (NMS 16.3)
- ensure that the written record of staff supervision kept in the home details the time and length of each session (NMS 19.5)
- ensure that there is a system in place to monitor the quality and adequacy of record keeping and take action when required. (NMS 22.1)

Outcomes for children and young people

Outcomes for young people are **good**.

Young people spend the majority of each week living with their family. While staying at the children's home, young people are able to keep in touch with family and friends and so maintain their cultural identity. Young people are also engaged in the local community. For example, the home has a nearby allotment. This provides young people with the opportunity for fresh air and exercise, and also gives them a

sense of achievement in helping to grow vegetables. Working alongside other allotment holders also goes some way to bridging the generation gap.

Young people are developing more insight into their difficulties and how they have impacted upon their family relationships. They are acquiring better understanding of how to cope with setbacks with more consideration and maturity. Young people are also more positive about themselves, taking pride in their achievements and the progress they are making. One young person said, 'I've learnt a lot here, like how to respect people better, this helps me get on better at home.' Another young person's social worker commented, 'Coming here gives them a positive experience away from the family home. It has improved their self-esteem and enabled work to carry on between them and their mum to improve their relationship.'

Young people are in good health. Some young people were confirmed smokers before they come to the home and elect to continue the habit. However, all young people understand what comprises a healthy lifestyle and so are able to make informed choices. Young people make good use of services providing help with emotional and sexual health, which results in benefits to their well-being and safety.

All young people have good school attendance. Most make good progress at school, and benefit from the stability and consistency they experience when staying at the home. Young people take part in household tasks and some are proficient in self-care skills. For example, one young person made breakfast for herself and the inspector.

Quality of care

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

Staff have built good relationships with young people. This starts with the pre-admission process, where the young person and their family are welcomed into the home. The quality of these relationships mean that young people behave well, any difficulties being resolved by discussion and negotiation.

The home ensures that structured meetings for the young people's group take place frequently. Young people value these, knowing that whatever suggestions they make will be listened to and given serious consideration by staff. One young person said, 'Our meetings are good, you get to put your point of view and then staff write it down, bring it up in their meetings, and tell us what they've decided.' Some young people said recently that their mattresses were uncomfortable. As a result, the home replaced them. Young people are clear about how to express any concerns or complaints, and have confidence in the process. A young person said, 'If I ever had a problem I could talk to any of the staff and I know they would sort it.'

Staff have a good understanding of each young person's individual needs, the broad objectives of their care plan, and how to help them make progress. There is good liaison with social workers, community support staff, and workers in other agencies to ensure that plans are consistently implemented. However, although written

placement plans are highly individualised, some do not address all areas of need. In addition, the evaluation of progress against objectives is inconsistent and not all are updated with sufficient frequency. This means that care planning does not systematically support the good work that staff do with young people. For example, key worker sessions between staff and individual young people are generally very good. They provide opportunities for staff to explore issues with young people in a supportive way and help them make progress.

The home maintains close links with all the agencies necessary to promote and improve the health of young people. A number of young people receive medication in relation to their emotional well-being. Staff are rigorous in following the procedure to administer this medication, and this keeps young people healthy and safe.

The home is in good physical condition. One young person said, 'My bedroom is always clean and tidy, always ready for me when I arrive.' Staff undertake most of the decorating themselves, demonstrating their commitment to maintaining a homely and comfortable environment. This is important in encouraging young people to invest in the home, particularly as they only live here for part of each week.

Safeguarding children and young people

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

Young people are emphatic in confirming that they feel safe here. Bullying is effectively non-existent. This is due in part to careful planning in relation to the composition of the group attending on any particular day. Also, staff are vigilant to the potential of bullying and use their skills and experience to manage situations where it might occur. This enables them to safeguard young people effectively. A young person confirmed this, saying, 'Bullying is not allowed, and it doesn't happen. I feel safe here as all the staff are nice and kind and they look after me.' Each young person has a written risk assessment based on their individual needs. Staff have a good knowledge of the particular vulnerabilities of each young person and have received training in child sexual exploitation. However, the risk assessments do not always address this issue adequately. This may result in staff having incomplete information and thus supporting a young person less effectively than they might otherwise.

The incidence of young people going missing is extremely low. Should it occur, staff have a good understanding of the procedure to follow. Additionally, the home has a good relationship with the local community police as part of a wider partnership protocol. This ensures that any missing episode is managed effectively.

Staff manage young people's behaviour effectively, maintaining boundaries while ensuring that young people's dignity is preserved. One young person said, 'I like it here, the staff are great, they never shout at you, even when you've done something wrong. They just talk to you, which works better in helping to you to behave. I've learnt a lot here, like how to respect people better, this helps me get on better on home.' Physical restraint is hardly ever used. The number of sanctions is low, staff

preferring to use encouragement and incentives to reward good behaviour. In addition, staff have been trained in the use of restorative approaches. These are particularly helpful where there are disputes between young people and others, including family members. This process not only resolves issues to the satisfaction of all involved but also helps young people to develop consideration for others.

The recruitment and vetting of staff is robust. However, the home itself does not keep a record of all the checks which have been carried out on individuals. This means that the Registered Manager cannot be completely assured that only people who are suitable to work with children are employed.

The home is maintained in a safe condition, with all necessary checks on equipment and utilities being carried out at the appropriate intervals. Fire safety is also generally well managed. However, the self-closer on one fire door was not working at the time of the inspection. If there was a fire this defect would allow it to spread more quickly than it would otherwise.

Leadership and management

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

The home received an interim inspection in January 2013, when it was judged to be making good progress. At that inspection one recommendation was made in respect of improving the quality of placement plans. As described earlier in this report there are still shortfalls in this area. As a result, a statutory requirement has been made.

The Registered Manager and senior staff provide the team with a satisfactory level of leadership. Routines for staff are clear, providing consistency and support for young people at all times.

The home's statement of purpose clearly states the objectives of the home and how it will meet the needs of young people. The children's guide is also well written and contains all the required information. This attention to detail ensures that young people, parents and social workers are clear about what the home offers and how it effects change in young people and families.

Both internal and external monitoring of the home is effective. In particular, the Registered Manager's monitoring reports give a good picture of the progress that young people make and evaluate the home's impact in supporting this progress. Analysis of placement information shows that the great majority of young people make a successful and lasting return to the family home.

There are sufficient staff to meet the needs of young people and also undertake a certain amount of work with families. This is helpful in repairing fractured relationships between young people and their parents and contributing to successful rehabilitation. Staff have access to a wide range of training which adds to and refreshes their skills. The Registered Manager and senior staff provide regular supervision for staff. In addition, at intervals managers undertake formal observation

of staff's working practice with young people. This kind of management oversight not only promotes the development of staff but also improves the quality of the service for young people. However, although supervision sessions are recorded, the time and duration are not. This reduces the accountability of the record for evaluation purposes.

The home's recording systems enable information to be stored securely while being accessible. Young people's case files are well kept and demonstrate that young people are able to see what is written about them. There is some evidence that case files are audited for quality. However, this is not a consistent or entirely accurate process. As a result, the shortfalls in placement plans and lack of timely review of other documents have not been identified and remedied by senior staff.

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.